

TennesseeWorks Employment Partnership Profile

Project SEARCH Adult Model

East Tennessee Children's Hospital and The University of Tennessee Medical Center

Employer Business

Project SEARCH was developed at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center (CCHMC) in response to a need for reliable entry level employees in the hospital's Emergency Department. CCHMC established a partnership with local service agencies to develop and implement Project SEARCH to prepare transitioning students with disabilities for employment at either CCHMC or other community employers. Project SEARCH is a nine month internship program offering classroom instruction on vocational, social, and independent living skills in addition to three ten-week rotations where interns learn different jobs at the hospital. Graduating Project SEARCH interns are provided with individualized supports for placement into employment at either the hospital or another local employer.

Project SEARCH has been hugely successful at CCHMC and has now been replicated at over 400 employers in the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia. The program model has expanded to other sectors such as banks, distribution centers, hotels, and government offices. Project SEARCH also has expanded to serve adults with disabilities.

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Partners

In 2013, the Knoxville Area Employment Consortium (KAEC), an organization comprised of service agencies with a shared commitment to expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities, initiated an effort to establish two adult model Project SEARCH programs in Knoxville. KAEC approached two distin-



guished employers, East Tennessee Children's Hospital and The University of Tennessee Medical Center, inviting them to establish partnerships to develop Project SEARCH programs. East Tennessee Children's Hospital is the only certified comprehensive regional pediatric center in East Tennessee. The University of Tennessee Medical Center is the region's only academic medical center, Magnet® Recognized Hospital, and Level 1 Trauma Center. Each hospital viewed Project SEARCH and the recruitment of employees with disabilities as consistent with their mission and values and agreed to host a Project SEARCH program.

KAEC selected the Cerebral Palsy Center of Knoxville to partner with East Tennessee Children's Hospital and Autism Breakthrough of Knoxville to partner with The University of Tennessee Medical Center. With the help of a grant from the Trinity Health Foundation of East Tennessee, the partners proceeded to develop Project SEARCH programs at each hospital. The hospitals each designated a liaison for Project SEARCH and mentors for the interns as well as classroom space, office space, furniture, telephones, internet access, and hospital ID for interns and program staff. The partner service agencies provide an Instructor Coordinator for the site, job coaches, curriculum, intern recruitment and

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Examples of Natural Supports in the Workplace

- Getting rides with co-workers to and from work
- Allowing employee to work in a quieter area
- Following a written or visual list of job duties available to every employee
- Creating a mentoring relationship with a co-worker or supervisor
- Involving co-workers as job trainers
- Having co-workers or supervisors cue when it is break time
- Using an existing scheduling system to increase productivity
- Getting feedback on work performance by supervisor

admission, supports for the interns and hospital employees, and job retention supports for interns subsequently hired by the hospital.

The two programs started operation in early 2014. The programs operate separately but they maintain a common schedule and share a Steering Committee and an Employer Advisory Committee.

Outcomes

In late 2014, seven Project SEARCH interns graduated from the East Tennessee Children's Hospital program and ten interns graduated from The University of Tennessee Medical Center program. A total of five of the graduates were hired by the two hospitals and the remaining interns were provided with assistance to find jobs with other community employers.

Project SEARCH has benefited both the host hospitals and their community partners. Betty Gissel, Vice President for Human Resources at The University of Tennessee Medical Center, said that *"the hospital is proud to be the host site for Project SEARCH. The interns have enriched our culture and made us more aware of the employability of people with disabilities. The interns who are hired by the University of Tennessee Medical Center are appreciated for their dedication and reliability. The training during the internships prepares them to become valued team members."* Sue Wilburn, Vice President for Human Resources at East Tennessee Children's Hospital, added that, *"Not only is Project SEARCH the right thing for East Tennessee Children's Hospital to do, it has opened up an employee candidate pool we were not aware of."*

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Beth Ritchie, the Executive Director of Autism Breakthrough of Knoxville, said, *"Breakthrough's partnership with The University of Tennessee Medical Center has been a rewarding experience for our staff and the interns. The hospital staff have been wonderful to work with!"* Bob Sexton, Executive Director of the Cerebral Palsy Center of Knoxville said, in summary, that *"Partnering with these two great employers has raised the bar on the employment possibilities for the people with disabilities we serve."*

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