
News Releases

For more information, contact us:

Joel Fosha
Indiana Institute on Disability and Community
812-855-6508

foshaj@indiana.edu

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Young People with Disabilities Discover Project SEARCH, Indiana's New Path to Employment

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. -- Matthew McCaslin had a good year in 2010, and so far, 2011 looks good too. As a mailroom associate at Pitney Bowes' Indiana Government Center Office in Indianapolis, McCaslin is working 40 hours a week at \$9.50 an hour and receiving health insurance and other benefits. He understands that in a time of recession and layoffs, many people his age could not find work last year. McCaslin, however, is a 2009 graduate of Project SEARCH Indiana -- the source of his good fortune.

"Project SEARCH really helped me to get a job and learn skills," says McCaslin. "I learned a lot about working hard in Project SEARCH."

The Indiana Government Center is one of several Project SEARCH sites around the state facilitated by the Center on Community Living and Careers (CCLC) of Indiana University's Indiana Institute on Disability and Community. Project SEARCH Indiana sites provide high school students and young adults who have significant disabilities with employment-focused classroom instruction as well as on-the-job training and internship experiences. Armed with their newfound knowledge and skills, many Project SEARCH grads are better equipped to compete in the job market and obtain meaningful employment.

Based on a model created by Cincinnati Children's Hospital in 1996, Project SEARCH Indiana is heading

into its third year of implementation and growth. Initial results from the program's pilot phase are encouraging. There are currently eight Project SEARCH Indiana sites training interns who are in their last year of high school at a partnering school corporation and a ninth site for young adults no longer affiliated with a school.

Of the 68 students who have successfully completed the program so far, 34 have been employed by their Project SEARCH Indiana host site or a similar employer. On average, these employees work 27.3 hours and are paid \$236 per week.

"Although 34 people hired may not seem like a big number, it's really a good, solid start for the program. When you look around the country, it's still not uncommon to see people with disabilities receiving sub-minimum wage or unemployed and living in poverty," says Project SEARCH Indiana coordinator Margaret Gilbride of the Center on Community Living and Careers.

All Project SEARCH candidates must be eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Applicants to the young adult program have already finished high school, while high school applicants are in their last year of school and are not expected to graduate with a general diploma.

Each Project SEARCH Indiana site combines the know-how and resources of several community partners as well as oversight and management from the Center on Community Living and Careers and Indiana's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Community partners include a local school system, an employer, and an agency that provides employment and support services to people with disabilities. In addition to Pitney Bowes and the Indiana Government Center, Matthew McCaslin's Project SEARCH partners include Avon Community School Corporation, Metropolitan School District of Wayne County and Sycamore Services.

Companies selected as Project SEARCH Indiana partners must be large, stable employers dedicated to the process and willing to work collaboratively with area schools and agencies.

Gilbride notes that, in accordance with Project SEARCH guidelines, there will continue to be a careful, deliberate effort to choose partners for the project. "There's definitely a learning curve for everyone involved," she says, "but the rewards for most employers make the commitment worthwhile."

Doug Beebe, executive director of Hook Rehabilitation Center of the Community Health Network in Indianapolis, agrees. Project SEARCH, he says, helped the company address stereotypes head on.

"I think it has opened a new pipeline for some excellent and dedicated employees for us," he said. "To be able to watch the growth of the students as they transition from being a class of students in our hospital to a group of valued co-workers has been an amazing experience."

For more information on Project SEARCH, contact Margaret Gilbride, Project SEARCH Indiana coordinator, at 812-855-6508 or by e-mail at mgilbrid@indiana.edu. For more information on the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, visit <http://www.iidc.indiana.edu>.

The Indiana Institute on Disability and Community receives support from the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at Indiana University, Bloomington (OVPR). OVPR is dedicated to supporting ongoing faculty research and creative activity, developing new multidisciplinary initiatives, and maximizing the potential of faculty to accomplish path-breaking work. The OVPR also provides funds, infrastructure, and other resources to enhance opportunities for federal, state, and private research funding.

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Related links: [Center on Community Living and Careers](#), Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, [Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation Services](#), [Project SEARCH Indiana](#), [Project SEARCH National](#)