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Project Search Continues To Help Preble County Students

Middletown, Ohio -- When a true partnership exists for the benefit of others, wonderful things do happen. The perfect example of this is the work being done between the Miami Valley Career Technology Center (MVCTC), Preble County Educational Service Center (PCESC), the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission (ORSC), and the Preble County Board of Developmental Disabilities (PCBDD). Each of these organizations has come together in a partnership to try to create a Project SEARCH model in Preble County by the fall of 2013.

According to <http://www.projectsearch.us/>, "Project SEARCH was developed at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. It all began in 1996, when Erin Riehle was Director of Cincinnati Children's Emergency Department. Erin felt that, because the hospital served individuals with developmental disabilities, it made sense that they should commit to hiring people in this group. She wondered if it would be possible to train people with developmental disabilities to fill some of the high-turnover, entry level positions in her department, which involved complex and systematic tasks such as stocking supply cabinets. As a starting point, Erin presented her ideas to Susie Rutkowski, then the special education director at Great Oaks Career Campuses. Erin and Susie formed a partnership that was instantaneous, and together they launched Project SEARCH.

Since its inception, Project SEARCH has grown from a single program site at Cincinnati Children's to over 200 sites across the United States and Canada, England, Scotland, and Australia. Project SEARCH's primary objective is to secure competitive employment for people with disabilities."

The Preble County Project SEARCH partnership was started when a need for such a program was discovered in the area. Preble County students had been accepted to the Butler Tech Project SEARCH class at Miami University and there were issues with how to transport the students to Oxford. The Preble County Board of Developmental Disabilities Transportation Department offered their

services. The benefits of Project SEARCH were discovered and the desire to start a similar program in Preble County started.

The Butler Tech Project SEARCH program has been in operation since 2005 and partners with Atrium Medical Center in Middletown, Ohio Casualty, and Miami University. “The program is designed to provide entry level job experience in collaboration with local businesses and agencies. The student interns spend the majority of the day at unpaid job sites with job coaching services leading to independence. The intern will be given the opportunity to experience three 12-week rotations within business sites during the school year.” The goal of Project SEARCH is to prepare the student interns for competitive employment, which is considered a job with competitive wages and responsibilities for a minimum of 20-hours per week.

Jerica Kruse, Rehabilitation Counselor for the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission (ORSC) explains the ORSC’s part in Project Search as, “ORSC is a state agency that provides services to the students with disabilities enrolled in the program by partnering with the schools, employer, and families. ORSC provides each student a Counselor who helps the student understand their disability and how it impacts them on the job. ORSC pays for the job coaching services, and job development services to help the person learn their job at Project SEARCH and place them in employment at the end of the program. ORSC will then continue with the student after they have exited high school to assist them with their disability related needs as it pertains to employment. “

When asked what benefit Project SEARCH provides through collaboration between agencies and business partners, Jerica said, “The partnership that is built in Project SEARCH allows for everyone to receive more support in helping the person with a disability and the employer. The program is a catalyst in building relationships between agencies such as ORSC, school systems and local business to build a stronger community.”

A recent success story for Project SEARCH in Preble County is Daniel Jamison. Daniel attended Preble Shawnee High School/MVCTC and is a recent 2011-2012 graduate of Butler Tech Project SEARCH. He received a full time job working at the Atrium Medical Center after participating in Project SEARCH. His position as an Environmental Services Tech offers full benefits including a 401k. By working with the ORSC, he was able to receive the supports needed to help him learn his job duties and work skills.

Daniels says of his experience with Project SEARCH, “Project SEARCH is a good program because they helped me get a job that I enjoy it also helped me learn a lot of job skills and how to fill out a resume, application and learn different ways to interview.”

Jerica has worked closely with Daniel and shared, “By working with Project SEARCH and receiving services through ORSC, Daniel has obtained a full time job with benefits. He is an exceptional worker. He has been able to develop his work skills, vocational maturity, understand the grey areas of work and show others his work ethic. He is able to take the first step into the world of work while building on his skills. It was an honor to get to know him and to work with such an outstanding young man.”

“I am positive Daniel would not have his job if it was not for Project SEARCH and his Counselor Jerica Kruse I think it is one of the best programs out today to help individuals with disabilities get a start in life they would not have had otherwise, “ shared Tina Jameson (Daniels Mother).

Atrium Medical Center is part of Premier Health Partners and has hired 22 Project Search interns over the past seven years. The interns work in a variety of different capacities at the medical center including linens, housekeeping, distribution center, replenisher, transporters, patient flow coordinators, medical imaging data entry, and nutritional service. The medical center provides Project SEARCH a classroom in the building. The Project SEARCH teacher and job coach meet with the interns to discuss their job duties and help train the interns to be successful in their new positions.

When you speak to the interns they meet you with a smile and tell you the best part of their job, “working”. They are so proud of the work they are doing and are an important part of the medical center team. These intern positions are all vital to the medical center running effectively. Darlene Fletcher, Environmental Service Manager at Atrium, said she has four Project SEARCH interns currently and they have become such a help to the staff that they really miss them when Project SEARCH is on summer break. Darlene works closely with the job coach and teachers to make sure the interns find success in their positions.

For more information on the efforts to start a Project SEARCH in Preble County, please contact Jerica Kruse, Rehabilitation Counselor with ORSC, at 513-852-3260.

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