

PROJECT SEARCH: A YEAR IN REVIEW

Project SEARCH Halton offers high school students with disabilities a unique one-year work experience that's business-led and skills-focused. Participants experience total workplace immersion which facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and relevant job-skills training through strategically designed internships.

Despite the challenges of a global pandemic, our interns have proven to be resilient and have found meaning and success throughout their experiences in Project Search. We were fortunate to be present on site and welcomed at Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital every day and we continued to witness the life-changing impact felt by students, departments, and families.

One parent reported that they have "seen such an amazing change in my son since joining Project Search. It's given him a new confidence and outlook - it's opened doors we never thought possible. He's grown so much and when we hear feedback in his internship evaluations it's so rewarding. Project Search is an amazing program."

Similar sentiments are shared by all of our interns, and the following reflections from our current interns further demonstrate the depth and breadth of the impact this program has had on students, staff, and families.

Julian:

For the past year, Julian has worked at Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital doing various roles in in Food Services, Physiotherapy and now in Dialysis.

"I learned about diversity and how to overcome difficulties which makes it easier for everyone to fit in. From the first day starting here I realized what a good opportunity this was for me," said Julian. "I feel 100% that I will have a better future. Before, I felt stressed about coming here. I was scared about meeting new friends. I have other goals for myself now - I'm thinking of working in a music store."



Cody:

Project SEARCH encouraged Cody to start dreaming about his future. Cody said: "I want to get a job in the IT department and get a house in the country and build a wood shop as well. I would like to get my driver's license and get a nice car." He also now asks about furthering his education. "Project SEARCH has made me more independent and more responsible and made me realize more important things in my life."



Caitie:

So far Caitie has said that her most memorable moment was presenting in front of her class outlining her athletic achievements and awards prior to coming to Project SEARCH and how her competitive spirit would serve her well in her internships: "Project SEARCH has changed my life and has changed my future. Instead of not getting a job after I graduate I'm thinking of what job I want in the future."



Aliyu:

Aliyu takes ownership of his job and brings a humorous flair to his work. He considers Project SEARCH an opportunity to "connect with different people and become part of a team." In his current internship he is helping to assemble new medical carts, repair communication devices, and solve technical problems throughout the hospital as part of the Computer Information Services department. Aliyu says "being part of Project Search has given me a chance to get a real job."



Justin:

Project SEARCH set Justin on an entirely new trajectory in his life and he embarked on the journey into post-secondary education. After discovering he had the skills necessary to potentially make a career as a Medical Device Technician, he enrolled at Mohawk College where he is currently studying while also continuing with Project SEARCH. In his own words, Justin says, "If not for Project SEARCH I would have been at home doing nothing. I learned to work hard, be a team player, listen and ask questions, and develop new skills. My family is very happy and proud of me."



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Andrew:

The relationships our interns develop with mentors, managers, and coworkers can be powerfully meaningful and can guide their skill development, confidence, and decision making as much as anything we might cover in a more formal environment.



“Before I started, I had no idea about my future. Now I know I can get a job.” Andrew later worked in Physiotherapy where he interacted regularly with patients and even had several opportunities to provide translation for Mandarin-speaking patients. Andrew exemplifies the mission of the hospital to provide “exemplary patient care always.”

Ethan:

Ethan’s first internship was in Medical Records. He says he “was a little scared at first but then I was trained at filing and doing mail runs to four departments.” He then moved on to a varied role in Food Services. He states that, “My future plans changed since starting Project SEARCH and now I’d like to get a paid job. Project SEARCH has impacted me to great potential to get a great job and my family is so proud of me.”



Ryan:

Ryan enjoyed the unique nature of the opportunities presented through Project SEARCH. One highlight for Ryan was seeing the morgue when he worked with the Information and Communication Technology department and was updating computer systems. He is always excited to share these rare and unexpected experiences with others.



Ryan said his “favourite moment was seeing the operating rooms during my time in MDR because that’s a place that almost nobody gets to see. I also learned how to put together case carts for surgery as well as learn to work with others better.”

We would like to thank all the community partners and funders who have made this program possible. Without donations from RBC Foundation, The Cooperators, and Harry E. Foster, Project SEARCH Halton would not be the successful program it is today.

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