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**To: Employment First stakeholders**

**From: Mike Maley, Statewide Employment First Coordinator**

**Re: Employment First: Project Search**

(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

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Members of the DHS Employment First team, along with colleagues at the Oregon Department of Education, Office of Developmental Disability Services and Vocational Rehabilitation, recently took a tour to learn more about Project SEARCH in Oregon.



Project Search's current interns, from left to right, are: Caleb Dannehl, Dean Hicks, Maggie Beseda, Liuba Monahan, Peter Burdett, John Farr, and Austin Harris.

Photo: Cassy McCartney

Project SEARCH has a 9-month internship training program for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) at [Kaiser Permanente Westside Medical Center](#). It is a business-led partnership with community agencies including [Albertina Kerr](#), Washington County Developmental Disabilities program and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR).

The Kaiser Project SEARCH site is based on a national program model started at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center in 1996. Project SEARCH now has 350 sites throughout the United States, plus Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Project SEARCH's national model traditionally promotes partnerships between a local employer, local high school transition program, Vocational Rehabilitation, and local developmental disability program. The model features transition students who apply for Project SEARCH internships at a select employer. Students work in 9-month unpaid internships and rotate three times within that time period, allowing them to try three different types of jobs in a variety of departments. Job coaches stay on site with the students.

The goal is that students leave the internship with competitive integrated employment in the community. For all its national sites, Project SEARCH's interns had a 69 percent employment rate upon exiting school, compared to the 13 to 30 percent rate for transition students nationally.

In Oregon, the Kaiser site is in its first year and functions a bit differently from the traditional model. The interns are not currently in transition services, but most recently graduated from a transition program. Albertina Kerr provides job coaching, as well as leading the "classroom time," where interns spend the first hour of their day on employment skills curriculum.

Kaiser Westside Medical Center is a state-of-the-art hospital with a large variety of types of skilled jobs throughout the campus. It is an ideal site for the interns to rotate through different jobs to discover more about their ideal work environment.

"Because this is a new facility, the managers have been more open to what these interns and this program offers," said Kelli Houston, head of volunteer services at Kaiser Westside Medical Center. "The students feel they are fully a part of the staff here."

All the interns are currently on the second of their three rotations. Caleb Dannehl is currently working as the emergency room greeter. He said so far he prefers it over his first rotation, which was working in sterile processing.

"I like the chance to meet new people and be social, so this fits me more," he said. "One thing that's a challenge: you have to prepare for any situation. You never know what's going to come through that door."

Ideally, Project SEARCH interns are hired by the same business where they did their internship. In the cases where there may not be an appropriate opening at the internship site, the interns work with VR to find employment. Project SEARCH

also develops a Business Advisory Council with local employers who engage with the interns and VR.

Scott Hillesheim, program manager for the Kaiser Project SEARCH site, said certain criteria have to be met in order for them to consider the intern as successfully employed after exiting the internship.

- The job must occur in integrated community work settings;
- Employees are directly hired by a business and earn the prevailing wage for a given job;
- Employees work a minimum of 16 hours per week with a goal of full-time employment; and
- Employees generally work the same schedule and hours as co-workers in similar positions.

The current group of interns developed a mission statement as part of a team building exercise. The statement reads: “As interns we value self-advocacy, honesty, respect, challenging ourselves, professional development, teamwork, equality, safety, organization, and privacy. We take these values to work every day, so that we and the Kaiser Permanente community can THRIVE.”

The Kaiser Project SEARCH team plans to continue the internship program next year. For more information contact Ebony Lawrence, the Project SEARCH Business Liaison, at [ebony.lawrence@kp.org](mailto:ebony.lawrence@kp.org). For more information on the project, visit <http://projectsearch.us>.

Thank you all for your continued involvement, support, and advocacy for services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Oregon.

If you have comments or other questions, please email them to [employment.first@state.or.us](mailto:employment.first@state.or.us).