

## Our Story



**In 1996**, while working as the Director of the Emergency Department at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, Erin Riehle was frustrated with finding employees for entry-level jobs that involved restocking supplies.

While working to identify a solution to eliminating the high turnover rates, Cincinnati Children’s had adopted a major diversity initiative, taking a policy statement from the American College of Healthcare executives, which reads, “Healthcare organizations must lead their communities in increasing employment opportunities for qualified persons with disabilities and advocate on behalf of their employment to other organizations.”

**Erin wondered** if people with disabilities could fill the entry level jobs she had. Not knowing anyone with a disability she turned to Susie Rutkowski, the Director of Special Education at Great Oaks Career Campuses, and asked if her idea was possible.

Together, their idea of filling a handful of jobs in Cincinnati Children’s Emergency Department evolved into a comprehensive program model—Project SEARCH.

**Since then**, Project SEARCH has grown from one original program site at Cincinnati Children’s to over 600 sites in 46 states and 10 countries. Through its goal, Project SEARCH has served over 22,000 individuals.

In August of 2014, Johnson County Developmental Supports implemented the first adult model program of Project SEARCH in Kansas. That following year, graduated interns from that class gained 100% in employment outcomes by working in an integrated non-seasonal work setting.

**In Johnson County**, our Project SEARCH has begun its 6<sup>th</sup> year with two host business sites: **Embassy Suites Hotel and Convention Center** and the **Johnson County Government Administration Building**. For the 2017-2018, both Project SEARCH host sites received awards for achieving 100% and 80-89% in employment outcomes for graduated interns.

Graduated interns have found employment in clerical, hospitality, and customer services. Interns have found successful employment in workplaces such as the **Johnson County Sheriff’s Department, Sunflower Health Plan, Embassy Suites Hotel and Convention Center, Dillard’s Distribution, Taco John’s, Fed Ex, Villa St. Francis Retirement Home, and many others!**

### Core Fidelity Model

- ❖ The outcome of the program is integrated, competitive employment.
- ❖ The focus of the program is on serving young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities who can benefit from personalized support in an intensive year of career development and internship experience.
- ❖ The program is a collaborative partnership.
- ❖ The program is business focused.
- ❖ The program leads to acquisition of competitive skills.
- ❖ The program is committed to continuous improvement.

For more information about Project SEARCH, please visit:  
[www.projectsearch.us](http://www.projectsearch.us).



**Project SEARCH** is a nine month employment-focused educational program designed for jobseekers with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) who are interested in gaining employment in their community. Project SEARCH places interns in real-world work settings where they learn all aspects of gaining and maintaining employment. A series of three internships lasting 9-11 weeks allows interns to explore careers and develop marketable job skills. They receive support from department mentors, skills trainers, and worksite accommodations and adaptations. The ultimate goal for each intern is to secure competitive employment within their community. The program provides individualized job development that is based on the intern's experiences, strengths, and skills.

**The goal of Project SEARCH** is to simulate a true work environment as much as possible. This includes going through initial job orientation and training, shadowing other employees (if this is how new employees are generally trained), taking normal breaks, eating lunch with peers, clocking in and out, providing and wearing the correct uniform, dealing with a supervisor, and being evaluated on job performance. The role of the lead instructor and skills trainer is to provide classroom training on these job skills and to assist the intern in being successful in these tasks with as much independence as possible.

**Benefits to Participants:**

- ❖ Participate in a variety of internships within the host business
- ❖ Acquire competitive, transferable and marketable job skills
- ❖ Gain increased independence, confidence, and self esteem
- ❖ Obtain work based individualized coaching, instruction and feedback
- ❖ Develop linkages to Vocational Rehabilitation and other adult service agencies

**Program Participation**

Individuals who wish to participate in the Project SEARCH program must meet the following criteria:

- ❖ Be 18 years or older and be in the last year of services from a school or have fully exited from school services
- ❖ Be a Johnson County resident
- ❖ Meet eligibility requirements of Johnson County's CDDO
- ❖ Meet eligibility requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation and Kansas Workforce Partnership
- ❖ Able to pass drug screen, felony check, and immunizations up to date
- ❖ Desire and plan to work competitively in Johnson County at the conclusion of the Project SEARCH program
- ❖ Have independent personal hygiene and grooming skills
- ❖ Have independent daily living skills
- ❖ Maintain appropriate behavior and social skills in the workplace
- ❖ Take direction from supervisors and modify performance

**To determine if you or someone else is eligible for our services, please contact the following:**

**Community Developmental  
Disabilities Organization  
(CDDO)**

To begin the application process or verify eligibility, please contact:

**Gail Lauri**

**913-826-2509**

[Gail.lauri@jocogov.org](mailto:Gail.lauri@jocogov.org)

For more information on becoming an intern or more information about Project SEARCH in Johnson County, please visit:

<https://jocogov.org/dept/developmental-supports/day-and-employment-services/project-search>