

Aug. 17, 2018

To: Employment First stakeholders

From: Acacia McGuire Anderson, Statewide Employment First Coordinator

Re: [Employment First](#): Project SEARCH and city of Portland

(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

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Note: this story previously ran as a DHS Director's Good Work! story

City of Portland commits to hiring people with disabilities



(Top row, left to right): Jessica Brown with Community Access Services; Asena Lawrence with Commissioner Fish's office; Robert Reynolds with Community Access Services; Mer Stevens with Community Access Services; Lynne Carter, VR counselor; Project Search graduates Per-Michael Jarnberg and Trey Schneider, and Keith Ozols, VR Workforce and Youth Manager. Bottom row (left to right): Carol Stahlke with Portland Water Bureau; Project Search graduate Ivory Broom; and Suzanne Saltzer with Community Access Services.

Photo: Angela Yeager

Project SEARCH is a national internship program for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). In Oregon, there are three sites funded by the Department of Human Services (DHS), including one with developmental disabilities provider [Community Access Services](#) and the city of Portland that started in March 2017.

DHS [Employment First](#) offered [grants](#)

to providers for start-up costs, and supports the program with services from Vocational Rehabilitation and the county developmental disabilities program.

Trey Schneider was one of five interns who worked at the Portland Water Bureau and the Bureau of Environmental Services as part of [Project SEARCH](#).

Those interns from the city of Portland recently graduated. A presentation informing Portland City Commissioners of the results was held Aug. 2 at Portland City Hall. Commissioners viewed a [video](#) showcasing the program.

Schneider testified on a panel with Mer Stevens, supported employment manager with Community Access Services; Anais Keenon, disability resources and outreach specialist with the city's Bureau of Human Resources; and Carol Stahlke, program coordinator with the [Portland Water Bureau](#).

“We looked at this and said this is work that needs to be done,” Trey said. “When we have the correct supports, the right accommodations, and an open and understanding environment, we can be your best employees.”

Two other interns, Per-Michael Jarnberg and Ivory Jasmine Broom, also attended the presentation.



((Left to right) Robert Reynolds with Community Access Services, Commissioner Amanda Fritz, Mer Stevens with Community Access Services, Project Search intern Trey Schneider, Project Search graduate Ivory Jasmine Broom, Mayor Ted Wheeler, Project Search graduate Per-Michael Jarnberg, Commissioner Nick Fish, Carol Stahlke with City of Portland, and Commissioner Dan Salzberg.

Photo: courtesy of city of Portland/Betsy Quitugua

Commissioner Nick Fish brought the program to the city of Portland.

“Through this program we’ve learned that it is not only a great experience for the interns – but a powerful experience for

our employees,” he said. “We also learned that when we remove barriers, and help build more inclusive workplaces, everyone wins.”

Mer Stevens told the Commissioners that Project SEARCH fits Oregon’s vision of supporting people with I/DD to live and work in their communities.

““Oregon is an Employment First state, and that means the purpose of our lives should be spent engaging in the community in ways that are meaningful,” she said. “The main barriers to employment usually boils down to a lack of experience and a lack of opportunity. Project SEARCH is targeted to help remove those barriers.”

Two of the interns, including Schneider, were hired as permanent full-time employees by the city of Portland. Another has taken a job at a local car dealership. Two other graduates are in job development with VR.

“As Trey’s VR Counselor, I couldn’t be more impressed and proud of his, and the interns, accomplishments and growth,” said Lynne Carter, a member of the Project SEARCH steering committee. “This is why we work in this field.”

Nationally, about 75 percent of Project SEARCH interns become employed in the community at 16 hours or more per week, far above the national employment rate of 35 percent for people with I/DD. In Oregon, Project SEARCH employment rates are about 90 percent.

After hearing from the panel, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler committed to the city continuing the program.

“I am enthusiastically supportive of Portland becoming a model employer of people with disabilities,” he said.

Project SEARCH will continue internships at Portland Parks & Recreation in the fall.