

MAKING **a** DIFFERENCE

REAL HOMES. REAL CAREERS. REAL LEARNING. REAL INFLUENCE. REAL SUPPORTS.



**NEWS
FOR YOU:**

EMPLOYMENT: Why Inclusion Works in Employment

THE DISABILITY VOTE: Now Get Out and Vote!

A VISION FOR 2021: GCDD's Five Year Plan Begins

On the Cover:
Project SEARCH instructor Loretta Fuller and Project SEARCH intern Cynthia Rodriguez review her daily lesson on building a resume in the training center at TSYS in Columbus, GA. TSYS, a credit card processing company, is the newest Project SEARCH partner in Georgia. (See story on page 6.)

The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities, a federally funded state agency, works to bring about social and policy changes that promote opportunities for persons with developmental disabilities and their families to live, learn, work, play and worship in Georgia communities.



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On the Back Cover:
Get Out and Vote November 8!
Election Day in Georgia is almost here. Check out the candidates and be an informed voter. *The Disability VOTE - Feel the Power!*
(See story on page 14.)

MAKING a DIFFERENCE

A quarterly magazine of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities VOLUME 17, ISSUE 2

Project SEARCH Success in Georgia..... page 6

Georgia was an Outcome Award Honoree at the annual Project SEARCH conference winning 13 awards, including nine out of 18 sites that were recognized as 100% placement sites.

Why Inclusion Works in Employment..... page 8

Across the State, people with disabilities are filling all kinds of jobs and establishing all kinds of careers. Find out what factors are driving the increasing number of people with disabilities in the workplace.

Voting: Now Get Out and Vote! page 14

On November 8, 2016, millions of Americans will head to the polls to vote. It’s important this election for people with disabilities to make their voices heard.

A Vision for 2021: GCDD’s Five Year Plan Begins page 18

Charged with creating systems change for people with developmental disabilities through advocacy and capacity building, GCDD aims to ensure positive outcomes for the disability community.

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Project SEARCH Success in Georgia

By Ruksana Hussain



At the Annual Project SEARCH Conference held in Orlando, FL in August, 183 program sites from 37 states and three countries were recognized for achieving 70-100% employment for their 2015 program graduates. Georgia was an Outcome Award Honoree winning 13 awards, including nine out of 18 sites that were recognized as 100% placement sites. What is it about Georgia sites that garnered such recognition?

TSYS employee Barbara Smith stands with her mentee Zariah Wheeler, a Project SEARCH intern with TSYS. The women are standing in front of a stationary closet which is organized and managed by Wheeler.

This means

EMPLOYMENT in
an **INTEGRATED
SETTING**, working
alongside coworkers with
and without disabilities,
**YEAR-ROUND
WORK** that is not
seasonal employment,
16 hours/week or more and
**MINIMUM WAGE
OR HIGHER.**

For more information about
Project SEARCH, visit
www.projectsearch.us

“One of the things we did was to host a two-day training on job development for the sites, with an emphasis on helping to make sure they had good strategies for finding jobs for people,” shared Dottie Adams, statewide coordinator for Project SEARCH Georgia.

Adams has been with Project SEARCH Georgia since it was established as a statewide initiative nine years ago. Project SEARCH was originally developed at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center in 1996, when Erin Riehle, director of Cincinnati Children’s Emergency Department, and Susie Rutkowski, then the special education director at Great Oaks Career Campuses, partnered to launch the initiative to commit to hiring individuals with developmental disabilities in the workplace.

Project SEARCH is unique in that it is a business-led, high school-to-work transition program, serving students with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). It takes place entirely at the workplace and the goal for each student participant is competitive employment. This means employment in an integrated setting, working alongside coworkers with and without disabilities, year-round work that is not seasonal employment, 16 hours/week or more and minimum wage or higher.

The success of the nine Georgia sites in securing such employment for their interns resulted in their recognition as 100%

placement sites. Adams credits the teamwork displayed by the different parties and the involvement of businesses in the community as the contributing factors to this success. Businesses aren’t expected to hire the interns they train, but if they do find a student to be a good match, they can be easily hired as they are already trained for the role, thus saving the business training fees.

“The success of the nine Georgia sites in securing such employment for their interns resulted in their recognition as 100% placement sites.”

Another benefit observed is some of the entry-level jobs see frequent turnover and are hard to keep filled, but interns from Project SEARCH want to work and are willing to do the job. “Our students are motivated because for the first time, they are making money,” explains Adams. “The emphasis is on employment and making sure the students don’t just go to training sure for a year for nothing. We have employment rates of about 75% with people working an average of 25 hours, making an average of \$9.61 which is pretty good!”

Project SEARCH Sites in Georgia

- Albany
- Atlanta (3)
- Canton
- Cartersville
- Columbus
- Dalton (3)
- Douglas
- Gainesville
- Moultrie
- Savannah
- Springfield
- Thomasville
- Walker
- Waycross

The majority of the Project SEARCH sites in Georgia are all medical centers or hospitals but one of its newest members is a credit card service company located in Columbus, GA. Total System Services, commonly referred to as TSYS, provides payment processing, merchant and related payment services to financial and nonfinancial institutions globally.

TSYS Business Liaison Pino Davis said, “There was an unmet need in our community for students in the Muscogee County School District (MCSD) with intellectual disabilities who were aging out of the school system.”

At the same time, MCSD Transition Manager Paula Dukes was relentless in her search for a business to partner with Project SEARCH. Although initially faced with “no, not right now,” her passion for helping students led her to the new TSYS Senior Executive Vice President & Chief Information Officer Patty Watson, who has a child with a disability.

“Patty was familiar with Project SEARCH from her previous employer. Her past experience coupled with her personal experience changed our answer to an emphatic ‘yes!’” said Davis.

This proved an opportunity for 18-year-old high school graduate Zariah Wheeler from Columbus to intern with TSYS through Project SEARCH. During her training, she learned to work the printer, make copies, identify different file and folder sizes and use a label maker – all skills that she can put to use in her new place of work once hired. “Everyone is helpful and I am enjoying this experience. I will be here for 10 weeks and get a job after that,” she said confidently.

TSYS’ partnership with Project SEARCH is proof that everyone can work despite disabilities or personal challenges. TSYS team members have welcomed the Project

SEARCH interns, many volunteering to serve as mentors. Another benefit of having the interns is how they are changing the way new team members are trained. TSYS has incorporated more visual aids and tasks are broken down into steps. Once more established, TSYS plans to share their successes with other local employers, such as insurance giant Aflac, and to encourage others to participate in the program.

“TSYS’ partnership with Project SEARCH is proof that everyone can work despite disabilities or personal challenges.”

Many other sites are already experiencing the value of partnering with Project SEARCH and flourishing as 100% employment sites. Among them is Cornerstone Medical Center (previously Hutcheson Medical Center) in Ft. Oglethorpe, GA. Students trained here are employed at Unique Fabrications, ShopRite, Food City and a local daycare. “If not for Project SEARCH, these students would be sitting at home without jobs,” says Beth Hammerstone, Project SEARCH instructor.

One of the success stories is that of 23-year-old Chickamauga, GA resident Rachel Cannon who works at the Walmart in Lafayette, GA as a greeter. “The experience at Project SEARCH was a real eye opener for me because it taught me a lot about what it is like to be out in the workforce and get a paycheck,” said Cannon. “I have been at Walmart almost six months and I love it!”

STATISTICS FOR PROJECT SEARCH GRADUATES IN GA

75%
EMPLOYMENT RATE

25
AVERAGE HOURS WORKED PER WEEK

\$9.61
AVERAGE WAGE PER HOUR



Project SEARCH graduate Rachel Cannon loves her job as a greeter at Walmart in Lafayette, GA.



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– Justin
Dart

*“Vote like your life
depends on it
because it does.”*



**GET OUT AND VOTE!
NOVEMBER 8**



***The Disability VOTE –
Feel the Power!***

Tag us on Facebook or tweet to us with
#VoteDisability!



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For important voting information, see article on page 14.

