

What is Project SEARCH?

In 1996, Project SEARCH was launched at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Centre. Project SEARCH is a unique, business-led, one-year, transition-to-work program for young people with developmental or intellectual disabilities. The main objective is to prepare students for employment with job skills training through a combination of classroom instruction and hands-on career training. This program takes place entirely at the workplace.

The singular goal of Project SEARCH is *competitive employment* for every program graduate!

What is '*competitive employment*'?

- Employment in an integrated setting (co-workers with and without disabilities work alongside each other)
- Year-round employment (not seasonal)
- 16+ hours of work each week
- Paid the prevailing wage

Currently, there are 600+ Project SEARCH sites worldwide. The program reports that approximately 70% of students find gainful employment within a year of graduation.

The Project SEARCH program model was introduced in **Ontario** by the Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN). Currently there are two other sites:

- 1) *Project SEARCH - Toronto* is hosted by the Holland Bloorview and Toronto Rehab-UHN
- 2) *Project SEARCH - Halton* is hosted by the Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital

Project SEARCH in Hamilton

The Hamilton-Wentworth School District School Board is at the forefront of bringing Project SEARCH to Canada as it implements this program in the community. This year, students have been placed in internship positions at the host site, the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, and are supported during their placements by a Teacher with special education training and Skills Trainers. After graduation, personalized employment support will be provided to help students secure quality employment.

Benefits to the Students:

- Participate in a variety of internships within the host site
- Acquire competitive, transferable and marketable job skills
- Gain increased independence, confidence, and self-esteem
- Obtain work based individualized coaching, instruction and feedback
- Develop connections to employment services in Hamilton (Community Living, YMCA and Path Employment)

Who participates in a Project SEARCH class?

- Students with special education needs who are in their final year of school attendance.
- Each site is staffed by a Teacher and Skills Trainers.
- Ongoing collaboration with the site liaison and department mentors to identify internship sites, necessary skill development and to support student success.

Student Selection:

Project SEARCH team members select Interns using information from the application, skills assessments, selection rubric scores, and student interviews.

Program Overview

Project SEARCH follows the school year calendar. Students attend the program for the full school year in the host business. The host site provides a classroom space that is staffed by an HWDSB Teacher who has special education training, and two Skills Trainers.

A. Program Orientation (3 weeks)

- Classroom sessions focused on new employee orientation, hands-on skill assessment and familiarization with the host business environment.

B. Three Internships (10 to 12 weeks each)

- Morning classroom session (1 hour)
 - Interns engage in activities to enhance employability and independent living skills. Some of the classroom activities include: team building, workplace, workplace safety, technology, social skills, problem solving, communication, interviewing skills, money management, and job search skills.
- Internship (4-5 hours)
 - Interns engage in targeted placements where they learn specific, relevant, and transferable job skills. Students also build communication, teamwork and problem-solving skills.
 - Interns work alongside current staff.
 - Students are supported and guided by the Teacher and Skills Trainers. Ongoing feedback and collaboration with department mentors takes place.
 - Potential student worksites are identified through a continuous collaborative process involving the Teacher, Skills Trainers and host site liaison.
- Afternoon classroom session (30 minutes)
 - Interns review their work and experiences and plan for the next day.

Employment Planning Meetings

Review meetings are held 4-6 times a year. The focus is on talking about the Intern's progress in gaining competitive skills and employment. The purpose of these meetings is to:

- Keep team members updated on the Intern's progress
- Identify ways to support the Intern to help reach the goal of competitive employment
- Build connections with community partners for future employment

Everyone who is actively involved in helping the Intern find employment attend the meetings. Attendees include:

- Intern
- Project SEARCH Teacher
- Skills Trainer
- Family member
- Other support members

Job Placement and Community Connections

During the last few months of the program the emphasis is on refining skills, achieving the career goal, and carrying out individualized job development. Job development is based on the Intern's experiences, strengths, interests, and skills. Linkages to appropriate services in the community are critical at this stage, as Interns prepare to graduate from the program, to ensure a successful transition to employment and adult life. Services are identified in the community that provide assistance with necessary adaptations required to perform a specific job. Job coaching and long-term follow along are arranged following graduation.

For more information, please visit our website at: www.hwdsb.on.ca/project-search/

Project Search Contacts:

Vesna Frankovich

Project Search Teacher

20 Education Court,
Hamilton, Ontario. L9A 0B9

vfrankov@hwdsb.on.ca

365-833-1247

Trish Woehrle

Consultant, Low Incidence

20 Education Court,
Hamilton, Ontario. L9A 0B9

twoehrle@hwdsb.on.ca

905-515-5706

