



Project SEARCH Workshop-to-Work: Participant Reflections on the Journey Through Discovery



Julie J. Christensen^a, LMSW, PhD and Kaitlyn Richardson^b, MPP

^a University of Iowa Health Care; ^b University of Rochester Medical Center

Abstract

Over recent years, New York (NY) State has engaged in efforts to transform the sheltered workshop system. As part of this effort, a variety of innovative models have been piloted to assess effectiveness in supporting sheltered workshop participants to train for and transition to competitive employment in the community. One particular pilot program adapted the Project SEARCH high school transition model for this purpose. Ten individuals participated in a 12-month program, where they participated in up to four internships. As part of the evaluation of the adapted model, this project aimed to document the individual growth of program participants, as well as their readiness for employment, through the use of video. Participants were interviewed multiple times, beginning at the start of the program, and then again at the end of each internship. The goal was to document and assess their increased ability to articulate vocational strengths and self-determined career goals over time.

Participants and Program Description

Ten individuals, whose length of engagement in the sheltered workshop ranged from 2-10 years, took part in the Project SEARCH workshop-to-work pilot from July 2015 – June 2016 (see Table 1). Nine of these program participants consented to be interviewed as part of the project evaluation. The program operated in three hotels owned by the same hotel management company in Upstate NY. The program followed Project SEARCH model fidelity guidelines (Daston, Riehle & Rutkowski, 2012). However, a few modifications were made to better support the unique needs of individuals transitioning from a sheltered workshop environment. Participants were offered up to four internships over the course of a full calendar year. Additionally, the program provided transportation for participants for an extended period at the start of the year, allowing for adequate travel training and accompanying safety assessments and time to update the participants' individual service plans to better align with community-based services and supports.



	N	%
Gender		
Male	6	60
Female	4	40
Race		
African American	2	20
Asian	1	10
Caucasian	7	70
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	2	20
Disability Classification (primary)		
Intellectual Disability	10	100
Disability Classification (secondary)		
Blind / Visually Impaired	1	11.1
Emotional Disturbance	5	50
Eligible to Receive Services from		
Vocational Rehabilitation	9	90
Developmental Disabilities / Medicaid	10	100

Method

- Demographic information was collected at the start of the program year.
- One-on-one interviews were conducted during the first week of program, in June 2015, with subsequent interviews scheduled at the end of each internship rotation (September and December of 2015, and February 2016).
- Interviews were transcribed and coded using Atlas.ti software.
- Employment outcomes were provided by the partner supported employment provider, based on record review.

Summary of Findings

Participants noted that Project SEARCH prepared them for entering the workforce in ways that their participation in the workshop had not.

*"It's a great... it's a wonderful program, it's a great program, and it teaches you values and teaches you, you know... you have to be a certain way, at a certain way, you cannot... like at the workshop, they don't care. But this is not no joke."
(P4, 33-year-old female)*

The cohort model was effective in alleviating fears and concerns about leaving the workshop.

*"I get to enjoy my day with my friends."
(P7, 26-year-old male)*

Participation in the discovery process out in the community allowed participants to imagine themselves in various jobs by exposing them to what the job entails.

*"I am lookin' forward to work at the... one of the hotels, but I'm not really sure what one I'm gonna be... I'm hopin' like don't maintain no work for... cleaning one of the rooms for... um, the guest that comes in there 'n stays. Um, I just like to work at a hotel."
(P6, 27-year-old male)*

Participants' responses shifted from focusing on the goal of achieving personal independence (e.g., living on my own, getting custody of my child, getting my driver's license), to viewing employment as a means for taking greater personal responsibility (paying the bills, not relying on Medicaid).

*"My goal in 5 years, I want me a job, a new place, and have joint custody of my daughter."
(23-year-old female)*

*"Yep, then I'm gonna help my mom do bills or whatever has to be paid"
(P6, 27-year-old male)*

**"I've learned about myself that I am confident, I am brave and I am strong."
(P1, 25-year-old female)**

Program Outcomes

- The overall rate of program completion was 80% and the overall rate of employment was 62.5%.
 - The employment rate of the Project SEARCH high school transition model, operating in the same geographic region, was previously reported at 83% (Christensen, Hetherington, Daston & Riehle, 2015).
- On average, graduates are working 17.6 hours/week (range: 2-20 hours), earning \$9.25/hour.
- 40% of employed graduates were hired by the participating host business.

Table 2

Program Outcomes by Participant

	Gender	Age	Years in Workshop	Completed program	Obtained employment*	# Hours/week working	Wage/Hour	Hired by host business
P1	F	25	4 yrs	Y	Y	2	\$10.00	N
P2	F	45	10 yrs	Y	N			
P3	M	25	5 yrs	N	n/a			
P4	F	33	2 yrs	N	n/a			
P5	M	45	5 yrs	Y	Y	20	\$9.00	Y
P6	M	27	7 months	Y	Y	20	\$9.00	Y
P7	M	26	5 yrs	Y	N			
P8	F	32	9 yrs	Y	N			
P9	M	51	2 yrs	Y	Y	6	\$9.25	N
P10	M	25	3 yrs	Y	Y	40	\$9.00	N
AVERAGE				80%	62.5%	17.6	\$9.25	40%

* Calculated based on % of program completers.

- The age of the participant did not appear to have an impact on achieving a successful employment outcome.
- Individuals who had been in the workshop longer than 5 years did not make a successful transition to employment in the community.

Contact Information

This project was developed and evaluated as part of the New York State Partnerships in Employment project, a Project of National Significance funded by the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

Julie J. Christensen, LMSW, PhD
Center for Disabilities and Development
University of Iowa Health Care
319-384-9334
Julie.Christensen@uiowa.edu

Kaitlyn Richardson, MPP
Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities
University of Rochester Medical Center
585-276-6449
Kaitlyn_Richardson@urmc.rochester.edu

