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Project SEARCH: Work-Based Transition Program for Young Adults with
Disabilities

by

Teresa D. Green

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

Perspectives on an Employer-Based Transition Program

by

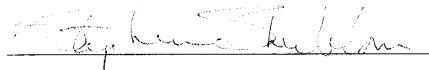
Teresa Green

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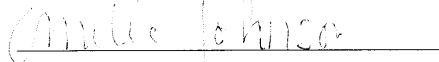
at Lindenwood University by the School of Education



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2/15/2013

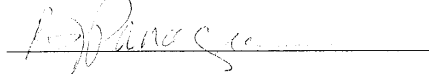
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Dr. Rebecca Panagos, Committee Member

2/15/2013

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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

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Signature: Teresa D. Green Date: 2-21-13

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Abstract

Historically people with significant disabilities were restricted to places such as adult activity centers, sheltered workshops, nursing homes, and institutions. Studies have shown the high school drop-out rate for this population is higher than those who are non-disabled. Policy makers concluded that these individuals needed to be better prepared for a successful adult life beyond high school. Individuals with developmental disabilities in the state of Missouri are over two times less likely to be employed than the national average. Laws have been passed to provide supports and services for individuals with disabilities to be as independent as possible. This paper explored the perspectives of a host site employer, parents, agency staff, and young adults with developmental disabilities in their participating experience of a one-year high school transition program with the main goal of employment. The students experienced employment through internships within a health care business setting. I conducted interviews, questionnaires, and observations in order to gain insight into the perspectives from each partner. Research questions included: How does Project SEARCH work? What are the parent perspectives on why and how Project SEARCH has prepared their children with developmental disabilities for competitive employment? What are the student perspectives on why and how Project SEARCH has prepared them for competitive employment? What are the business host site's employer and other agency staff perspectives on why and how they have prepared students with developmental disabilities for competitive employment? Findings found within the research were that Project SEARCH was a collaborative effort among various agencies to provide internships in a completely immersed business setting to students with developmental disabilities in

which the ultimate goal was competitive employment. Parents perceived the program as indispensable to the increase in skill sets that occurred. Students perceived the experience obtained in the program as increasing their self-advocacy and self-confidence skills. By purchasing a license for the Project SEARCH program, the agencies involved have increased the opportunities for young adults with disabilities to obtain job readiness skills that impact the participant for the rest of his or her life. The results indicated although not every intern was employed upon exiting the program, skills beyond measure were obtained due to participation in an immersed workplace setting with specialized instruction in employability skills.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Background of the Study

All stakeholders such as school districts and outside service agencies should be aware of best practices and ideologies for transition services for young adults with disabilities graduating high school. Research has shown that individuals with disabilities were more likely to be considered as a dropout than their non-disabled peers. For this reason, policy makers had implemented laws that require school districts to consider post-secondary transition skills for individuals with disabilities in order to help them prepare for the adult world. This research explored the agency, parent, student and host site perspective on how a work-based transition program, Project SEARCH, had prepared young adults with a developmental disability participating in the program for competitive employment.

The school districts involved in this project had made a commitment to offering more opportunities for students with disabilities in transitioning from secondary to post-secondary goals. Specifically, a group of agencies partnered and determined that they wanted the outcome of selected group of individuals with developmental disabilities to be competitively employed. The partner school districts collaborated with a service provider to submit an application for funding from the local Senate Bill 40 Board to implement a Project SEARCH site to be in place for the fall of 2010. All five districts in the county were invited to participate.

Legislation

The federal and state governments were holding schools more accountable for post-secondary outcomes of students with disabilities graduating with Individual Education Programs (IEPs). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 made high schools across the nation accountable for measuring and reporting their graduation rates (Schifter, 2011). In 2008, the U.S. Department of Education mandated that “states establish a uniform definition of high school graduation rate by the 2011-2012 school year” for accountability as cited in Schifter (2011, p. 409). The states determined the definition would include “the percentage of students who enter high school in ninth grade and graduate within four years” (Schifter, 2011, p. 409). This contradicts the Individuals with Disabilities Act’s (IDEA) expectation for the subgroup expectations for high school graduation of students with disabilities (Schifter, 2011). According to Schifter (2011, p. 409) “IDEA assures that students with disabilities the right to a ‘free appropriate public education’ from age three through 21.” To qualify for special education services, an individual must meet eligibility criteria under one of the designated categories under the law. The student would have an IEP and a team would determine any transition needs of the student no later than the student turning 16 years of age (Schifter, 2011). Policy makers for IDEA have defined expectations of transition requirements to consider in students’ post-secondary goals and ways to measure the outcomes of those goals.

The National Post-School Outcomes Center website (n.d.) defined these post-secondary outcomes under indicator 14 of the IDEA federal law. According to indicator 14, schools were required to document the students with IEPs who graduated high school and within a year had enrolled in higher education, been competitively employed or

enrolled in some other secondary education or training program. In order to hold school districts more accountable for outcomes of young adults with disabilities once they leave high school, indicator 14 under IDEA required schools to consider training/education, employment and independent living goals for students who are at least 16-21 years of age within the IEP in the state of Missouri. The goal for the government and schools was to enhance transition services to improve outcomes for young adults with disabilities to be successful in adulthood

Statement of Problem

Many young adults with disabilities did not graduate or were unprepared for adult life upon graduation. Kellems and Morningstar (2010) reported youth with disabilities were less likely than their peers to be employed after leaving high school. According to the Preliminary Finding and Observations Report document found on the Department of Mental Health website (State Employment Leadership Network, 2008), 2007 national data indicated the percentage of individuals with developmental disabilities in integrated employment was 20%. Missouri, however, was consistently behind the national average over the years with a decline to 9% in 2007.

Many people with disabilities were capable of being trained for independent employment skills (Brooke, Revell, & Wehman, 2009). People with disabilities have historically been denied equal access to opportunities for employment. Individuals with disabilities were typically denied choice and/or preference for the jobs they obtain because they were thought to be unemployable in the competitive work force (Wehman & Revell, 2005). While in high school, students were offered services directed toward meeting goals which are written within their IEP. Outside agencies can also play a role

in services offered within the IEP which prepare the young adults for employment but due to cutbacks, these resources are not consistently available (Morningstar, 2006).

Employment Facts

According to data on the Facts for Features website posted by the United States Census Bureau, 13.3 million 16-64 year-olds reported difficulty finding or keeping employment due to a health condition, including disabilities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). According to a questionnaire of 3,797 businesses, employers had four main concerns regarding hiring a person with a disability. First, they questioned if an employee with a disability can complete job tasks. Next, they questioned how supervisors will manage employees with disabilities. Then, they were concerned accommodations are expensive. Examples of accommodations in the workplace may include specialized equipment, adjustments to work schedules, or facility modifications. Finally, they feared the organization's worker's compensation and health care costs will increase (Domzal, Houtenville, & Sharma, 2008). The Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities (n.d.) reported that Missouri had one of the lowest employment rates in the United States for people with developmental disabilities. Many young adults graduated from high school and went home with no supports, attended expensive habilitation programs, or were on wait lists for local sheltered workshops (Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities, n.d.). According to Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities (n.d.), over 100,000 people in Missouri had a developmental disability. Some key facts on the website for the Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities (n.d.) included the following:

The number of people with developmental disabilities living in state institutions

in the U.S. has declined by 70 percent over the past three decades. Missouri has had a 52 percent decline since 1999. People with developmental disabilities have the highest unemployment rate of any group of Americans: up to 80 percent of people with developmental disabilities are not employed. Only 7.5 percent of those served by Missouri's Division of Developmental Disabilities have a job in the community. Many people with developmental disabilities remain on long waiting lists for services and benefits. Nearly 5,000 Missourians are waiting for services. (para. 2)

This study related to these figures in that individuals with developmental disabilities are being educated in the least restrictive environment within public education. The unemployment rate for these individuals was high. The Project SEARCH program's structure was said to be dedicated to teach job readiness skills to young adults with developmental disabilities in order to increase the competitive employment rate. This study explained how Project SEARCH taught job readiness skills and how its funding structure worked. It also expanded on the different perspectives involved in the outcomes of the program.

Purpose of Study

This study examined the internationally known work-based program, Project SEARCH. The mission of the partnership supporting Project SEARCH was to provide training to improve the job placement rate for young adults with developmental disabilities. The purpose of this study was to explore and coordinate the different perspectives of stakeholders involved in the Project SEARCH program, explore the processes used in the program, and document the program's outcomes. This program

may be considered innovative in that it attempted something not previously done on a large scale - train students with disabilities for competitive marketplace employment. This research was worth accomplishing to document best practices and explore the implications of its ideology on how students with disabilities may be trained for independent, employable skills. The knowledge that comes from learning about best practices and innovations of transition may decrease the number of high school dropout rates and ultimately increase the number of persons with developmental disabilities be employable in immersed settings. The talents and capabilities of those with developmental disabilities were as varied as the talents and capabilities of the population as a whole (Borgmeyer, Davis, Doll, & Skinner, 2009).

Project SEARCH international program website (2011 b) claimed to have educated employers in the community about the potential of the underutilized workforce of individuals with developmental disabilities, and assisted employers in meeting their human resource needs. Project SEARCH (2011 b) claimed when employers focused on the strengths of this employee pool, they had the potential to gain dependable, well-trained employees with good work attitudes. In addition, immeasurable benefits may come from preparing young adults with disabilities in a complete work immersion setting. Regardless of the employment outcome, the interns may leave the program with skills that could overall improve their quality of life.

Why Project SEARCH Missouri?

The original Project SEARCH was initiated in 1996 when two employees of Cincinnati Children's Hospital pointed out persons with disabilities were large contributors to the hospital's income through services such as rehabilitation or surgeries.

The hospital, however, did not tend to hire people with disabilities (Riehle, 2011). One program created from this recognition and to promote employment for people with disabilities was Project SEARCH. Project SEARCH was a program which took place for a student with a disability during his or her last year in high school. It was targeted to students that are interested in competitive employment (Project SEARCH, 2011 a).

The program was designed to take place in a healthcare or business setting. Job skills and soft skills are taught in a completely immersed workplace setting (Project SEARCH, 2011 a). Project SEARCH was set up to serve as a single point of entry into the workforce for persons with developmental disabilities. The students were to participate in a two-week orientation at a business site, and three 10-week job rotations before graduation. The students were not paid during this transition program (Project SEARCH, 2011 a). Project SEARCH was stated to be a best practice business led model (Riehle, 2011). Such a program was what Harris County agencies felt would assist in meeting their agencies goals in increasing training opportunities for competitive employment of a specific population of the disabled. For the confidentiality of participants and agencies, pseudonyms will be used for the specific county, agencies, and individuals who participated in this study.

Project SEARCH was an alternative more compatible with business practices than the current rehabilitation model (Borgmeyer, et al., 2009). The rehabilitation model had students going to work sites occasionally or there was a simulated work environment. Three school districts and a service agency completed an application for funds through Senate Bill 40 Board in Harris County. This request was made to develop skills in collaboration with multiple agencies. The funding provided start-up costs including

licensing, professional development, and classroom set-up. Professional development included a tour of original Project SEARCH site in Cincinnati, Ohio for up to 12 persons and a site fidelity check from a staff person from Cincinnati. The intent of Project SEARCH was for residents with developmental disabilities in Harris County to provide training to increase placement in meaningful, complex, and rewarding jobs.

The school districts determined the major needs related to community services and capacities. The need for the program was based on 20% of individuals with developmental disabilities being employed on a national average and Missouri had nine percent of these individuals employed (Borgmeyer et al., 2009). The collaboration between agencies was born from the recognition that the best way to support transition and post-school outcomes was to work collaboratively with community resources (Borgmeyer et al., 2009). By the agencies working unilaterally, it was hoped that current funding structures could be flexed to provide collaborative funding in addressing an interns specific goals and interest in job placement (Borgmeyer et al., 2009).

The goal for Harris County was to plan for implementation during the Fiscal year 2010 (July 1, 2009-June 30, 2010), and to implement Project SEARCH at the beginning of the Fiscal year 2011 (August, 2010). It was anticipated in the first year of implementation; the program would serve 12 Harris County students at one site, and would serve approximately an equal number annually. There are 12 student slots in the program because that is how many students it would take in order for the program to be sustained financially.

In particular, Project SEARCH in Harris County took place at a hospital centrally located in the county. A teacher and an employment specialist were hired by Florence

School District. Del Ray Hospital (DRH) agreed to have a staff member as a business liaison who devoted at least ten percent of his or her time to Project SEARCH.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Senate Bill 40 Board were funding an employment specialist through a local service agency. The business liaison assisted in finding internship positions within the DRH departments and made accommodations for the young adults to be successful such as training on different disabilities. Although Project SEARCH has key fundamental elements on how it should be implemented, each Project SEARCH may work differently.

Research Questions

The Research Questions pursued by this investigation include: How does Project SEARCH work and what are parent, student, and business host perspectives on Project SEARCH, its methods, and goals? What are the parent perspectives on why and how Project SEARCH has prepared their children with developmental disabilities for competitive employment? What are the student perspectives on why and how Project SEARCH has prepared them for competitive employment? What are the business host site's involved perspectives on why and how they have prepared students with developmental disabilities for competitive employment?

In order to answer the research questions, I gathered information from Project SEARCH international conferences and attended Project SEARCH committee meetings for the research site area. I also had parents complete questionnaires and followed up with interview questions. Interviews helped me compare the students and parents perspectives of their job skills pre and post program. Interviews with the teacher and employment specialists helped understand the type of curriculum and skills obtained over

the course of the school year. Understanding the curriculum and obtaining a description of the program pieced together the experiences and stories of becoming prepared for employment. Interviews with employers, employees and agencies helped me determine perspectives, reasoning, collaboration and implementation processes for the Project SEARCH program. Observations assisted in the understanding of the processes and curriculum used for the program.

When I attended the Executive Board meeting in May of 2011, I notified them of my intention with the study focused on the Harris County Project SEARCH site. The Executive Board determined they would like to know the perspective of the parents of the program's participants as well as the participants themselves on the program's successes and failures. They approved the pre and post Project SEARCH questions that I intended to ask the participants and wanted to make this process a standard practice of the program.

Definition of Terms

Braided funding- funds coming from different government agencies into one traceable funding stream for a service package to an individual that remain separate strands but join in the end (Timmons, 2007, p. 2)

Competitive employment- work in the competitive labor market performed in an integrated setting on a full or part-time basis in which an individual is paid at or above minimum wage and receives a level of benefits paid by the employer for the same or similar work of someone who is nondisabled (US Legal, 2011)

Community based instruction- systematic instruction in integrated community settings which allow students to develop and apply job skills enhancing opportunities

within the community (Baltimore County Public Schools, 2005)

Developmental disability- disability which is related to any mental or physical impairment which occurs before the age of 22; some disabilities it includes are mental retardation, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, head injury, autism, or a learning disability related to a brain dysfunction (Missouri Department of Mental Health, n.d., para 1)

Employment specialist/job coach- assists in obtaining a job for an individual with a disability by “creating a positive job match; maintaining a job through on-site assistance and other workplace supports; and advancing careers with career development” (Work Support, 2007, para. 3). The employment advisor learns the individual tasks needed to perform job duties and then assist the individual with a disability in becoming proficient at those tasks over time.

Interagency Collaboration- cross agency cooperation which identifies gaps and overlaps in services as well as areas of agency expertise; and leads to strategic decision making that broadens the collective capacities of participating agencies (Timmons, Podmostko, Lavin, & Willis, 2005)

Internship- similar to the clinical rotations in every medical school curriculum or apprenticeships in other career-technical programs where the student assumes an employee role in learning tasks (Rutkowski, Daston, Van Kuiken, & Riehle, 2006)

Successful Outcome- competitive employment in an integrated setting with year-round work of twenty hours or more and being paid minimum wage or higher (Project SEARCH, 2011 b)

Transition services- a coordinated set of activities through the efforts of multiple agencies for a student with disabilities that is results oriented focusing on improvement of

many aspects of life such as independent living, education/training and employment (U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs, 2007)

Limitations

I collected information for this research from August of 2011 through November of 2012. There were limitations within this study. At the time of this research, there was only one Project SEARCH in Missouri, the site of this particular study. Project SEARCH had over 140 programs internationally. I had chosen only one Project SEARCH site because there was no list of Project SEARCH sites provided at national conferences or on their website. There was also no effective means of communication for continuity of the collection of information obtained. In addition, a Project SEARCH site could have been in existence but not had a fidelity check. Even though a site has had a fidelity check, there may be some differences in the structure, curriculum, business setting, and application process.

Some of the information obtained in questionnaires and interviews may be sensitive due to some of the participants having a developmental disability. Parents and students who participated could have had discomfort in answering certain questionnaire or interview questions. In order to address sensitivity and discomfort, the participants had the option of participating and were able to view the questionnaire and interview questions prior to answering. I also had the participants sign consent to participate.

Additionally, the hospital was not willing to sign consent for me to interview staff members other than the business liaison for Project SEARCH. Finally, as a member of committees who assisted in the process of starting the first Project SEARCH in Missouri, there was the potential of personal bias in the research. In order to ensure personal bias

would not interfere with the research, I provided a questionnaire and asked interview questions that were developed to allow them to provide their own perspective on Project SEARCH.

Conclusion

I wanted to explore and coordinate the different perspectives of stakeholders involved in the Project SEARCH program in Harris County, explore the processes used in the program, and document the program's outcomes. This research is worth accomplishing because the documentation can show how individuals with disabilities can be trained for independent, employable skills. With opportunities for young adults to participate in such programs, the high school dropout rate may decline. There may also be an increase in the individuals with disabilities being employed.

This program guided schools and agencies on how to provide effective instruction in employability skills in order to be a competitively employed individual. This was not just an educational issue, but a civil rights issue - people with disabilities have historically been denied equal access to opportunities for employment. Individuals with disabilities were typically denied choice and/or preference for the jobs they obtain. Project SEARCH informed parents, educators, young adults, and employers about collaboration of agencies and the benefits of employing people with disabilities, but the program itself has not yet been well studied.

In this chapter, I explained the background of the study in which several districts within Harris County were seeking a transition program attempting to provide competitive employment to individuals with developmental disabilities. The problem Harris County is faced with includes students with disabilities who are graduating high

school unprepared for adult life. A general explanation of the Project SEARCH program was provided as well as the research questions and definition of terms.

In Chapter 2, a review of the literature is presented. The literature considered for the comparison with my research results included a review of the laws passed over the last 50 years. Investigation of the components of compliance and legalities of the IEP play a role in why districts are working to improve transition outcomes for students. I examined research findings in best practices in reaching employment, agency collaboration, as well as why people should employ people with disabilities. In order to learn about Project SEARCH, program fidelity is included in the literature review as well as the agencies involved in the Harris County program. Finally, there is research in the perspectives of individuals who have participated in Project SEARCH programs internationally.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

There are various factors involved in creating a post-secondary transition program. For the purpose of my research, this literature review covers law regarding individuals with disabilities, IEPs, best practices in reaching employment for those with disabilities, collaboration efforts between agencies, preparation for competitive employment, Project SEARCH model fidelity, outside agency involvement, post-secondary perspectives, and why businesses should employ individuals with disabilities. I also research how transition activities prepare young adults for post-secondary goals.

Law Regarding Individuals with Disabilities

According to Hartman (2009), individuals with developmental disabilities continue to be underemployed and have the “lowest rates of engagement in employment-related activities” upon graduation (p. 6). Fifty-two percent of young adults with cognitive disabilities are employed, receiving training or attending a post-secondary school (Hartman, 2009). Young adults are individuals that are at least 18 years of age or older. The National Adolescent and Child Treatment Study found after studying 800 youth with an emotional disturbance over a seven year period only half obtained employment and lived independently (Silver, Unger, & Friedman, 1993). These outcomes are the reason transition has become an area of focus for policymakers in the field of Special Education. There has been a range of federal legislature passed over the last two decades regarding this issue.

People with developmental disabilities were, for the most part, institutionalized 50 years ago. Prior to the Disability Rights movement in the mid 1900's, individuals with disabilities were not exposed to other individuals with the same or different disabilities.

Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Independent Living Management (2001) documented it was not until 1963 when President Kennedy started an initiative to push people with disabilities out of institutions and pushed to create better health and rehabilitation services so these individuals could restore their lives in the community. The next major legislation was the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provides comprehensive services and outlaws discrimination against citizens with disabilities. It supports maximum integration into the community and assistance for independent living to all individuals with a disability. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 law prohibits discrimination in employment based on disability (Johnson, 2004).

In the 1980's, leaders helped to create a unified movement for all people with disabilities (National Consortium on Leadership and Disability for Youth, n.d.). Federal and state legislature made efforts to be more family-focused and create transition policies and programs within educational facilities. There had been research findings and awareness movements which pushed for laws to support individuals with disabilities while in school to assist with post-secondary outcomes. In 1983, funding to support transition services for youth with disabilities was made available with the enactment of The Education of the Handicapped Amendments (Lehman, Hewitt, Bullis, Rinkin, & Castellanos, 2002).

It was from there more laws unfolded which brought individuals with developmental disabilities more rights. In 1990, George H. W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) into law. ADA mandated accommodations to have programs and services accessible to people with disabilities in local, state, and

federal governments and businesses (Rehabilitation Research & Training Center on Independent Living Management, 2001). ADA is a law was created to end discrimination against all individuals with disabilities.. “The 1992 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act endorses natural supports as a source of extended services for individuals receiving supported employment” (West, Kregel, Hernandez, & Hock, 1997, p. 175).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a critical law passed the same year as ADA which requires free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive setting (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2006). IDEA assures students with disabilities have a right to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) from age three through age 21. In order to qualify for services under IDEA, a student must be eligible for any one of thirteen categorical disabilities.

Unlike IDEA, Section 504 and ADA do not ensure that a child with a disability will receive an individualized educational program that is designed to meet the child’s unique needs and provide the child with educational benefit, so the child will be prepared for ‘employment and independent living.’ (Wright & Wright, 2008, para. 7)

The IEP, in part, determines the transition goals for students by age 16. This discussion may include the need for extending the four year high school program to a fifth-seventh year or until the young adult turns age 21 to graduate. After a young adult graduates, he or she is no longer eligible to receive services under IDEA.

The federal IDEA legislation has a different expectation for graduation of students with disabilities than the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (NCLB of

2001, n.d.). The passage of NCLB of 2001 holds school districts “accountable for measuring and reporting their graduation rates” (Schifter, 2011, p. 409). According to the U.S. Department of Education, the definition of high school graduation rate needed a uniform definition. The uniform rate “estimates the percentage of students who enter high school in ninth grade and graduate within four years. Schools are responsible not only for the graduation of students in the aggregate, but also in disaggregated subgroups” as cited in Schifter (2011, p. 409). This includes the subgroup of students with disabilities. Schifter (2011) pointed out NCLB expects students with disabilities to graduate within four years of starting high school, however, IDEA allows students with disabilities to receive services in high school through age 21. Schifter’s study showed “most students graduated after four, five, or six years in high school with median time-to-graduation approximately five years after entry into high school”(2011, p.409).

In 1998, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) was implemented. This act requires federally funded programs create a comprehensive job training system. The purpose is so individuals with disabilities have access to job training and employment services through accommodation. The next year in 1999, the legislature passed a law which made it possible for people with disabilities to have a job without losing their Medicare or Medicaid coverage. It is called the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act. This act is a progression of disability policy toward competitive employment for individuals with disabilities (Wehman & Revell, 2005).

Individualized Education Program

An IEP is a legal document created for students aged three through 21 in the state of Missouri who meet the eligibility criteria as a child with a disability according to the

law. The IEP team is comprised of at least one regular education teacher, a special education teacher, an individual who can interpret the instructional implication of test results, and the Local Education Agency. The IEP includes several items including a description of where the child currently performs in academics and/or behaviors, the goals the IEP team deem appropriate for the student to reach within a year, specific services the child will receive in order to reach those goals, placement in the regular education class, and a transition plan for those who are at least 16 years of age (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). For the purpose of this research, I will focus on the parts of the IEP which directly tie to transition.

When the IDEA was amended in 2004, there was new definition for transition services. The U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs' website gave the definition of transition services as defined through the IDEA 2004.

Transition services means a

coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that A) is designed to be a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; (B) is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests (2007, pg.1).

Transition activities are meant to assist in preparing the young adult with a disability for adult life. The IEP team needs to keep in mind the young adults interests, preferences,

skills, and needs when considering the development of transition goals. The activities suggested to meet the post-secondary goals should consider work experience, adult service providers, independent living, community activities, education and career goals (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

Best Practices in Reaching Employment for Individuals with Disabilities

There is regulation in secondary education to increase the preparedness of students with disabilities for employment. Articles related to school-to-work transition for competitive employment included findings for what students need to know in transition planning. According to Haring, Lovett, and Smith (1990), many students lack the skills needed to be independent and reach their full potential in life. The authors wrote this partly because many programs designed for students with disabilities are inadequate. Within their study of post-secondary vocational and community adjustment of recent graduates, the authors were still inconclusive as to what key components would be adequate education prior to the graduation of students with disabilities. Haring et al. (1990) concluded a major obstacle for these recent graduates was financial and residential independence. The authors also concluded there were not many resources and services for students with disabilities in post-secondary school. One must keep in mind the sample for this study was a small population in a geographically limited area in New Mexico. Services and agencies vary throughout different cities. Employment programs vary throughout communities.

“Too often, and with too many people in our society, perceptions related to disability are immediately linked to descriptors such as handicapped, impairment, unable to do, dependent and less qualified” (Wehman, Revell, & Brooke, 2002, p. 42).

Supported employment focuses on the abilities of people with disabilities (Wehman et al., 2002). Engaging employers to expand employment opportunities to individuals with developmental disabilities is challenging. Teachers and families are often unaware of the resources available in communities. There is also employers' perceived inexperience of the student and reluctance to hire a young adult with a disability (Carter et al., 2009). According to Carter et al. (2009), there are "weak linkages between schools and community employers, and difficulty finding transportation and on-the-job supports" (p. 38). When considering best practices for employability skills for young adults, service providers and educators must consider the business aspect (Riehle, 2006). Carter et al. (2009) suggested hosting community conversation as a way to develop creative solutions to businesses' need for good employees and provide meaningful work experience for young adults with disabilities.

Rehabilitation professionals often use deficit marketing to "sell" a potential employee according to Riehle (2006). "Deficit marketing, that is, using negative descriptors to 'sell' a potential employee, is an approach that is totally at odds with the business mindset" (Riehle, 2006, p. 69). She states they often times make "cold calls" to businesses and offer to have an individual with a disability "enter the workplace as a volunteer". When considering job placement for a person with a disability, Riehle (2006) suggested asking two questions: "Is this consistent with normal business hiring procedures? Would I want to work or be hired under these conditions?" (p. 70). In order to retain an individual with disabilities in competitive employment, the people within the support system should consider a job "that matches the interests and skills of the job candidate, learn about the business before calling them, focus on skills and attitude that

the candidate would bring to the business and make the business feel lucky to be getting the individual” (Riehle, personal communication, 2011). The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) published a final report regarding best practices in the employment of people with disabilities for state government in 2005. According to the report (Office of Legal Counsel, 2005), it is best practice for agencies to provide ongoing strategies such as public awareness about employment possibilities, educating employers, about benefits of hiring persons with disabilities and expanding internship programs for persons with disabilities.

Once an individual with a disability is employed, how can general retention practices be optimized to include people with disabilities? According to Habeck, Rachel, Campbell, and Kregal (2007), retention of employees is a major issue as well as employers wanting to control health care and benefit costs. In order to have more control, companies have identified disability management practices as important. Specifically, disability prevention and management can be controlled better by having a clear and consistent applied return to work (RTW) process,

supervisor buy-in with RTW, an employee-oriented organizational culture, targeting upstream with safety and risk prevention, an integrated approach to benefit and claim/case management, directly assisting supervisors at the job site to make accommodations, and providing very early intervention for all types of health and injury incidents. (Habeck et al., 2007, p. 5)

There are seven core quality indicators for competitive employment services job outcomes for Special Education teachers to know about transitioning youth with disabilities (Brooke et al., 2009, p. 60). These quality indicators are seen as best practice

in employment services for persons with disabilities. The first indicator involves the use of benefits planning. A special education teacher or provider who is the planner should discuss with the family the impact of wages on benefits and complete a benefits analysis. Benefits may include disability that Social Security Administration (SSA) provides or associated public health insurance benefits.

The SSA is a federal government entity which provides an important source of income for people with disabilities through various programs. The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program provides supplemental income funded by tax revenue to individuals meeting their eligibility criteria for a disability and have limited income or resources (U.S. Social Security Administration, 2012). The program is designed for individuals who receive Medicaid or Medicare and Social Security benefits and do not pursue jobs because they do not want their SSI and related benefits to cease. These individuals rely on this income for medical equipment and services. However, SSA has in the recent years promoted programs which will allow them to receive benefits yet still have gainful employment (Brooke et al., 2009). The purpose is to see if the individual with a disability is able to have employment and be independent of the benefits offered by an SSA disability program. Therefore, use of benefits planning to ensure individuals with disabilities understand they are able to work and still receive benefits within certain guidelines is a part of effective planning for a successful work outcome.

The second indicator is having the young adult assist in individualizing the job goal. An example of individualizing a job goal may be assisting the young adult with exploring job and career interests. Brooke et al. (2009) stated the IEP used in secondary

schools should be person-centered and build around informed choice. This means the school should assist the students in understanding their strengths, interests, and job goals.

The third component is assessing the competitive job quality by reviewing the wages earned and number of hours to work per week. The individuals should earn at least minimum wage and work at least 20 hours a week if possible. The fourth indicator for a successful job outcome is to investigate whether the wages earned and benefits received are commensurate with others that do similar job tasks, and that advancement could be an option. Being employed in an integrated job setting is the fifth indicator. An integrated environment is within a regular business setting and individuals with disabilities are able to participate in the community.

The sixth indicator is quality of job-site supports and systematic removal of supports. The purpose of these supports is to ensure there are supports in place in order to continue successful employment as needed. Do the support strategies match the individuals learning style and culture of the job site? Is there a plan for the systematic removal of the job supports? According to Brooke et al. (2009), when an employment specialist is able to reduce his/her presence at the job site because an employee with a disability is able to perform the essential functions of the job correctly, the process is called fading.

The seventh and final indicator is the presence of ongoing support services for job retention and career development (Brooke et al., 2009). Support is offered as needed after employment by assisting the employee with a disability in such areas as work place “accommodations, adjusting supports to address changing needs both at and away from the job site, and other supports that enhance job retention” (Brooke et al., 2009, p. 65).

Supports in training and employment are a way for individuals with disabilities to be more independent in choosing the direction of their lives. Every member, regardless of the entity they represent, should view job development as a joint responsibility between all members including educators, vocational rehabilitation counselors, students, families, and other outside agencies rather than one person's responsibility (Ankeny, Wilkins, & Spain, 2009). Using natural supports and job coaches for individuals with disabilities has become popular in recent years.

West et al. (1997) interviewed 385 supported employment provider agencies regarding time-limited and extended service natural supports. Their research results indicated 85% of respondents reported the natural supports used in their agency have been generally successful and useful for those individuals with disabilities on their caseload. There are various studies completed regarding natural supports. These studies each have different definitions for the term "natural support". Some studies are less specific while others explain who, how and when (Wehman & Bricout, 1999, p. 220). In most discussions regarding natural supports, "co-worker" is the most common recurring term. The research field seems to concur that natural supports involve individuals within the employee's work environment (Wehman & Bricout, 1999, p. 220).

The literature is unclear as to whether or not a job coach, also known as a job specialist, is additionally considered as a natural support. According to West et al. (1997), the job coach facilitates the natural supports. Research by Fabian, Edelman, and Leedy (1993) suggest the role of a job coach will fade out of the natural supports within the employment environment over time. Wehman and Bricout (1999) make several points regarding supported employment. First, people with significant disabilities need some

support during their employment. Second, there are various roles for the supports depending on the individual and the job. Finally, effective supports whether they are natural or more intrusive must be maintained long term so people with disabilities do not lose their jobs. A job coach may be considered more intrusive because it is an additional person in the work environment that is not an employee of the business but a person of service for the individual with a disability. A natural support may be considered less intrusive because it may consist of a co-worker or supervisor that trains and/or supports workers with disabilities. However, Wehman and Bricout (1999) wrote, “It is noteworthy to observe that the vast majority of employers view the job coach as a positive presence within the work place, as opposed to an intrusive or disruptive influence” (p. 224).

When instruction is provided in the academic setting in preparing for work, there are different ideas for communication than there would be in a work setting. A teacher leads and provides direction during instruction for student responses. However, in the workplace, the setup for interaction varies. “Sometimes your supervisors may specifically ask you for your opinion or ask you to express that opinion in writing. More often than not, however, they assume that if they need to know something, you will bring it to their attention” (Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2011). The school setting provides little opportunity to develop and maintain work skills (Smail & Horvat, 2009, p. 7). “Physical activity opportunities for a traditionally inactive population is essential and plays a vital role in transition planning” (Smail & Horvat, 2009, p.7). There are many studies which conclude there is a positive association with “paid work experience during high school and post-school job success for youth with disabilities” (Ankeny et al., 2009, p. 30). When schools prepare young adults for the work force, they must consider

demographics, skill sets, and career assessments, as well as planning and exploration activities (Carter et al., 2010). Demographics should be considered to have knowledge of the opportunities and resources that may exist in the community.

It can be challenging to pull together the resources for services and supports. There are different agencies which offer programs and services for individuals with disabilities and these agencies are operated by different funding sources. The agencies, therefore, have varying goals, priorities, outcome expectations, and requirements. “In order to achieve job seeker employment goals and respond to employer hiring needs, it is often necessary to access funds from more than one program, agency, or funding stream” (Nicholas, Kauder, & Krepcio, 2011, p. 1). There can be collaboration of funding in order to be financially efficient for programming. This is called braided funding. According to Timmons, “successful pooling of resources relies on solid collaborative partnerships” (2007, p.1). There are four models which are nationally recognized employer-responsive models that use braided funding (Nicholas et al., 2011, p.2). These models include the Lowe’s distribution center model in Pennsylvania, Project SEARCH in Ohio, Start on Success in Maryland, and Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board. Each of these models have common factors such as an employer who wants to recruit and hire individuals with disabilities, partnerships between employer, and community organizations, which provide support to meet human resource needs, and use of braided funding or collaborative funding.

Collaboration Efforts Between Agencies

Collaboration goes beyond funding. There should be a focus on collaboration on transition services because people with developmental disabilities have multifaceted

support needs. Historically, different systems were not able to work together. In Morningstar's (2006) opinion, no agency is capable of single handedly providing all the supports needed to effectively plan and provide comprehensive transitional services. Collaboration is a well-defined relationship. When collaboration exists, there is a commitment to definitions, goals, responsibility, mutual authority, accountability for success and sharing resources as well as rewards (Pacer Center, n.d.). Morningstar, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor at University of Kansas within the Department of Special Education. She was an advisor regarding a study on what strategies are needed to facilitate interagency collaboration for transition services. The study results indicated the capacities needed for high-performing Local Educational Agencies (LEA) to implement interagency collaboration requirements for transition services include scheduling and staffing, early planning, flexibility in location of services, follow-up after transition, administrative support, funding, and state support (Morningstar, 2006). The strategies LEAs need are collaboration with adult agencies, meeting with students and families, training students and families, joint training of staff, meeting agency staff and transition councils, transition portfolios, and disseminating information widely. Morningstar (2006) reported State Educational Agencies (SEA) require state transition councils, expertise and partnerships, funding, and legislative support in order for interagency collaboration in transition services. The strategies they need include local input, ongoing support and training, memorandums of understanding, and widespread dissemination. Finally, the attitudes characterized by high performing LEAs and SEAs in interagency collaboration include a clear value of relationship building, positive attitudes when building relationship capacity, and relationship building strategies. Relationship building

strategies would include advocacy, ongoing meetings, and transition councils (Morningstar, 2006).

Like Morningstar, Johnson (2004) recommended involving community service agencies to participate in the development of transition plans in order to ensure students with disabilities have access to full participation in post-secondary education and employment. He also suggested districts promote collaborative employer engagement through work-based learning opportunities. To further improve collaborative efforts, he recommended establishing partnerships with workforce development entities. In order to improve collaboration and system linkages at all levels, Johnson (2004) discussed how developing innovative interagency financing strategies can promote cost-sharing for needed transition services. He also suggested collaborative staff-development programs such as cross-training, team-building, and others which involve collaborative relationships.

Project SEARCH Model Fidelity

Practices that support the successful transition of youth include the need for coordinated efforts across systems, socioeconomic and community factors, and commitment actions by the government, businesses, and private citizens (Lehman et al., 2002). Project SEARCH is a one year transition program for students with developmental disabilities in their last year of eligibility for public education. The application program provides skills training and work experience. The young adults must have the goal of competitive employment. Rutkowski et al. wrote about how the Project SEARCH program is unique in that “it combines real-life work experience, training in employability and independent living skills, and placement assistance through an active

collaboration of the education system, employers, and the VR system” (2006, p.27).

Project SEARCH is a business model with true collaboration among its partners. The sustainability of the program is through braided funding. Active partners may include businesses, schools, VR, community rehabilitation providers, long-term support agencies, families, and social security administration (Project SEARCH, 2011 b).

Community based training is not a new concept but Project SEARCH is different from other models. The founder of the program, Erin Riehle (personal communication, February 22, 2011) stated Project SEARCH finds best practices and combine them all under the business model. According to Riehle (personal communication, February 22, 2011), the program is also unique because there is an application process, uses braided funding, and complete immersion in a business setting. Transportation is typically not offered for this program. The reason for this being, young adults need to access alternative ways for being transported when they find a job and this program is structured to prepare them for competitive employment. It may not be the only placement option for young adults with developmental disabilities, but it has gained credibility from the federal government. In 2009, the Department of Labor (DOL) became the first federal program to host a Project SEARCH site. The DOL website newsletter (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009) posted, “Project SEARCH is a significant step toward making the federal government a model employer and putting these students on the path to good jobs” (para. 4).

Erin Riehle (personal communication, February 22, 2011) stated the program typically takes place in healthcare or business setting with at least 200 employees. Examples of business sites include a university, zoo, hospital, bank, or city government.

The partners provide consistent on-site staff which includes a special education teacher and at least one job coach. Project SEARCH activities are tied into mandated federal law indicators with focus on transition under IDEA (Project SEARCH, 2011 b). The indicators include the dropout rate, least restrictive environment, parental involvement, compliant IEPs, transition goals, and post-school outcomes (Project SEARCH, 2011 b). On July 14, 2011 during the annual Project SEARCH conference in Minnesota, the Project SEARCH Design Team presented a Project SEARCH curriculum to the participants. The curriculum covers areas such as team building, workplace mobility, workplace safety, technology, social skills/communication, presentation skills, interviewing skills, money management, health and wellness, resume, job search, and job retention.

Project SEARCH began at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center in 1996 by Erin Riehle. Riehle (personal communication, February 22, 2011), a nurse in the emergency room at the time, stated the hospital had adopted a new policy statement which referred to increasing employment opportunities for qualified persons with disabilities. Riehle noticed the patients, the hospitals consumers, were coming into the hospital with disabilities or leaving with them. These individuals were considered patients and not necessarily potential employees. Riehle then started making phone calls to school districts and the developmental disability office in Ohio. She knew the hospital had an education department and spoke to them about wanting to educate and train people with disabilities within the hospital setting. In the process, the program will "educate employers about the potential of this underutilized workforce while meeting their human resource needs" (Cincinnati Children's Project SEARCH, 2011, para. 3).

The program is now replicated in over 39 states and at least five countries with over 150 sites in the United States alone. The program is in large corporations, banks, universities, health care, and government offices.

Project SEARCH Del Ray Hospital (DRH) currently serves students who are 18 to 21 years old. The students must have a developmental disability and have completed four years of high school credit but deferred graduation status. Therefore, the student will not receive his or her high school diploma until exiting the Project SEARCH program. The schools may refer to these students as fifth year students or second year seniors. The person with educational rights must agree it will be the last year of services and upon exiting the program the student will receive a high school diploma. The student must be eligible for VR and Department of Mental Health (DMH) services. The students also need to be able to take direction from supervisors to modify behavior as necessary. There needs to be a way to effectively communicate and the parents need to be able to provide transportation. There is a drug screening, felony check, and all immunizations need to be up-to-date. Ultimately, the student needs to have a desire to work competitively in the community at the conclusion of the program (Cincinnati Children's Project SEARCH, 2011).

Agency Involvement

In order to maintain model fidelity with Project SEARCH, there must be various agencies involved unilaterally. Active partners must collaborate and provide services to the interns. In this study, the agencies involved besides the local school districts included the local Senate Bill 40 Board, VR, a service agency, and the hospital host site. The

Senate Bill 40 Board in the area studied had partnered with the Missouri Department of Mental Health (DMH).

According to the Missouri DMH website (Missouri Department of Mental Health, n.d.), a part of their mission is the rehabilitation of Missourians who have developmental disabilities. The site also includes eligibility requirements to receive services. A developmental disability is a disability which is related to any mental or physical impairment which occurs before the age of 22. Some disabilities it includes are mental retardation, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, head injury, autism, or a learning disability related to a brain dysfunction. DMH also stated in order to be eligible there must be a determination the disability will be:

likely to continue indefinitely and it results in a substantial functional limitation in two or more of the following six areas of major life activities: self-care, receptive and expressive language development and use, learning, self-direction, capacity for independent living or economic self-sufficiency and mobility. (Missouri Department of Mental Health, n.d., para. 1)

In order to be eligible to apply for Project SEARCH, the students must be eligible for DMH services.

DMH and the Senate Bill 40 Board of Harris County became partners in 2006 leading to the decision of the Senate Bill 40 Board took over case management from the DMH Regional Office when an individual turns 17 according to the Senate Bill 40 Board website (Developmental Disabilities Resource Board, 2011). The Senate Bill 40 Board is an entity in which is funded through local county tax levies (State Employment Leadership Network, 2008). Some of the funded services include but are not limited to

adult day programs, transitional programs, adaptive equipment, and supported employment. The Harris County Senate Bill 40 Board agreed to fund the Project SEARCH replication process as well as assist in establishing professional development, furniture, and equipment for the training lab within the hospital. A Senate Bill 40 Board case manager assists individuals with funding for services provided through other service agencies within the county. In order for a Project SEARCH student to obtain funds to participate in the program, he or she must be DMH eligible and VR eligible.

VR assists people with disabilities who want to work but have difficulty finding and/or keeping employment. On the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (MODESE) website under VR (Vocational rehabilitation, 2011), it states "VR specializes in employment and training services that can assist you in becoming employed" (para. 1). Eligibility is met when an individual has a physical or mental impairment which makes employment difficult without rehabilitation. The VR counselor determines the eligibility based on a collection of data from the school and the family. VR funds Project SEARCH through supported employment services. Specifically, they authorize supported employment assessment, task analysis, and job development. VR counselors typically complete the supported employment assessment to determine if the student is employable. If the student is employable, VR supports the application for the student to attend Project SEARCH. If the student is accepted into the program, VR hires the services of task analysis and job development to a service agency. The service agency fulfills VR's request through an employment specialist.

The service agency that holds the license for the Harris County Project SEARCH had a motto. The motto during 2011 was "changing the lives of people with

developmental disabilities” (Life Skills, 2011, p. 1). On their website (Life Skills, 2011), they explained their mission is to provide high quality, individualized services that meet the clients’ needs. This service agency provides support for people with developmental disabilities to live in their own home and find and keep employment. The service agency provided an employment advisor to the Project SEARCH program through funding VR. The role of the employment advisor is to identify skills and abilities, and match jobs to job skills for the individual with disabilities area of interest. The business site in which the young adults received job skill training for the purposes of the study is DRH.

DRH is the host business site for the first Project SEARCH Missouri. DRH’s website (Barnes Jewish St. Peters Hospital, 2012) wrote they have been operating since 1980. There are 127 beds at the facility. According to DRH website (2012), the hospital has at least 11 different departments willing to provide internships for the young adult students. Some of these departments include central sterilization, oncology, and materials management.

International Perspectives on Project SEARCH

Work is highly valued in the American culture. An individual’s status in the community can be enhanced when someone is working and paying taxes. Brooke et al. (2009) wrote working gives the employee a chance to relate with co-workers and to develop many connections at work and in the community. The Vice President of Hospital Operations at Ministry St. Joseph Hospital (MSJH) in Marshfield, Wisconsin stated Project SEARCH gives young adults with disabilities an opportunity to be active members of the community (St. Joseph Hospital, 2012). One of the job coaches at Project SEARCH MSJH Jane Austin stated in the work setting, the interns are able to

develop strong work skills and appropriate work behaviors with their support (St. Joseph Hospital, 2012).

James Paget University Hospital (JPUH) in Norwich, England has a site for Project SEARCH within their facility. When John Hemming, trust chairman of the hospital, was interviewed, he discussed how rewarding the project is for everyone involved (Norwich Evening News 24, 2011). He further said there is substantial growth in the intern's confidence. Cassie Clarke, a supervisor over Project SEARCH at JPUH, stated the program offered more hope to students entering work than any other program she has seen in her 25 years of teaching in special education. She stated the students have really come out of their shells and they will now hold conversations after hardly saying a word in the beginning of the program. An intern named Michael Francis from the Washington D.C. Project SEARCH site within the U.S. Education Department stated he was pulled out of his shell by attending the program (Turque, 2011). Stephen Taylor is the job coach at the JPUH site and stated that without this type of program, the young adults with developmental disabilities would not be hired. A young adult who graduated from the program and now has a full time job stated that her confidence has grown since starting Project SEARCH at JPUH. Troy Booker, from the U.S. Education Department Project SEARCH site, did not want to leave his home often times while attending high school due to being taunted by classmates calling him "retarded" (Turque, 2011). Troy did not have to worry about being taunted in the workplace environment.

Richard Garcia was an intern in the partnership in the Project SEARCH site between DePaul Industries and The Standard, an insurance company, in Portland, Oregon. Richard has since been hired by The Standard. Noel King is the Vice President

of Development and Social Programs at DePaul Industries. He stated there are collaborative efforts between two organizations to provide work opportunities for people with developmental disabilities who have proven to be capable and productive employees” (Depaul Industries, 2011). Richard pointed out that he prefers the repetitive nature of the job and the lack of interruptions he has while working so he can pay attention to the details when filing. Mark Oettinger is a General Manager of the Wal-Mart Distribution Center in North Platte, Nebraska who partners with the local high school to be the host site for Project SEARCH. Mr. Oettinger points out the interns show up every day for work and are building friendships. The experience is rewarding for both the associates and the kids (Carlini, 2011). According to comments from supervisors at a Project SEARCH Indiana University site, the interns became part of a team and they have noticed gains in confidence with the job skills because the interns start initiating new tasks and ask to see how else they can assist the departments (Indiana, 2011). Although the goal is employment by the end of the Project SEARCH program, Bitta DeWees at the Ivy Tech Community College stated many students begin the program feeling shy and lacking confidence (Denny, 2012). DeWees, the Director of Project SEARCH at the Ivy Tech site, went on to say that by the end of the program, interns are able to give PowerPoint presentations in front of a group. The intern’s confidence and self-esteem transformations were powerful. The instructor of the program, Christina Montiville, stated she “has seen these young adults grow beyond the labels placed on their lives” (Denny, 2012).

Why Employ Individuals with Disabilities

Research supports the idea there are benefits to hiring individuals with disabilities. People with disabilities with gainful employment is an advantage because, for example, they are able to earn a paycheck for more financial independence and have the potential for benefits such as medical coverage or insurance. For employers, it may lead to increased productivity, a more diverse work environment, and wider customer base. Hiring individuals with disabilities may also benefit business through financial savings due to low absenteeism because the need for job recruitment is low with increased retention rates. There are also potential tax incentives or deductions for the employer.

People with disabilities are capable of meeting or exceeding performance standards for employment. “In many cases research has shown employers save money and time by hiring individuals with disabilities” (Aging and Disability Resource Center, 2010, para. 1). Retention of good workers is important to a business’s success. Retention of employees also assists in the reduction of costs that result from turnover. Recruiting people with disabilities can also cut costs because recruitment can be conducted through nonprofit services. The Aging and Disability Resource Center of Hawaii (2010) agreed that hiring these individuals increases the workplace diversity and provides the opportunity to tap into new consumers. The business additionally has the potential to qualify for tax incentives or deductions. Wehman (2011) shared these views in his research. He included several reasons for why employers should hire young people with disabilities. First, young people with disabilities can be outstanding workers by having good attendance and being highly productive. Second, consumers prefer to do

business with companies which hire workers with disabilities. The results of a national questionnaire noted that 87% of the people prefer to do business with companies which hire individuals with disabilities (Siperstein & Romano, 2006). Third, employers are interested in hiring individuals with disabilities because their customers often have family members with disabilities. Employers are more likely to hire individuals with disabilities due to having more exposure with them. Finally, most employers are good stewards in the community and want to live up to their social responsibility.

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (2005) published an article pointing out the fact that people with disabilities are the nation's largest minority. If an individual with a disability were to be hired by an employer, it would create a competitive edge over other businesses and create a more diverse environment (Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2005). Brooke et al. (2009) agreed in their findings by showing that the general public would then be able to see people with disabilities be competent in the work setting. It would also assist the employers in meeting their labor needs. According to a Virginia Commonwealth University questionnaire of 250 supervisors in 43 businesses, supervisors were pleased with the performance of their employees with disabilities (Domzal et al., 2008). In order to manage employees with disabilities, the employees should be managed just as all other employees and disability awareness training can assist with alleviating concerns. Most of the time accommodations needed for people with disabilities are of little to no cost. For example, pictures are posted at workstations in order to identify a product or process. The typical expenditure for those who do require an expense is typically around \$500 (Domzal et al., 2008). Furthermore, most businesses report there were no significant increases in cost for workman's

compensation or health care costs due to hiring individuals with disabilities. An article by Siperstein and Romano (2006) reported the same findings when researching literature on the fears of employers in comparison with the results that occur once the person with a disability is hired. For instance, nearly all employers who had hired an individual with a disability had stated they would hire someone with a disability again. Also, employers perceived employees with disabilities as having better attendance and being more reliable than their non-disabled employees.

The Department of Labor's document entitled *Employer Perspectives on Employment of People with Disabilities* (Domzal et al., 2008) offers tools and resources employers can use to hire, retain, and advance employees with disabilities. These resources and tools include:

employer tax credits and incentives, disability awareness training, visible top management commitment, mentoring, assistive technology, flexible work schedules, using a specialized recruiting source, training existing staff, on-site consultation or technical assistance, disability targeted internship program, short-term job assistance through a job coach, developing a targeted recruitment program, centralized accommodations fund, or reassignment. (Domzal et al., 2008, p. 3).

The Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities has a transition program for young adults called Bridges. In their question and answer section on their webpage (Marriott Foundation, 2009) they discussed their experience in working with people with disabilities. Seventy percent of the time, people with disabilities who are willing and able to work do not require special equipment or technology. "The DuPont Company reports

that the employees with disabilities were actually ranked higher on safety issues by supervisors than their non-disabled peers. Other U.S. Department of Labor studies support this finding” (Marriott Foundation, 2009, para. 4). People with disabilities are held to the same standards as employees who are non-disabled as far as being managed if they are not doing their job. The Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities (2009) noted “a recent Harris poll found 82 percent of managers said employees with disabilities were not harder to supervise than employees without disabilities” (para. 3).

Summary

Between the passing of federal laws NCLB and IDEA, there are requirements for school districts regarding preparing activities for post-secondary transition. These activities and services are planned within a young adult’s IEP on the transition services plan. Research regarding transition best practices in preparing people with disabilities for employment show having real life work experience or community-based instruction helps prepare young adults with disabilities for work. In order to be efficient with efforts of different agencies for preparing young adults in employment, research supports collaboration between agencies. Research shows employers who hire people with disabilities do not have an increase in financial obligations. The people with disabilities perform their job duties and have good work ethic. Best practices for improving the transition process for young adults with disabilities included business centered marketing, braided funding, and natural supports on the job.

The Project SEARCH program was considered a best practice model in that it was created under the business model, used braided funding, and young adults were immersed in a job setting. They also focused on educating the community and businesses as well as

creating partnerships regarding hiring young adults with disabilities. Agencies involved with the Project SEARCH model for Harris County include the Senate Bill 40 Board, VR, local school districts and a service agency.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

Overview

In Chapter 2, I reviewed literature regarding my research study. In Chapter 3, I explain the research design and methodology. In my study, I wanted to have a deeper understanding of how Project SEARCH works to prepare young adults for competitive employment. I wanted to explore and coordinate the different perspectives of stakeholders involved in the Project SEARCH program in Harris County, explore the processes used in the program, and document the program's outcomes. In order to have a better understanding of the program and processes used, I completed questionnaires and interviews with individuals involved with Project SEARCH DRH. The individuals included the instructor, employment specialists, interns, parents of interns, and at least one administrator from each agency. I am an outsider to parents and students. I am a colleague of the agencies involved.

Research Questions

I, as a researcher, chose to use a qualitative design for this dissertation. I chose qualitative research because it has flexibility in which I can modify my design and focus, if necessary, during the research to understand new (Maxwell, 2005, p. 22). My study is a phenomenological study in that it investigates various perceptions of a particular phenomenon (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The phenomenon of the study being the job skills obtained from participating in Project SEARCH DRH. I described the perceptions and reactions to the participants' experiences in some detail.

Interviews with students, parents, and the different agencies are the primary methods of data collection. In addition, I also conducted a parent questionnaire and

observed in the training lab and intern sites in order to explore the different perspectives of stakeholders involved in Project SEARCH DRH. In addition, I attended committee meetings and an international conference.

I developed research questions in which to base my research: How does Project SEARCH work and what are parent, student, and employer perspectives on Project SEARCH, its methods, and goals? What are the parent perspectives on why and how Project SEARCH has prepared their children with developmental disabilities for competitive employment? What are the student perspectives on why and how Project SEARCH has prepared them for competitive employment? What are the business site's involved perspectives on why and how they have prepared students with developmental disabilities for competitive employment?

Sample

The participants in this study were recruited verbally through the Project SEARCH DRH instructor at the open house for Project SEARCH year 2011-2012. I sat at a table with a recruitment flyer available for inquiries regarding the study. Each participant in the study signed a consent form for participation in research activities. The parents signed a different consent form for their young adult that was 17 or 18 but had legal guardianship. I recruited the school representatives, outside agencies, instructor, and employment specialists through face-to-face conversations. These participants were interviewed at their place of business. The location for the intern and parent interviews was the training lab of Project SEARCH or at a location chosen by the parent for their convenience.

The students interviewed range from ages 17-21. They are both male and female and come from Harris County within the Florence School District, Raleigh School District, Jergen School District, and Phillips School District. Each student had a developmental disability. A few examples of a developmental disability include autism or Down syndrome. The total number of students interviewed was six. Since there were only six interns in Project SEARCH at the time of the study, I had full intern participation. I also received full participation from each intern's parent. At least one parent from each intern completed the pre-Project SEARCH questionnaire and then also participated in the post-Project SEARCH interview.

I interviewed key stakeholders involved in the program. These stakeholders work for the different agencies involved as well as the business site at DRH. I interviewed Amy, the Special Services Director of Florence School District; Sara, the business liaison for DRH; Ellen, the instructor of Project SEARCH, Lindsey, service agency Job Developer, Melissa, VR Supervisor; Emily, Senate Bill 40 Board Program Manager; and Sean as well as Serene, the Employment Specialists.

Data Collection

Prior to interviewing I obtained permission from the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct my research. I gained consent from Florence School District to obtain secondary information through documents regarding Project SEARCH information on how the program works as well as documented outcomes. I had consent from DRH, VR, service agency and Senate Bill 40 Board to complete individual interviews. I secured consents from all Project SEARCH participants and their families to use their comments in my dissertation. The Project

SEARCH Executive Board determined they would like to know the perspective of the parents of the program's participant's as well as the participants themselves on the program's successes and failures.

Procedures

I developed the interview and questionnaire questions by working with qualitative experts within the Lindenwood University doctoral program in order to try and answer the purpose of this dissertation. I also requested input from Project SEARCH DRH Marketing and Communication Committee in order to determine if the questionnaire and interview questions would meet their expectations for the perspectives of the intern's and their families. This includes the perspectives of the Project SEARCH program, its methods, and the perspectives of the parents, and interns pre and post their experience in Project SEARCH. The questions are different for the participants depending upon their role within the project. I also followed up with additional questions if I felt it necessary based upon the answers provided. The questions provided to the agencies, interns, and their parents can be found in Appendix A.

I provided a questionnaire to the parents of the young adults participating in Project SEARCH prior to starting the program. The purpose of the questionnaire was to determine their perception of why they chose to apply to Project SEARCH, what the ultimate goal was for their young adult, what concerns they had, what they felt their role was, and what their perceptions were of their young adult's abilities or work opportunities. The parents were provided the questionnaire at the open house of the program. One parent opted to complete the questionnaire via email and the rest of the parents chose to complete them during open house. These questionnaires were

completed in August of the 2011-2012 school year. The parents were initially provided a questionnaire instead of an interview because I wanted them to be able to compare what they wrote at the beginning of the program to what they would state at the end of the program. I also provided questionnaires to the parents because there had not been an established rapport with myself or the Project SEARCH program. I wanted them to have time to review the questions and think through their answers. At the end of the program, I did a follow up interview to discuss the differences and/or similarity in their answers pre-Project SEARCH and post-Project SEARCH. Additionally, interviewing them in person allowed more depth regarding their responses.

I interviewed the participants of Project SEARCH. The interviews took place in the conference room located inside the training lab. I completed the interviews one-on-one with a recording device to be transcribed on a later date. It was important for me to interview the interns face-to-face so I could see their facial expressions, body language, and to avoid misinterpretations. I also used their words and body language to compare from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year. The pre-Project SEARCH interviews took place in August of the 2011-2012 school year. The post-Project SEARCH interviews took place in May 2012. I did not have a relationship with the young adult or parent participants of the questionnaire or interview process prior to gathering the information.

In the middle of the 2011-2012 school year, I interviewed key stakeholders involved in Project SEARCH. I met the stakeholders individually at their place of employment for the interview in the months of February through April 2012. I selected the key stakeholders by determining who makes decisions for the agencies involved.

This includes those who are directly involved every day in the program. The individuals directly involved include the instructor and the employment specialists. I also attended Executive Board meetings in April of 2011, as well as January and May of 2012. Additionally, I went on a Project SEARCH DRH tour, and attended community presentations regarding Project SEARCH. Finally, I was a member on the Marketing and Communication Committee as well as the Application Committee which met throughout the school year.

I emailed interview questions to the stakeholders prior to the interview. This allowed them to review the questions and consider how they answer the questions. This is important because I did not want them to feel rushed during the interview and wanted them to have ample opportunity to speak in detail. I chose to interview the key stakeholders and students face-to-face because I wanted to be able to see their body language and did not want to misinterpret statements. It also allowed for me to ask additional questions based on their comments to gain deeper understanding.

Throughout the school year, I observed in the intern training lab and intern sites at least 10 times per month for at least a half hour each. I completed the observations as a nonparticipant. I observed in order to obtain a better understanding of what the intern's day consisted of and how it may change throughout the school year. I would go to the training lab at different times throughout the day but mainly in the morning or at the end of their day. During the majority of the school day, they are in their intern sites.

At the end of the Project SEARCH school year, I provided the post-questionnaires to the parents. Right after they completed the questionnaire, I interviewed them in the Project SEARCH training lab. In May, I also interviewed the students for the second

time face-to-face. I recorded all of the interviews so they could later be transcribed and coded.

Analysis

Once all questionnaires were collected and interviews were transcribed, I highlighted all of the words and/or phrases that I felt were important or saw reoccurring. Once all of the documents were highlighted, I categorized the commonalities into different areas. The main purpose of the study was to learn about how Project SEARCH DRH works as well as the perspectives of those involved in the program. After the interviews were transcribed and coded, additional sections were added because the participants in the study brought up additional relevant points. The areas included for how Project SEARCH DRH works are the planning, structure, schedule and curriculum, funding, application and selection, and host site preparation. Categories were also included to address the perspectives of the interns as well as their parents. When interviewing the agency partners, their perspectives on employability skills obtained, uniqueness of the program, collaboration between agencies, and role of employment specialist was added as relevant. The goals and outcomes of Project SEARCH DRH were documented through committee feedback and interviews. Finally, a category was added for immeasurable benefits. Each of these categories is addressed in Chapter 4.

Summary

This chapter has summarized the process used in studying how Project SEARCH works for the DRH site. It also addressed how information was obtained in seeking insight into various perspectives of participation. This qualitative study includes use of interviews, observations and questionnaires. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study.

Chapter Four: Presentation of Findings

Overview

In Chapter 4, I presented finding of various aspects of Project SEARCH along with perspectives of young adults, staff, and parents who participated. Project SEARCH prepares Harris County residents with developmental disabilities who are 18 to 21 years of age and in their last year of high school eligibility to work in an internship within the community. Agencies that committed to the project included four schools, VR, a service agency, local Senate Bill 40 Board, and a hospital. The school districts obtained start-up funding through a Senate Bill 40 Board application which helped the agencies collaborate on initiating the program. The purpose of the study was to explore the different perspectives of the stakeholders in the Project SEARCH DRH program. Additionally, I collected and obtained information regarding the processes used in the program and document the outcomes. Through all of the information obtained, Chapter 4 will provide findings in the following areas: planning, funding, structure, schedule and curriculum, employability skills, employment advisors, application and selection, host site preparation, uniqueness, collaboration, goals and outcomes, young adult perspectives, parent perspectives, and immeasurable benefits.

Planning

The Project SEARCH program at DRH has been in place since the 2010-2011 school year. The Project SEARCH DRH came about when Lindsey, the Director of Employer Partnerships for the service agency, was searching the internet for programs which could assist young adults with skills prior to being employed. Lindsey's job is funded by the Senate Bill 40 Board, therefore, when Lindsey came across this program,

she shared it with Senate Bill 40 Board staff member, Emily who is the Program Manager in Harris County. They both decided to go to different school district sites around Harris County and a neighboring county to tour different transition programs. When interviewed, Emily stated “we really felt that none of the training programs were very comprehensive and when we looked at Project SEARCH, it was this great comprehensive training program.” She went on to state, “we thought it was a great collaborative funding option and that we wouldn’t be the sole funder. It would be multiple people, so it would make it affordable for everybody to do.” Ultimately, the students could then “get some great, long term training through-out the school year. They could leave the school and have great skills necessary to get a job.”

When I asked Emily what was meant by a “comprehensive training program”, she explained further. She stated when touring neighboring school district training programs, “the students might have gone two to three days per week for about two hours to a work site. When you go somewhere for two hours, you don’t get the whole scope of the job.” The program in a neighboring county, at the time, had students working about four hours per day for five days per week. She explained with the Project SEARCH model, the interns work for five days a week and work up to six hours per day. “You are getting to see people and build up that stamina in order to perform at those work levels for a long period of time because that’s what’s expected when you graduate school and go to get a job.” Emily also pointed out in the interview that the high school training programs would have the students work at different sites. “You might go to the grocery store one day and bag groceries and the next day go to the pet adoption center and do something

different. You weren't building upon your skills." The sites they toured did not have internships like the Project SEARCH model offered.

The service agency and Senate Bill 40 Board representatives then went to the local school districts and VR to educate them about the Project SEARCH program and determine the level of interest in participating. Melissa, District Supervisor for VR, stated a representative from Project SEARCH came to one of their supervisors meetings several years ago, and we were impressed. Melissa stated, "I was impressed with how creative the hospital was in developing adaptations, making adaptations for people with disabilities and how it really saved them money." Melissa said it appeared the Project SEARCH program "could find a workplace for everybody it appeared" and "made them (the young adults) successful". She felt the program had people with disabilities "who were contributing to the whole operation of the hospital." When referring to the employees with disabilities Melissa said, "some of them have been there for years and years. That's what impressed me." She said people with disabilities were performing well in a variety of jobs. It had created a diverse employment site.

When I interviewed Lindsey regarding the service agency involvement with Project SEARCH DRH, she explained their agency provides "financial support for participation". The service agencies involvement in the program is to "provide the adult service component so that would be coaching as well as job development and job coaching after they obtain a job". When I asked Lindsey what job development means, she stated "job development is utilizing a staff member to facilitate looking for a position with the intern once they are ready. It would include filling out applications, meeting with business and all of the other regular activities involved in job hunting." In regard to

involvement in funding, she stated the service agency receives “funding from VR and our local county board to be able to provide job coaches.”

Amy, Director of Special Services at Florence School District, stated the district “didn’t have a program or access to a program that we felt appropriately prepared students for work.” The district was approached by the service agency and Senate Bill 40 Board representatives to start the first Project SEARCH site in Missouri. Amy stated, we knew it was a need for our school district. The factors which initially drove our agency to get involved were simply we thought students needed more access and more training in work and more people with developmental disabilities in Harris County were employable if they had that training.

One of Jergen School District’s Special Education Program Coordinator’s, Katee, stated they participate “to further expand programming for 18-21 year olds. What we were looking for is more of a real life option for them.” Jergen School District was looking to “simulate real life and Project SEARCH seemed to really fit that need so we are very excited for it.” Katee stated her district offered their own transition program for students with disabilities who are graduating through their IEP goals. The goals of the program are similar to Project SEARCH with several major differences. The Jergen School District’s program was a two year program, and Project SEARCH only lasted a year. The location of their transition program was on the Community College campus and Project SEARCH’s host site was a hospital which offers different types of internships. Finally, Jergen School District offered transportation for the young adults and Project SEARCH did not.

Raleigh School District's Transition Program Coordinator, Ana, said their district participated because it wanted "to provide resources and an avenue for our kids to transition" into the workforce. Raleigh School District's transition programming has been changing over the last several years. Ana stated they currently have a "tiered level program in school". When the IEP team of a student deems it necessary, a freshman or sophomore student may participate in job skill training activities at the school such as learning inventory skills, operate the dishwashing machine, recycle program or make cookies. The two high schools in Raleigh School District have different job skill training activities for each building. The student's senior year, he or she may "work out in the community for two hours a day" at retail or grocery stores or at a local hospital. Amber, Raleigh Special Education Director stated, "initially, there was a lot of planning, problem solving and planning. Once the program was in place, there was a lot of talk about individual students." They discussed which students would be appropriate for the program currently and in the coming years.

All public school districts in Harris County were asked to participate in the Project SEARCH community partnership program by encouraging their eligible students to apply. There are a total of five districts in the county and four participate in Project SEARCH DRH. One district that actively sent a young adult to the program during the time of this study did not participate in the research interviews. The district did not provide reason for the lack of participation.

DRH is the host business site. The hospital provides two business liaisons, a classroom space, and internships in various departments. Sara is the Manager of Professional Practice and Leadership Development and one of the business liaisons.

When I inquired why the hospital chose to participate, she stated, “because it’s an awesome opportunity to provide to young adults and give them a chance to grow and develop.” Sara stated, in response to a question for reservations held regarding being the host site, she needed to look at it “from a capacity standpoint” and ensure

we were not going to overwhelm the employees by giving them additional work load responsibilities. When in fact, that was a concern to keep in the forefront; however, it was not a problem. It was just a concern to be aware of and ensure that I accommodated for.

Funding

The Project SEARCH at DRH uses braided funding for the program. Agencies contributing to the funding are the participating school districts for each student they send, Senate Bill 40 Board, and VR. “Our agency is the fiscal agent for the schools. I guess I would note here the school districts are the primary funder,” Florence’s Special Education Director Amy stated. Amy went on to state “we are the smallest district in the county”. All other districts willing to participate in the program declined to be the fiscal agent. The fiscal agent collects funds from the participating agencies for the cost of the students that attend the Project SEARCH program. Amy said Florence School District Superintendent, agreed to assume the fiscal agent role. “Our superintendent allowed us to step up to the plate and assume that role as fiscal agent.”

I inquired how funding works for each agency. Amy said “it’s interesting because Florence School District, of all of the agencies involved, is the only agency that has a financial commitment on the line that is not attached to individual students.” The financial commitment is the cost of the instructor of the program as well as one

employment advisor along with maintenance costs. When interviewing Amber, the Raleigh Special Education Director, she stated, “We are billed per student. The more students that participate in the program the less expensive it is to participate per student. For however many students that we send, we are billed by Florence.” John, Director of Alternative Learning at Jergen School District, stated, “it is pretty straight forward because it is just a tuition payment. We get a bill, we pay it, and the bill is very reasonable because it is kind of a co-op type setting.” He went on to say, “one of the expectations is that the parents provide transportation which is unique and also lifts a burden off of the district. Even if the district provided transportation and we would have to send a bus or a cab, it would still be worth it. It is a bargain for the service we are getting.”

According to a VR counselor in the Harris County area, “VR funds Project SEARCH DRH participants through Supported Employment Services. These services may include funding for a supported employment assessment, task analysis and job development.” The Senate Bill 40 Board explained they contribute funding for “a part of a job coach and the administrative over site for the lead service provider”. Currently, the Senate Bill 40 Board has a yearly application because Project SEARCH DRH was still a pilot project at the time of this writing. This means the program was not in ongoing Senate Bill 40 Board funding. A representative of the Senate Bill 40 Board states “usually a project has to meet its targets for at least two years in order for it to go into ongoing funding.” At this point, the Project SEARCH DRH site has not met project targets.

Structure

Project SEARCH at DRH has an Executive Board meeting at least four times per year to discuss a variety of topics regarding Project SEARCH according to Amy. The Executive Board Meeting, on October 3, 2011 discussed things such as their Memorandum of Understanding between partners and the various committee reports. The Executive Board is made up of at least one individual from each partner as well as parents of interns who have participated in Project SEARCH, and an individual from another community business. Project SEARCH DRH created different committees to assist with the functioning and system of the program. The committees include the Selection/Application Committee, Business Council/Job Development, Marketing/Communication, IEP Compliance, Follow-Along/Retention Services, and the Core Team. Each committee had a charter stating the committee mission, critical tasks, committee members, roles, responsibilities, meeting, communicating, decision making process, expectations and conflict resolution, and deliverables.

During the interview process, the structure of Project SEARCH was discussed by John. He stated,

I think it is messy. I think for one classroom, essentially three staff, there is a lot of oversight. I get the need for the outside agencies. I think that adds a layer of complexity. When you have these other agencies with other missions, it gets a little confusing. It is a little much sometimes. When you have a hosting site and their need for publicity and their need to show this is what we are doing. Schools are a little more introvert. It is interesting but it is very complicated.

Schedule and Curriculum

In order to obtain information about the Project SEARCH DRH site schedule and curriculum, I interviewed the Project SEARCH Instructor, Ellen, and used my observations to cross reference her statements. I learned Project SEARCH DRH has the students follow the Florence School District school schedule. The first few weeks of the school year, the students are in the classroom all day receiving specialized instruction. It was during this time the interns decided the classroom should be called a training lab.

Ellen stated,

During the first three weeks, we do the career plan. We are working on employability skills, self-advocacy skills, answering the phone, calling in sick and getting to know their managers. I created a matching activity with a picture of the manager and their name to match with the department.

I wanted to know what skills were being taught during time the interns were in the training lab. When I inquired about curriculum used in Project SEARCH Ellen stated, “there are very limited academic goals; it is very functional.” The curriculum focuses on self-advocacy skills and independent living skills which the school curriculum does not cover in depth. “The curriculum I have directly targets competitive employment, getting a job and keeping a job. In school, you never hit those skills because there is a focus on grade level expectations. None of that is real life,” she stated. “The school curriculum is structured to meet the state guidelines for test scores. Project SEARCH is not concerned about test scores. It is about being able to be successful in life.”

During the 2011-2012 school year, I completed observations during training lab instruction times. Due to the fact that more time is spent in the training lab during the

beginning of the school year, I observed more often during the month of August than in the months following. In August, Ellen had a different student serve as team leader each day. The team leader would go through the day's agenda with the other interns and lead the creed at the end of the day. The creed consists of the same motivational statements read aloud by the interns every day at the end of the day. Ellen said she learned about this creed from a Project SEARCH conference hosted in Miami. At the annual Project SEARCH national conferences, various Project SEARCH sites share information, curriculum, ideas and best practices with the group so these things can be used and perhaps improved through collaboration.

The first few weeks of Project SEARCH, I observed the students learning responsibility skills through the process of signing in and out each day. If they did not possess the skills already, the students learned to use internet and e-mail appropriately. They also collected tasks from other departments within the hospital to assist with gaining job skills such as rolling silverware, data entry, and sorting files by alphabetizing, etc. There were training lab binders that have items such as job-related vocabulary word searches. The ability to match numbers and letters is a job skill needed for various rotations around the hospital. Interns used a computer typing program in order to improve their typing skills. During the first few weeks, employment advisors and the instructor set up times to visit the various departments with internships available. The head of each department showed the interns the job skills needed and the duties expected. While the interns went on these tours, one of the interns recorded the demonstration on video so they were able to go back and review the information as needed in order to make their decision on which internships they would like to pursue. An interview with the

department head was the next step. During the last half of their day, they discussed health and wellness as well as went for a short walk around a trail on the hospital grounds. They continued to work on computer skills by going through different career exploration sites and then end their day with reflections and the creed.

After three weeks in the training lab, the first intern with promise of independence and appropriate social skills began the internship first rotation. Students' start dates are staggered as they start their internships throughout the hospital over the next several weeks. The start dates are staggered as they seem able to perform job tasks and communicate effectively and appropriately with staff. The Project SEARCH staff makes the determination of who goes out and when. The staggering occurs on different days. "We usually try to have our first intern go out about three weeks into the school year," Ellen said. As I went back to observe in September, different skills were introduced to the interns who were not yet placed in their internships such as identified survival signs, learned how to find a job, practiced how to improve people skills, learned how to professionally answer business phone calls and take messages, and learned differences in unprofessionalism vs. professionalism. They also continued to work on effective communication and self-advocacy, time-management techniques, problem solving skills, work-relationship building, and development of realistic career goals.

After all interns are placed in their first rotation internships, the schedule changes during the day. Ellen said, "Typically, they are in the training lab for an hour in the morning. During this time we are doing some typing, alphabetizing, sorting, checking email, working on interviewing skills and job tasks from the departments that have internships." Ellen created a checklist of things for the students to work on so they can

do the tasks independently. She made binders for interns to help practice sorting by months and alphabetizing. Computer software is also available for the interns to hone their money skills. While observing during the months of October through May, I observed the checklists being used by the interns.

Ellen said the internships are from nine o'clock in the morning to two o'clock in the afternoon. "They eat at the times that their departments eat lunch. When they come back, we do reflections about their day. If there are any concerns or problems, we troubleshoot on those and reflect. We talk about how they can start fresh the next day. Each day is a brand new day." In order to have continued communication with the parents, the students email their parents daily on what they accomplished during that day. When I observed the interns returning to the training lab from their internships, they stated the creed aloud together before signing out to leave.

According to Ellen, there are 12 departments with internships available. Some of those departments have two internship positions available. Overall, there are about 16 different internship positions open for the interns to choose. "Typically, we try to do three rotations of internships," Ellen stated. "That depends on the skill level, conduct level and interpersonal skills." The number of internships a young adult completes may be affected by their ability to transition to new tasks and people. Some interns require more time to obtain certain employability skills. Prior to beginning the internships, VR and the Project SEARCH staff completed Career Plans and interest inventories to determine in what types of jobs the interns may be interested. There is an opportunity for young adults to tour and shadow internship openings in various departments of the hospital. Ellen said, "We have the interns decide on which areas they are interested. If

their skill set does not match their area of interest, we give them some suggestions of other areas”.

Ellen stated that during the school year, the interns participate in a talent fair which involves various employers in the community. The employers come and the interns orchestrate three interviews with the employers. The employers then provide feedback to the interns on their interview skills. She said the interns also present at different community functions such as Rotary Club meetings. The interns assist in making Power Point slides based on their internships and skills learned and then present it to the audience. Finally, the interns also go on community outings to tour potential employers’ businesses. On the tour they learn about the business’s human resource process, how to apply, and learn what types of skill sets the business is currently seeking. Ellen added that a challenge for the interns is the businesses that have moved to online applications. Additionally, there are at least four times throughout the year that the parents participate in a conference with Project SEARCH staff, their young adult, VR, and Life Skills to discuss skills obtained by the intern and skills that need to be improved. There is also opportunity to discuss benefits planning with an outside agency. Benefits planning allows for the family to prepare for any Social Security Administration or other public programs that provide benefits to individuals with significant disabilities. There can be discussion at that time regarding work incentive programs.

Employability Skills

The employment advisors and the instructor of Project SEARCH provide information obtained through interviews regarding employability skills. Each month while in the program, each intern and his or her family received a monthly report that

included the rotation in which the intern is participating, strengths, areas of opportunity, internship evaluation information, calendar of events, and specific tasks and skills they have been working on over the last month. The Project SEARCH instructor also collected data on each student throughout the year for the quarterly reports for IEP goal progress. The data collected is mainly task analysis reports from the employment advisors. The VR counselor is involved during the first couple of months by completing career framework conferences with each intern to discuss his or her disabilities, strengths, interests, areas of opportunity and what the student can do to secure and retain a job. The Project SEARCH instructor also kept information on how interns are doing with areas of curriculum. The employment advisors documented on an assessment report what skills the interns mastered, and evaluated their performance-assessing them as either making adequate progress, making limited progress, not making progress, or that the objective was not addressed. For this report, there was a pre-assessment that is completed again after each internship rotation. Areas within the curriculum the assessment measured include the following: team building, workplace mobility, workplace safety, technology, social skills/communication, presentation skills, interviewing skills, money management, health and wellness, resume and career passport, job search skills, and job retention.

Employment advisors completed an internship assessment at least three times with each rotation. The internship assessment identified the different assist levels the student required in various areas of the curriculum pre, mid, and post internship. If the intern did not complete a particular objective, required physical prompt, modeling or a direct verbal prompt, the employment advisor created a plan of action in those areas. While interviewing Employment Advisor, Sean, he mentioned sometimes they document

both task completions as well as the length of time required to complete the task. Sean stated he knew when an intern has mastered a task because he or she “does not need help” any longer. Serene, another employment advisor, stated she knows when an intern has mastered a task when “I don’t have to prompt them, not even with a gesture.” Serene loved it “when the intern goes with the flow of the work environment”. She stated she sometimes stayed out of the intern’s line of sight and watched them on the job. She looked for the intern to go to the department head after finishing a task to offer to complete another task.

When I interviewed Ellen, I asked how the team prepared the interns for interviews. For each of the internships, the interns requested an interview from the department in which they wished to work. Interns then went through the steps necessary to schedule an interview. The interns practiced their interview skills in the training lab prior to the interview with the head of the department. Ellen said, “we set up mock questions and practice those. We put together their resumes and portfolios. We do a lot of mock interviews and use the video modeling technique. We critique each other.” She told me after each of the internships, the interns completed an exit interview and department managers provided a letter of reference to the interns. In addition, the interns updated their resume and also sent thank you notes after each interview with the department in which they applied.

Employment Advisors

When interviewing employment advisors, I was able to learn more about the role they play in how Project SEARCH DRH works. Sean stated interns are trained by the department heads or mentors and then the employment advisors follow through with the

training so accommodations can be made depending on the intern's ability or learning style. "My job is to make sure the training is suited to each individual," he said. Serene, the other employment advisor, stated she requests the job description prior to placing an intern in a position. She requests an appointment with the department manager to discuss the job description so she can go into detail when discussing expectations to the intern applicant. Serene said she likes the mentor, also known as natural supports, to initially model the intern's specific job tasks. "I think it is better because that person knows and has been working a long time in that job," she stated. Serene stays and observes the mentor while teaching the intern so she is better able assist in any needed accommodations. She stated she ensures the intern is corrected immediately if he or she is not completing a task appropriately. Both employment specialists stated they go to the instructor when they need additional suggestions on how to best support interns. The instructor and employment advisors communicate about pertinent information regarding problematic behaviors or activities which have occurred. Serene stated the instructor also assists with communicating information to make generalizations during the instruction time to help problem solve or correct behaviors.

When I inquired about the process employment advisors use to complete task analysis for each intern, Serene explained there are different levels of support. On the first day for the task analysis, she wrote a lot of "m's" next to the task. The "m" stands for modeling. On the second day of the internship, she hopes the intern will move from having the task to be modeled to being able to do the task through verbal prompting. By the third day, she is providing indirect verbal prompts such as saying "what comes next?"

Application and Selection

Project SEARCH interns are recruited mainly by the school districts and each district recruits potential interns differently. Typically, the schools offer the program to any student identified as benefitting from an additional year of high school in order to be appropriately prepared for a post-high school placement. The IEP case manager proposes it to the family and has the family apply to the Project SEARCH program. The selection committee for Project SEARCH then accepts or denies the young adult's application based on whether or not he or she fits the Project SEARCH criteria. If the young adult is accepted, the IEP team meets and determines if the young adult requires the program or another option prior to leaving high school.

In order to be eligible and accepted into the Project SEARCH DRH program, a student must fall into a certain score range agreed upon on the rubric, be qualified for services through VR and qualify for services through the Department of Mental Health (DMH). The selection rubric is comprised of criteria on a five point scale in the areas of age and school status, commitment to community employment, attendance, independent daily living and self-care skills, appearance and professional presentation, appropriate social and behavioral skills, and interpersonal communication. An employment advisor goes to the home district and observes the young adult in his or her current programming. Ellen stated during the interview,

I think the observations give us a better picture than even the school districts saying oh this is a good candidate and even the selection process, you are looking at paper. The observation really allows you to choose students who are more appropriate for the program.

The Project SEARCH staff also interviews the young adult prior to entering the program. The IEP team of the student's homeschool must then agree to allow the young adult to participate in the program. Although the Project SEARCH participants will walk across the graduation stage with their class, they will not receive their diploma until after they exit the Project SEARCH program.

I asked John how his district decides which students are appropriate for the program, he stated, "we have Work Experience Coordinator's in every building and a transition Coordinator, so I think we know who the kids are that will be appropriate for the program." We discussed how different agencies and districts may have a different idea of candidate's appropriateness for the program. He said, "I think there is a benefit to a difference of who we think is an appropriate candidate for the program and who the program thinks is appropriate for the program." He would like to see Project SEARCH as an option for young adults during their senior year (fourth year) in high school. We discussed a similar program Jergen has within its own district. The Jergen transition program takes place on a college campus site. That site is for young adults who are "typically not prepared for any kind of employment opportunities" per John. Regarding Project SEARCH DRH, he said that they are sending more independent students, "we are looking at it as a fifth year and hopefully, in the future, a fourth year capstone class for our more independent students."

Lindsey stated after the 2011-2012 school year was over that the DRH site has had challenges with student selection. Some of the students who have participated in the program were not a good fit with the ultimate goal of the project. The students she is referring to either quit the program during the school year or were not competitively

employed six months after the completion of the program. In order to have more appropriate applicants, their program has added interviews along with observations to the selection process. She adds that is important that the young adults have a desire to work.

Host Site Preparation

In order to determine how the host site prepared for interns and interns and vice versa, I interviewed the Project SEARCH DRH instructor and the business liaison. When I asked Sara, the business site liaison, if the hospital provided any disability awareness training prior to the interns starting in the facility, she stated “We didn’t initially but we did after some feedback.” She stated, “I was finding that our employees and our managers were not holding the interns accountable enough. They were letting them get by with certain behaviors that would not be acceptable in a normal work environment.” She went on to say, “they looked past things because of them being in a learning setting, being young adults and because of having a disability”. Sara stated the hospital employees had to learn they were not helping the interns by lowering expectations.

Sara said “if anyone has been uncomfortable with interns because of a disability, I have not heard about it.” She provided an example of some frustration among staff in the 2011-2012 school year. The employee “was giving the intern direction and she did not see the intern taking the immediate redirection. There was what she perceived as some stubborn and rebellion behavior.” In reality, Sara said the employee “needed a better understanding of the disability.” Sara stated the employee was already frustrated and realized he or she could have asked for assistance in handling this situation.

Once we were able to bring in some additional tools with the help of Ellen and the employment advisors, we were able to resolve the situation. The employee

thought she understood the disability and wanted to be a part of being a mentor for the intern.

The employee ultimately realized she was informed in some characteristics but there were still things she did not know about that particular disability. Sara said, “instead of reaching out for help early, she tried handling it on her own.”

Sara also stated that the hospital has seen leaders emerge within the staff due to their hosting Project SEARCH. “There has been remarkable employee engagement and development.” She states her “aha moment” is the soft skills that occur with the young adults due to consistent professional interaction with adults. She said she feels the hospital is a good host site due to being connected to the community. It is a supportive, nurturing culture with diversity.

I asked Ellen, the Project SEARCH DRH Instructor, how she prepared interns for the host business site. She told me interns do” job shadowing and go around meeting and introducing themselves to the different departments. When we do the job shadowing, we find out whose personality would fit with a certain department.” The managers typically are the ones interns shadow and video so the manager can discuss expectations for skills and communicate with whom they will be working. Ellen said the interns discover things such as “some departments are laid back, some are very structured and some you cannot talk too loud.” Interns also complete a modified orientation of what all DRH staff complete. Interns learn about things during the orientation such as infection control, safety procedures, and confidentiality. Orientation is modified because the interns do not need information on things such as benefits. Interns also must complete standard procedures of all employees of the business. Prior to beginning the Project SEARCH

DRH, the interns must receive appropriate immunizations, pass a drug screening and pass a background check.

Uniqueness

While in the training lab, the interns learn various skills. In the interview with Ellen she stated, “I prepare them more for everyday living. I prepare them for things to expect in society beyond the four walls of the school.” She went on to say the curriculum she uses to instruct the interns,

focuses a lot on self-advocacy skills and independent living skills. The curriculum is different; the whole mindset is different as a Project SEARCH instructor because I no longer focus on what they need for test scores. My goals are more for long-term living and life.

Amber, from Raleigh stated during her interview the program they offer at their trade school does not include students working in the community. Raleigh teachers are not collecting data on outcomes of those students. “Actually being in the work setting and the training lab sets a different expectation. I think that is so huge. School behavior is one thing but work behavior is something totally different.” From her perspective, it makes a positive difference. In other programs throughout the county, young adults are “going to pretend to work and it does not feel real like it does to the students of Project SEARCH.” The Director of Alternative Learning at Jergen School District, John, stated,

I do not think the program is unique. Jergen has a very similar program. I think it is unique in that people do not go out and try to take those risks very often. Schools do not go out and try to build relationships with hosting sites especially larger organizations such as the hospitals. I think it unique in that sense but I

think it is the trend that is going to be continuing. Every district is going to have some type of more elaborate transition program for kids, especially, the kids that have more cognitive delays. The expectation is going to grow in the area of transition for educators.

When I interviewed the service agency employee, Lindsey, she stated,

I think it is a best practice. I think it is one of the best programs in the country based on the fact it has been replicated in over 150 places. They obviously understand how to bring together many different entities and make the focus be on the business needs.

Lindsey also said she feels the school system is so focused on academics the schools do not focus

on the skills needed to obtain and retain a job. Young people graduate from high school without the basic skills to land them a job and those individuals are not necessarily qualified to attend college or a technical school. It leaves them in a really tough spot.

Ellen, the Project SEARCH Instructor, stated the program is unique in that it is business like. The young adults were in an adult social environment. There were team-building activities within the curriculum. The dress code also played a factor in that it is professional. Every day the interns must have dressed appropriately for the departments that they work. There was hospital staff support and they assist with correction of the interns behaviors. The managers and supervisors of the interns departments were the ones that correct the interns when they do something inappropriate or when the skills are not up to par just as they would any other employee.

Collaboration

While completing interviews, I inquired about experience in the collaborative process. I wanted to know what challenges were faced and how the agencies worked together. Lindsey from the service agency stated it has been difficult.

I believe it has to do with power struggles. Having a number of decision makers in the room who are used to being able to decide how things go and flow and not being able to share that power and responsibility is difficult for them.

Lindsey is speaking from the perspective of someone Executive Board co-chair as well as committee member of Project SEARCH DRH Business Council.

Participating school district employees also discussed the collaborative efforts. Katee, from Jergen felt the collaboration has been good. “With any new program, you have your bumps in the road. I think like a first time for everything, you have to work through those first time issues.” When asked what aspect of the collaboration has been most difficult, she stated getting to the same level of collaboration that they currently have for their own district’s transition program. “I think it’s just like any program you just have your first year bumps in the road but it is working, it is a new program and we are tweaking along the way.” John, the Director of Alternative Learning at Jergen, stated, “I am pretty easy going but it is pretty frustrating at times.” He said, “I think people have their own personal agendas. It seems like there is a level of trust that does not really exist in the group at times. I think there are agendas that are not put out on the table.” He said there are “folks who, I think, philosophically think this is their program.” Some individuals have their own agenda of seeing the program go a certain way. He mentioned this can be frustrating because he felt it stifles the operation and takes up a lot of time.

John said, “if we talk about the program, we should be worrying about the kids, the staff and the host site. We seem to be worrying about us a little bit more at times.”

When I asked Ana from Raleigh School about her experience with the collaboration process, at first, she focused on the collaboration aspect from within her school district. “As a coordinator I tell everybody about Project SEARCH. I present all of the materials. I extend an invitation to the open house and the tours. I am trying to raise awareness of the program itself.” In doing so, she is encouraging the case managers of those students who may be appropriate for the program to refine the curriculum and goals so it is a smooth transition into the Project SEARCH DRH program. In regard to collaboration between agencies, Ana stated, “there are good and bad points. If I encounter it I move past it and it makes me align myself with those that are more receptive and encouraging.”

From the perspective of a Senate Bill 40 Board case manager, Heidi, the collaboration between Senate Bill 40 Board, her client, and Project SEARCH DRH has been great. Heidi feels like the Project SEARCH Instructor, Ellen, keeps her updated about meetings and keeps the families involved. She said, “I was involved with two of the families before they ever got involved with this program.” She knew the parents of those families considering the program and she supported their applications. It has been a perfect fit for one of her clients yet not for the other one. She said, “I based my encouragement on feedback from the school. I do not know if they really knew all of his limitations or his abilities and how his limitations did or didn’t meet this program.”

Emily, from the Senate Bill 40 Board, stated she feels the process has been difficult. “I think a part of it is that we have different disciplines coming together that do

not quite understand each other.” She said each agency has its own requirements and its unique way of operating. “So although you can say schools operate one way, each one of those four school districts operate differently, have different guiding principles or different ways of implementation.” She said although the service agency is not bringing financial resources to the table, they have to implement the program and collaborate with all agencies involved. We also have the business host site and its expectations. Emily said although different entities are paying different amounts,

everybody has to be held accountable for all of those disciplines to work. I do not know we ever really had buy in from everybody. Everybody agreed to it and said they wanted to do it but I do not think they all take ownership. I feel like I take huge ownership in the program working. Although it’s not my money, I feel like I have a financial stake in it but I don’t know that everybody else does. There is a lack of commitment and agreement on outcomes.

The business liaison for DRH, Sara, said from her perspective, “it has been eye opening for me coming from healthcare and business. I felt like I had to learn what the norms were in special education and in VR and things like that.” Her background is in nursing and case management. “I know that term is used in education a little bit but it is dealing more with disease processes from an acute setting in a hospital and then helping to manage that disease process after the hospitalization.” She said some of the same terminology used in the hospital has a very different meaning in the education world. “Having to understand what that means in education was a little bit of a learning curve for me and then still understanding all of the different funding streams and how they came to be.” She felt at times she was spending a lot of time during meetings trying to

understand the language used by other agencies so she kept trying to catch-up in conversations. “I was not able to hit the ground running like everybody else because I was still learning the terminology. But everybody is very collaborative and I think everybody has the same goal. We need to implement it as a team.”

The Project SEARCH DRH Instructor, Ellen, stated the collaboration is “challenging but necessary”. She said collaboration is challenging because “everyone has their own way of doing things. Trying to pull everyone together to come to one united front is probably the most challenging thing that I have seen.” She said there are different challenges as the program is only in its second year. “I feel that the first year, we had to pull it all together and get the program running. The second year, we had a better understanding of each partner’s responsibility, what they do, and how they fit into this collaboration.” She said she looks forward to next year because she believes there is more structure, organization, and everyone has a better understanding of their role. “We have those that understand that from the school district perspective, they have to understand the business part of it and the business part has to understand the school.” Another challenge she pointed out from her perspective is each agency has certain guidelines each must follow. “I think now everybody is really starting to learn about and understand each other’s agency. I think we are working out some of those kinks. People really want this program to be successful.” She went on to say, “I think that if everyone keeps that in the forefront of their minds, then the challenging part of it becomes a little bit easier. I know everybody in this partnership wants this program to be successful.”

Amy, Director of Special Services at Florence School District, said the collaboration and partnership is very difficult. “I think it is more difficult with some

partners than with others. Everybody is coming from a different point of view. Everyone is coming from a different level of commitment.” Amy said, “I have tried very hard to work and honor the different points of view of other partners but sometimes it is really hard to do because my opinion is they do not have the same financial liability hanging out there.” She feels Florence School District has a financial liability as well as a commitment to students for whom they provide this program. “When I look at the students who are coming up through our system, I very much want to be able to offer this program for students who are currently in elementary school and up.” She said the goal is to have as many of their students competitively employed as possible. “In order for it to be successful for our students, we need to partner with other agencies in the county to make it work and that collaboration is hard.” Amy provided an example using VR funding. “VR has a different approach to funding than we do. In the state of Missouri, VR has the authority to provide funds or not provide funds based on standards I don’t understand and have not been able to find out.” To Amy, the standard appears to be subjective. She stated when she has asked for the VR eligibility criteria, she has been told it is complicated. “I don’t understand how they make their decisions, it makes it appear subjective and I’m sure it is not. That makes it hard because I know they are looking at it through this lens.” She said even the school districts involved see things from different lenses. “When you have another school district with difficult financial problems or they’re dealing with more rapid growth than we are, they too are looking at things through a different lens.” From her perspective, “one of the hardest parts about collaboration is to find a lens we can all look through and all be on the same page. That is really difficult because we are really not all in the same place.”

Emily from the Senate Bill 40 Board described her experience in the collaboration process with all of the partners as a learning experience. "I think it's been great and I have high hopes this program will continue," she said. She expressed it is difficult to find businesses which feel employees with disabilities can be valuable additions to their companies. She wishes businesses would see people with disabilities as contributing members to their business. The hospital is a "proud spokesman statewide and locally. They see the value it has brought to their company. To have that voice is incredible." Emily said the business host site is wonderful to work with. She too feels she has learned more about the other agencies involved such as the schools yet still has more to learn. Partner collaboration helped develop a better understanding of how schools operate as well as build better understandings between partners. In regard to young adults and their families she stated, "these people leave school and come to the adult world and try to get those disciplines to work together so everyone knows what is going on. It is a big task."

Goals and Outcomes

The Project SEARCH definition of a successful outcome is to be competitively employed six months after the completion of the program. The previous intern must be working 20 or more hours a week and be making at least minimum wage. According to the service agency, during the first year (2010-2011) at the DRH site, 60% of the participants were competitively employed. From the 2011-2012 graduates, two out of six have jobs that meet the Project SEARCH criteria.

The Senate Bill 40 Board has specific targets they were trying to meet for the Project SEARCH DRH program. The performance target was not met at the time of this writing was 83% of participating young adults being competitively employed by June 30,

2011 (Grainger, 2011). When I asked Emily about her interpretation of why targets are not being met, she stated she thought it had to do with the economy and the level of commitment of partners. “The economy is one factor. The other factor is I think we do not have 100% commitment from all schools to send people.” The partners involved expected to have 12 students, and the program has yet to be able to achieve that goal. Although she perceived it as positive, another factor affecting outcomes was the appropriateness of program participants. “I think some of the students who we have had may not be able to be competitively employed. I think part of the program is a discovery process you should allow some of the people into the program that you are just not sure about.” She felt with adequate amount of training, the young adult with developmental disabilities may be able to be competitively employed. “If they do not ever get that opportunity, we will never know. I like it that we take on people we are not one-hundred percent sure even though it impacts your outcome of people getting a job.” She stated the program provides opportunities of employment for these individuals who otherwise would not have been available. “If they would have just gone to VR to get a job in the community, they would have never been approved. With this support, they develop the skills to work in the community.”

An important piece of the collaborative process is reaching consensus on definitions of outcomes. In an interview with VR, Melissa stated, our definition of outcome means the person is competitively employed in the community making at least minimum wage per hour, working in a job where the company is paying them to work there and they maintain their employment at least ninety days.

In other circumstances, VR is able to hire the agency that would provide services to their clients for supported employment based on the family's preference. In the case of Project SEARCH DRH, the service agency holding the license for providing the supported employment services will be provided funding by VR. The service agency holding the license has the families of the interns sign a contract stating that during the duration of the program, the family will use as their provider of services. Once the program is complete or the intern has exited, that young adult may then choose another provider if they prefer.

At the Executive Board meeting held in May 2012, members discussed their disagreement on a successful outcome for participants of the program. VR's definition is different than the other agencies within the collaboration. Each agency has the same goal of competitive employment for participants. However, each agency's definition of outcome is slightly different from international Project SEARCH.

Lindsey with the service agency stated that the Executive Board will have annual reports in the future with the Project SEARCH outcomes. The report will also include outcomes as expected by the goals of each agency. She added that there will also be questionnaires created for each agency involved including hospital management in order to improve the program moving forward and ensure everyone's needs are being met. She added that a challenge in seeking competitive employment for the interns is that the Harris County area is smaller and the turn-over is not high.

Amy, co-chair of the Executive Board and Director of Special Services for Florence School District, stated her personal desired outcome is interns exiting the program with jobs they desire. She went on to point out this is where the different

agencies see outcomes through a different lens. Amy gave the example of a young adult who finished the program and got a job meeting the Project SEARCH definition of an outcome. This former intern was hired in a position she desired in a daycare setting. “This is an example of the different lenses. In my opinion, Project SEARCH was a success for her. She was an outcome because she finished the program, got a job and is still working in that position.” Amy went on to explain, “from the point of view of VR, she is not an outcome because she was not placed by Life Skills and she is being paid through a workforce development grant...” From Amy’s perspective as an administrator,

I do not care who placed her there. I do not care who got her the job. I do not care who is paying her. What I care is that she is working in the field that she wanted to work. She is going to work every day, five days per week and collecting a paycheck. To me, from a school administrator point of view, that is an outcome but from a VR point of view, that is not an outcome. So, that is again looking at things through different lenses.

Amy explained the program goes beyond being employed. “People need to feel they are doing something important with their lives. They need to have some place to get up and go to every day.” She also stated individuals thought to be appropriate for day habilitation or sheltered employment sites may be able to be competitively employed. “It is very rewarding to be involved in something that is having that kind of outcome for people with disabilities. It is very frustrating to work with people who are coming from completely different positions and directions.” Diverse backgrounds, viewpoints, and funding sources make it difficult to collaborate and achieve the desired outcome for all perspectives. “It is difficult to try to get all of those people to come together. There has

been an immense amount of frustration but the rewards are worth it.” Amber, from Raleigh School District, stated the desired outcome is for businesses to start to realize hiring people with developmental disabilities is “helping the morale of people currently employed or the actual production”. John, Director of Alternative Learning at Jergen School District stated,

I think it does a good job of preparing the kids, I really do. It is the icing on the cake. My only worry is that we are not actually seeing those kids become employed. They are definitely ready, they are more independent, and they are still not fit into a worksite environment in long term situations.

When considering options for more young adults with disabilities obtaining competitive employment, John said, “it takes a lot of work from outside agencies and the staff in the program. Maybe the program has not been there long enough and the contacts do not exist.” Ultimately, he feels “the agencies do not work as seamlessly as they could and so we do not have constant recruiting going on. I think it will take time.”

I asked an individual at VR to discuss why she felt outcomes for Project SEARCH DRH were not being met. In her perspective, it is due mainly to the provider’s lack of creativity.

We have great success with other agencies. The agency that is providing the services to the Project SEARCH DRH program does not have the level of expertise we have seen. We are talking about people with pretty significant disabilities gaining high level of skills, quality skills and trying to find employment for them in the community. It is a major issue that they have never

issued that type of ability in the services that they provide to us before Project SEARCH came along. Obviously, they can't do it now.

She added lack of public transportation is another thing that may be impacting the participation or employment of the young adults.

In interviewing DRH, Sara provided her opinion on why the hospital has yet to hire any of the interns although they have participated as host site since it started in August of 2010.

I think because of the way healthcare is right now, we are not hiring. Number one, we do not have the turn-over we had before. I think because of the economy, people who have a job are staying in their job longer. I think we would love to have hired some of our interns because we get attached to them and we do not want them to leave. We think they would be a good fit. The desire is there. It is not related to not wanting to have a disabled worker, which is not it at all. I think it is just that those positions are not available. The positions that are available are not in the same type of role that the intern has been trained.

Young Adult Perspectives

In order to gain student perspectives, I interviewed the interns at the beginning of the Project SEARCH 2011-2012 school year and again at the end. One intern, Marie, stated prior to Project SEARCH DRH she had not had any interviews but had participated in a summer work program. She said by the end of the Project SEARCH program, she had completed at least six job interviews. Before she began her internships she stated some job skills she already possessed were office type work. She specifically mentioned data entry, filing, and spreadsheets. During her post interview, she learned through the

internships how to make photo copies, collate packets, and operate a typewriter. “It was a shock to me,” the hospital was using a typewriter instead of computers for a particular task, Marie said. During Marie’s pre-Project SEARCH interview, she mentioned she was most interested in Health Information Management within the hospital.

After her internships, she stated she would like to find a position doing clerical work. Before the internships, she said she felt basic computer skills were skills she already possessed, and she needed further support and training in various computer software programs. Marie said she requires support, “staying on task a little bit. It is easy to get distracted and I need to get back on task.” At the end of the internships she said, “I was finishing tasks on time and asking questions when I need to. Like if I didn’t understand questions when they are trying to explain what they want me to do.” Marie said her responsibilities at home are largely unchanged. She did say she feels better about herself since participating. “Yes, I feel more confident because I have learned more clerical skills that can help me get a job. I want to get a job and maintain it.” Marie said program instructors taught her interviewing skills and how to dress for an interview. She said she liked being in the hospital work environment. “It’s more active and we get to help the departments. We are more independent and at school, teachers are around to help you. Here you have to advocate for yourself.” Marie emphasized that her learning experience has introduced her to new skills and prepared her for steady employment.

During Daniel’s pre-Project SEARCH interview, he was able to answer some questions with short responses. When I asked if he had ever been in an interview before, he said “yes.” I then asked how many interviews. His response was “five.” He let me know he had yet to be hired but had been able to practice skills at places such as

Schnucks and Target. He also told me he learned skills at those places such as “stocking shelves, cleaning and folding clothes.” When I asked other questions, he did not appear to understand them. I asked him what he expected to learn in Project SEARCH. His response was “science.” He also stated he wanted to learn “history” while in the program. I asked him what kind of job he wanted. He was unintelligible for this answer at the beginning, but mentioned he wanted to work at the movies. He also mentioned he felt he was good at the cash register due to a class at the technical school. When I asked Daniel if there were things he felt he still needed to work on or have assistance with he stated, “money worksheets and counting skills.” At Daniel’s post-Project SEARCH interview he stated he has had about ten interviews all together. He said during his first rotation in the cafeteria, he learned how to stock dishes and wash tables. During his second rotation in central sterile, he learned how to stock the cart and clean the tools. He stated he now wants to work at Schnucks stocking shelves. He said participating in the program has “kind of” given him more confidence. When I asked him what he has learned, he said, “resume, interview questions, and PowerPoint.” He said in conclusion he feels he has done his best.

Chris stated during his pre-Project SEARCH interview he had one interview for a job prior to the Project SEARCH program. He said, “I like working outside but I don’t know if that is a job skill. I like working outside.” As far as what he expected to learn during Project SEARCH at DRH, he stated he wants to learn “how to find a job and what other kinds of things I like to do.” He stated he did not know what kind of job he wanted to do after participating in the program. “I don’t know what it will be. Hopefully get paid.” When I asked him what types of things he feels he does well, he said, “I don’t

know”. He gave the same answer when asked if there are areas in which he felt he needed further support or training.

After his participating in the program, I interviewed him again. When asked the number Chris stated, “I think four for my internships and two for regular jobs.” During our interview, he went on to state he may go on an additional interview at Fed Ex for a position. This time when asked what skills he felt he has he stated, “in grounds and maintenance, I learned how to do good yard work. I also did cafeteria stuff in an internship. The skills I learned there were to work hard and fast.” He went on to state, “the internship I’m in right now, I’m learning how to sort things.” Also during his post-Project SEARCH interview, he said he wanted to get a job “that is easy and pays a lot of money.” When I asked him what things he felt he does well, his answer was no longer “I don’t know.” Chris’s response was, “I do a lot of things well. I sort things well and clean good.” I asked him if he has more self-confidence since participating in the program and he said, “yes, I am working under more stressful situations.” He also mentioned his interviewing skills and ability to speak in front of a group of people have improved. When I asked him what he has learned in Project SEARCH he stated, “I think it’s a good thing for kids who have disorders or couldn’t finish high school like me.” He said, “I’m in this program because I didn’t do good in high school. I got D’s. I got just enough to graduate and went to this program because I couldn’t go to college.”

Jessica stated she had not had any interviews prior to Project SEARCH. She stated although she has yet to have a job, she has done work programs. “I worked some in high school. I worked some in grocery stores like Dierbergs and Schnucks.” She said, “I also worked in restaurants which was kind of fun. I did things like bussing tables.”

When I asked her what skills she feels she has she stated, “we stocked in the aisles and that was kind of fun. I like to make it perfect. I also did some bagging and know how to file.” I asked her what types of skills she hoped to learn by participating in the Project SEARCH program. “I want to learn radiology and how to stay calm and relax. Sometimes I get really scared or nervous.” She said she would like to get a job after Project SEARCH “maybe therapy services, radiology or be in a mail room.” She said she does do some things well already. “I’m really good at calculating numbers. I’m good with technology.”

When I asked Jessica what areas she felt like she needs further support or training, she stated she needs help controlling her emotions. She wants to learn how to not take things personally when an authority figure is addressing the group and waking up in the mornings. During our post-Project SEARCH interview, Jessica reported in addition to entrance and exit interviews for her internships she has had one interview. Her interview was for a position with customer services for a hospital. Post-Project SEARCH she stated she feels she has gained skills. “I advocate for myself because sometimes I might get overwhelmed or frustrated. I learned it’s okay to ask people things and not get frustrated.” She went on to state, “I learned people skills. I did radiology, therapy services and surgical services. I have had therapy my whole life so I know what it’s like to be at the other end.” When I asked her what kind of job she hopes to secure due to participating in the program, she said she is hoping to obtain a job in customer service. She said she still feels like she will need support in some areas. “I will probably need support on how to calm myself down before I get frustrated or shut down. I need to keep my emotions under control while I am working.” I asked her if the expectations at home

have changed. “There is because my mom doesn’t want me to make my own decisions yet. I know I can, I just don’t listen to her all of the time. I know I do some of the time, just not all the time.” Jessica stated she now has a boyfriend but “there is no romance at work.” Jessica added, “I thought the program was good for me and I recommend other people do it too. Project SEARCH changed my whole life. I also learned not to cry at work. There is no crying here.”

During the pre-Project SEARCH interview, Levi said he has done some charity work but never been in an interview for a job before. He mentioned he feels he already has a couple of job skills. “I know I am good with computers and answering the phone.” He said during Project SEARCH he would like to “enhance skills”. Levi said there is a skill he feels he does well. “Probably like basic computer skills.” When I asked him what skills he feels like he needs to work on during his participation in Project SEARCH, he said, “staying on task a little bit. It is easy to get distracted and I need to get back on task.” After participating in the program, he said he had participated in at least three interviews with the departments for the internships. He said he had learned new job skills such as folding, filling the servers, and working the stations. He would like to “have a job where I can have half the hours but have enough money to live off of.” This time when I asked him what things he feels he does well, he said, “I’ve pretty much increased my time of not being late. I’m on time more and learned how to manage my stress.” He said he did not feel the need for further support or training. Since participating in the program, he said expectations really have not changed at home. I asked him if he feels like he has more self-confidence. “I have more confidence but my confidence still drops. It’s 50/50. People were pushing me to do my best.”

During the pre-Project SEARCH interview, John said he had participated in at least one interview but did not know with whom. He said he did not know what specific job skills he currently displays. He said “yeah” when I asked if he knew what skills were. When I asked what he felt like he does well he said, “sit at home.” He said his goal for being in Project SEARCH is to “call an ambulance”. He was unintelligible for a portion of his answer and then concluded by stating, “ambulance come.” He said he did not know what he wants to learn while participating in the program. He said, “yeah” when asked if he was going to learn job skills. I asked, “what type of job do you hope have due to your experience in Project SEARCH?” He stated after Project SEARCH, he would like to get a job driving a big brown truck. I asked him if he has a driver’s license. Levi said, “No, I want to get one.” During his post interview, he stated he had completed at least four interviews. He went on to say the job skills he has learned include: trash, recycling, stocking, and cleaning tables. He gave the same answer he did for his pre-internship interview as far as the job he wants. He said he wants to drive a big truck but still does not have a driver’s license. When I asked him what tasks he felt like he has done well during the internships, he stated trash and help people. Although he stated he does not need help with anything anymore, he does have a mentor and employment advisor who still assists him with remembering tasks on the internship. When I asked him if he felt like he has changed, he said, “yeah.” He also said his confidence has increased. When I asked him what he feels has changed, he said, “typing and email.” He also added he has learned how to dress for an interview by wearing a tie. His instructor added his conversations are less one sided and more on topic. He also has exhibited increased eye contact with others since the start of the program.

Parent Perspectives

Participants' parents were provided a questionnaire prior to their young adult's first day at Project SEARCH DRH and interviewed at the end of the school year. At least one parent of each intern agreed to participate in the interview. Each of the intern's parents interviewed during the Project SEARCH 2011-2012 school year felt the program was beneficial to their son or daughter. Sally stated during the interview process her daughter is now more direct when speaking to others. She also looks others in the eye more often when speaking with them. Sally stated specifically about her daughter,

Watching her sit through the first meeting she was all slumped, not looking at anybody, not responding when someone asked a question. Now, she sits up and her hands are still. She is looking and paying attention to what people are asking. Sally had written in the questionnaire prior to her daughter's participation in the program that the goal for her child, Marie, at the end of the school year was full-time employment with employee benefits and an increase in confidence as well as work skills.

Transportation to and from the program was a concern for her family but Marie was able maintain good attendance and to successfully transfer to and from the program. At the end of the internships, Marie had yet to obtain a competitive job within the community. Six months after exiting the program, Marie was continuing to seek employment.

Otis stated his son's communication skills have grown dramatically. He described a change his son made due to participating in the program. "He came in kind of shy and not able to talk with adults as soon as there was the slightest bit of a conflict. Now, he is willing and able to talk through situations." Otis went on to say his son learned job skills he would have walked away from previously. Otis said the Project

SEARCH DRH program seemed to have the most diverse opportunities to probe his son, Daniel's, interests. Otis's goal for his son at the beginning of the program via the questionnaire was for Daniel to gain employment. Otis wrote, "This program seems to have the most diverse opportunities to figure out his interests. It was the only program left." If he did not have a job, Otis at least wanted him to learn skills of how to find and keep a job in the future. Otis was concerned Daniel would not stay focused and interested during job tasks or he would ultimately not obtain a job. Daniel had not been gainfully employed by the end of the program in May. Six months after exiting the program, Daniel was working 15 hours per week at a local restaurant with supports.

Melanie, a mother of a student with a part-time, 20 hours per week food service job, explained she felt the Project SEARCH program was beneficial for her son because he gained job interviewing skills. She felt having a job coach assist him with interviewing skills and applying for jobs was imperative. Melanie stated she felt the class time to work on resumes and job interview conversational skills as well as the internships themselves gives the interns "valuable experience that can transfer into the workplace". She said other parents ask what her son has been doing since leaving high school. She then explains the program to other parents. "It is very common that the response is why don't they do that for all kids because most of them can use that" when referring to high school students who are not ready to go straight into college. "It would be advantageous to have this program for those not ready for the college environment due to grades or maturity." Melanie feels like the Project SEARCH DRH is unique because it was the only one like it in the state. She explained the program is unique to have several different agencies providing services in one setting. Her son, Chris, was able to learn about

upward mobility, benefits, met potential future co-workers, see the work environment and what his job tasks would be when he went for his interview in food service. Following the food service interview, he did not want to go to the next interview with Fed Ex. Melanie stated they discussed having him go to another interview although he wanted the food service position for the experience. She stated her son “has no filter. If he interviewed, he would say he did not want to work there and accepted a job at McDonalds which is true.” Melanie had written in her questionnaire that they heard about the program through the school and thought it would benefit him because it would showcase his capabilities. Melanie wrote she wanted Chris to expand his knowledge of the work environment and learn resume writing and interviewing skills. She also expected him to become more self-assured and develop better people skills. By the end of the Project SEARCH DRH internships, Chris was competitively employed. The program met Melanie’s expectations for her son based on our interview. Six months after exiting the program, Chris was still employed at a fast food chain and had increased his work hours.

Lisa explained that although her daughter is not leaving Project SEARCH DRH with a job, participation was beneficial for several reasons. “It makes her accountable. She’s more responsible and takes accountability for things she didn’t do right and makes her think about things before she does them.” In Lisa’s questionnaire she wrote her daughter, Jessica, participated in the program in order to become more independent and increase skill levels. Lisa hoped Jessica would learn how to advocate for herself appropriately when she needs help on the job or becomes frustrated. Jessica was not competitively employed by the end of the internships in May. Six months after exiting

the program, Jessica had obtained a job in an assisted living facility working 24 hours per week with supports.

Rich and Katie wrote in their questionnaire of concern for their son, Levi's, health. They wrote that he needed time off if he were to have a seizure. They wrote Project SEARCH DRH was the safest place for him due to his health issues. Their goal for him was to obtain a part-time job. After the internship, Rich and Katie agreed the experience gave their son a "good taste of real world workplace and not just classroom." They said he did not socialize much with the other students in the program. Due to Levi's disability and outlook, he participated in one internship throughout the entire school year. His day at the internship and training lab was reduced during the year due to his disability. He was dismissed from the program at the end due to unacceptable work behaviors. One day before the program was completed, Levi had stolen food from a staff refrigerator. In addition, he repetitively took unauthorized breaks within the department but the behavior had not been previously reported to the instructor or job coach. Due to these behaviors, Levi was exited from the program. Rich and Katie both stated they believed it would have been beneficial to have a day when parents could observe their young adult in an internship as well as more communication between the school and home. They stated that Levi had been vocal about not wanting to be in the Project SEARCH DRH program but they wanted him to have the experience. Six months after exiting the program, Levi was unemployed and not seeking employment.

Ann stated Project SEARCH DRH was beneficial for her son, Will, because it taught him to be more independent. She stated he is better at following directions. The biggest change she noted for her son is his speech and language growth. "His speech is

much better. He can ask and answer questions more verbally. He is more focused and can follow the conversation more closely within the family and with others.” Ann initially wrote in her questionnaire she wanted Will to be in the program in hopes he would gain more independent skills, communicate better, secure a job and be able to continue his education. At the end of the program, Will had not been competitively employed. Six months after exiting the program, Will had obtained a job in a sheltered workshop. Ann stated “helping people has been his dream for the last few years and Project SEARCH made his dream come true.”

Immeasurable Benefits

The benefits of participating in this business immersed setting for young adults are difficult if not impossible to measure. When reviewing the interviews again, it is important to highlight things stated by the participants of the program and their family. There were factors mentioned that may improve their overall quality of life.

Although Marie mentioned through interview her responsibilities at home are largely unchanged, she stated she feels better about herself since participating. “Yes, I feel more confident because I have learned more clerical skills that can help me get a job. I want to get a job and maintain it.” She also mentioned her increased independence and self-advocacy. Marie’s mother said the biggest change in her daughter is the way she speaks to people. “She is more direct.”

Daniel stated his participation has “kind of” given him more confidence and stated he feels he has done his best. Daniel’s father stated his son’s communication skills have “grown dramatically.” He stated, “Now, he is willing and able to talk through situations.” His dad went on to discuss how he has more confidence in his son’s skills.

Daniel now communicates and is able to “say I don’t understand or I need further help in understanding what you want” according to his father.

During Chris’s interview, he stated “I learned how to do good yard work... The skills I learned there were to work hard and fast.” He went on to state his confidence has improved and “I am working under more stressful situations.” Chris’s mother said he has matured and is more responsible since participating in the program.

I think a big impact is just how he felt successful and knew that he could learn jobs. Being out there in a work environment helped him to mature. It kind of took him from an attitude when he is thinking about what he wants to be and what type of jobs he’d like to have to a more realistic attitude. He now knows more specific talents that he could use in a work environment. So he proved that to himself. Any maturity he gains and being more realistic has impacted me as well because it’s always been a struggle. I try to keep his feet on the ground but not burst his bubble. It’s always been a hard balance to strike. By having other people working with him, looking for jobs, and pulling him in when he wants to apply for a \$75,000 per year sales job, helps. It’s not just coming from mom because mom takes away all of the fun. She is the ‘no’ person. It’s been a good thing. The fact that he is now working a regular job and has good benefits was sped up because of Project SEARCH. I can see him easily sitting back all summer enjoying himself and not even thinking he needed to work. So that support helped immensely.

Jessica agreed she too has gained self-advocacy skills. She stated, “I learned it’s okay to ask people things and not get frustrated.” I asked her if she had more self-confidence since participating in Project SEARCH.

I have a little more confidence because I feel more free and more space from my mom. I know I can make my own decisions but she doesn’t think that. She just thinks I will be a baby the rest of my life but I know I won’t. So I need to make my own choices in life. If she thinks I’m making a bad choice, that’s fine, but she needs to keep it to herself.

Jessica also stated, “Project SEARCH changed my whole life.” Jessica’s mother stated, “she’s more responsible and takes accountability for things she didn’t do right.” She also, “advocates for herself and tries to find what is acceptable.” Jessica’s mother added she contributes more to the family.

Levi stated during his interview he has more self-confidence but it still drops. Levi’s mother stated, “he has taken a little more responsibility at home. It made him feel like what the rest of the family was doing.” Levi now has more sense of belonging. His mother went on to say, “he is better able to talk to people and solve problems.”

Will stated his self-confidence increased. His mother, Ann, said he is more independent now. “He can follow the conversation more closely within the family and with others” she stated. She added the expectations at home were raised a little. She felt she saw a noticeable difference in his professionalism as well. “I could definitely tell a difference in his professionalism from the beginning of the program to the end.”

At an end of the year celebration ceremony held at the hospital for the interns, there was a former Project SEARCH DRH graduate who addressed the audience. Molly

told everyone she works full time at MetLife. She prefaced how the Project SEARCH program allowed her to experience what she was interested in doing. Molly said, “to figure out that it is okay to make mistakes. We may not like it. We may not love it but in the end we did what we wanted to do.” Molly was referring to the chosen internships. She stated a “can’t do attitude...does not work here”. Immediately following Molly’s speech, Otis got up and talked about his family’s experience.

Otis is the father of Daniel, a Project SEARCH intern who was completing the program during the 2011-2012 school year. Otis stated the interns have matured. “They have matured. They know how to communicate which they did not know how to do before as well.” He referred to his son as being “happy” to wake up and go to the hospital for work. He stated communication is the largest growth he has seen. He said the most important piece of this program is that it is like a real job. “We are not talking about a store or something ran by teachers. They are working with professionals in professional jobs.” Otis went on, “There’s no work like that, that I am aware of, that can show up on a resume that they go out to compete for jobs.” He appreciated the fact his son was not in a “controlled environment...It is a real working position.” Otis pointed out that, “they have learned a lot of skills from different rotations that can be easily transferred to other jobs besides hospitals.” They have learned how to communicate with their bosses and other employees. He completed his speech by stating, “This program is awesome, I would recommend it over any other program that we have had, it is not like any other program that is offered to any other student.”

Summary

In Chapter 4, I presented the findings based upon my study. The interviews with the host site and agencies provided insight into their perspectives of the program and how the program works at the DRH site. The questionnaires and interviews with the interns as well as their parents gave insight as to their perspectives on how the program works and prepares individuals with developmental disabilities for competitive employment. Observations, attending the Executive Board meetings, community presentations, and Project SEARCH tour offered insight into the curriculum and how the interns are taught and prepared for employment. One of the six interns had obtained competitive employment by the end of the program in May of 2012.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Project SEARCH is a program which originated in Cincinnati at the Children's Hospital as an idea sparked from a nurse. The program has been around since the early 1990s. The 2010-2011 school year was the first year Harris County began the first Project SEARCH in the state of Missouri. Project SEARCH was the initiative of local agencies coming together to try to improve transition initiatives in Harris County. This chapter covers research questions explanation, implications, additional findings, recommendations, discussion, and conclusion. My intention with this study was to explore perspectives of key stakeholders of the Project SEARCH DRH program. I sought out the processes used for the transition program and documented the program's outcomes. I learned from the study that there are benefits from participating in the program that are separate from the outcome of competitive employment.

Questionnaires and interviews allowed for comparison parents perspectives of the Project SEARCH participant's job skills pre and post program. Interviews with the interns allowed for comparison of their perspectives of how the program, if at all, increased their job readiness skills. Interviews with the teacher and employment specialists assisted in the understanding of curriculum and skills obtained over the course of the school year. Understanding the curriculum and receiving a description of the program pieced together the experiences and stories of becoming prepared for employment. Interviews with employers, employees, and agencies provided insight into the perspectives, reasoning, collaboration, and implementation processes for the Project SEARCH program. Observations assisted in the understanding of the processes and curriculum used for the program.

Each school district and agency was invited to participate through one or more staff being interviewed. The only participating entity which did not in this interview process was Phillips School District. All young adults participating in the Project SEARCH DRH program along with their parents during the 2011-2012 school year participated. The interns were interviewed both pre and post Project SEARCH. Parents were given a questionnaire in the beginning of the 2011 school year and were interviewed at the end of the school year. Observations were completed throughout the school year while interns were in the training lab. I also attended committee meetings, tours, conferences, and public presentations. I analyzed my data by interviewing representatives in each area which participated in the program. I studied how the students were being instructed to prepare for working competitively. Most of my sources were primary with the interviews and observations; however, I obtained employment outcome information through the Project SEARCH DRH program.

Research Questions Explanation

The Project SEARCH that was studied for the purpose of this dissertation took place at DRH in Missouri. Project SEARCH DRH was a collaborative effort between four schools within Harris County, Senate Bill 40 Board, VR, service agency, and DRH. There was over a year in the planning of Project SEARCH in Harris County. DRH agreed to be the business site which trained young adults with disabilities to obtain job skills while completing internships within their building. The school districts involved have an application process in place for young adults on IEP's who could potentially qualify to participate in the Project SEARCH DRH program during their last year of

eligibility in high school. The school districts were the main funders for the program. However, Senate Bill 40 Board and VR also financially contribute.

The processes used in Project SEARCH are many. Project SEARCH worked by the collaboration among agencies, immersion in a business setting, and braided funding. Senate Bill 40 Board of Harris County provided start-up costs for the program. Senate Bill 40 Board provided ongoing funding which is given to the service agency. The service agency, in turn, provided an employment specialist and created a business council within the community. The employment advisor's role was to provide transition services of employment readiness, searching for employment, and support on-the-job upon hire. The business council was created to raise awareness that individuals with disabilities can be competitively employed. VR also provided funding to the service agency for the service of the employment advisor. Specifically, the employment advisor completed the task analysis and job development. The service agency was not the only agency in the area providing employment services to young adults, however, VR and the Senate Bill 40 Board must contract with them on this project because they obtained the license of rights to use the Project SEARCH program. Finally, the largest contributors financially to the Project SEARCH program were the school districts. Districts each received and paid a bill to fiscal agent, Florence School District, for each student who was accepted into the program.

Project SEARCH DRH 2011-2012 had about a three-week period where the interns focus on the hospital environment expectations and orientation. After this period of time, the interns were staggered into internship opportunities based upon their job skill readiness and interests throughout the hospital. The young adults no longer attended their

home school campuses but reported to the training lab daily. The interns followed Florence School calendar. They provided their own transportation to and from the hospital. During the time in the training lab, the interns reviewed policies of DRH. They also had to ensure they had up-to-date immunizations and background checks. When the interns were not in their internships, they were in the training lab working on the Project SEARCH curriculum. The interns had an employment advisor working with them or a natural support until they are independent on the task or job as a whole.

The curriculum topics of focus may vary year to year based upon the interns' needs. The curriculum included developing skills in team building, workplace mobility, workplace safety, technology skills, social skills, presentation skills, interviewing skills, money management, health and wellness, resume construction, job search skills, and tips for job retention. The employment advisors kept track of task analysis during each internship rotation and determine when the interns were able to be independent on the job. During the school year, the interns attended a talent fair in which they had three interviews with different local employers. They also spoke in the community by giving presentations and went on tours in community at different potential employers.

The employment advisors assisted in implementing support and accommodations as needed in the work environment so the interns were able to learn how to complete job tasks. The goal of the employment advisor was to fade when the intern is completing tasks independently. The employment advisor from the service agency actively sought employment with the interns while in the program. Upon exiting Project SEARCH DRH, the interns received services through an agency to continue looking for employment based on their interests and skills. Once a job was obtained, they continued to be

provided services while on the job until a provider was no longer needed. The overall goal was competitive employment for the interns. Outcomes, however, were not defined the same for each participating agency. At the time of data collection for this study, each agency had not verified their definition of a successful outcome. The majority of the partners agreed collaboration has been difficult but necessary. At the time of this study, the Project SEARCH DRH program was new.

The study inquired into parent perspectives on why and how Project SEARCH has prepared their young adults with developmental disabilities for competitive employment. The parents of the interns participating in the program mentioned in their questionnaire prior to the start of Project SEARCH DRH that they wanted their young adult to learn new skills. One parent mentioned the goal for the end of the program for their young adult was employment according to their own expectations. Comments were made such as their children will be more independent, have improved communication and interviewing skills, have a stronger resume, and have higher self-confidence.

When the parents were asked about their concerns for participation within the program, the parents mentioned lack of transportation between home and the training lab. They also mentioned fear their young adult may lose interest, not want to work, health concerns, and lack of ability to focus. One also mentioned their concern was their young adult would not appropriately advocate for himself or herself. Each parent stated they felt their role as a parent of a student participating in Project SEARCH DRH was they support and encourage their young adult. In addition, concerns such the need for proper clothing, transportation, supplies, and lunches were also mentioned.

During the exit interviews, parents mentioned their young adult's skills have improved. The intern's participation in the program and the extra year of maturity were thought to be contributing factors among such characteristics as responsibility, accountability, self-confidence, and self-advocacy. A few of the parents mentioned disappointment with the fact the hospital has yet to hire any of the interns. Some also mentioned being able to observe their young adult in the internship environment would have been helpful, and they felt a disconnect between the communication of the specific skills and behaviors their young adult had acquired or still needed assistance with. The other concern mentioned was from the parent's perspective; it did not appear the agency was actively seeking employment for the interns until the last month of the program.

Study participants agreed with West et al.(1997) and Wehman and Bricout (1999) that training and employment supports helped individuals with disabilities be more independent in their lives. Parents involved in the study were especially aware of changes in the participant's sense of independence and confidence. Words and implications that reoccurred among the young adults and their parents were self-advocacy, increased self-confidence, sense of worth, sense of belonging, communicating effectively, and desire.

Student intern perspectives on why and how Project SEARCH DRH has prepared them for competitive employment were also consistently positive. Intern interviews consistently spoke of increased *confidence* and *self-advocacy*. These themes were also found in press articles for previous participants of Project SEARCH programs internationally. Most of the interns also focused on the actual job skills they obtained during the program. The interns with higher communication skills were verbalizing both

how they felt by participating in the program as well as appreciation of the specific job task skills. The interns with communication deficits tended to limit their responses on specific job task skills they learned, and they were unable to expand further to how they felt. The interns all expressed the program was beneficial for them in obtaining skills needed for obtaining and retaining a job.

The business sites and agencies involved also had positive perspectives regarding how they have prepared students with developmental disabilities for competitive employment. The representatives interviewed from Senate Bill 40 Board, service agency and Florence School District also all reported the program was appealing to them, in part, due to collaborative funding. Furthermore, each agency had its own goals within the organizations for young adults transitioning out of high school to be employed or, enrolled in post-secondary school or training. Raleigh School District, Florence School District, and Jergen School District mentioned during the interview process that the Project SEARCH DRH program was another option for students in special education to meet specific criteria to obtain job readiness skills. Each agency mentioned how the interns learned to be more independent and emphasized the increased communication and social skills. The goal for all agencies, parents, and students involved was competitive employment for the young adult with a developmental disability, which was seen as a life enhancing experience that will impact the participant for the rest of his or her life.

When perspectives were researched of different Project SEARCH programs internationally through news articles and newsletters, I found recurring themes in the discussions that had echoes in this research project. Individuals who were co-workers, parents, instructors, mentors, or interns mentioned the rewards from the program. They

discussed a substantial growth in the intern's confidence and noted that interns learned how to hold conversations. This change was not just in how the participants see themselves, but how others come to see them. A common phenomenon was for the mentors to realize the interns were more capable and productive than the mentors had expected. Interns also grew in their ability to give presentations in public regarding their job skills. I heard these same themes throughout the interview conversations I had with study participants.

Implications

The results I found mirrored the research reported in Chapter 2 for the most part. According to Hartman (2009) and Silver et al. (1993), about half of the people with disabilities are employed. The 2010-2011 Project SEARCH DRH participants have had a 60% outcome of interns securing competitive employment. The 2011-2012 interns are at a 33% outcome as of October 2012. Of the six interns, two are competitively employed by Project SEARCH standards, one is working part-time, one is volunteering, another is seeking employment, and the final intern works at a sheltered workshop. Wehman et al. (2002) agreed with Carter et al. (2009) that employers are largely unaware that people in society with disabilities are able to be gainfully employed. Though this study did not explore the views of local employers not participating in the Project, several participants confirmed that the local business community shares this lack of awareness, and it is an impediment to having a larger pool of employers. Carter et al. (2009) and Riehle (2006) stated when marketing individuals with disabilities to be employed by businesses, there should be consideration and conversations of the business aspect. The Office of Legal Counsel (2005) added there should be ongoing strategies of public awareness regarding

possibilities for employment of individuals with disabilities. With the start of Project SEARCH at DRH, the service agency involved with the program has been the leader in creating a business council in Harris County to raise awareness of issues regarding employment for individuals with disabilities.

Creating a collaborative program with varying agencies to support transition services for young adults with disabilities was supported by published work from Morningstar (2006) and Johnson (2004). Part of the success of the program was that there was a fidelity check to ensure the model implemented meets the internationally trademarked and copyrighted Project SEARCH criteria. A part of the criteria was essential collaboration among all partners to include braided funding. It was rare for all of these entities to work together at the same time and collaborate with funding to service young adults. The program was funded through Senate Bill 40 Board, VR, and the school districts. The service agency acted as the fiscal agent for the Senate Bill 40 Board and VR funds. The program used braided funding which allowed them to combine resources in order to provide services which assisted in improving job skills and finding competitive employment. This study agreed with Nicholas et al. (2011) as well as Timmons (2007) that collaborative funding assisted both the job seeker and employer reach employment goals. Project SEARCH was an example of a program using collaborative funding due to the different financial regulations of each partner. Morningstar (2006) and Johnson (2004) were both advocates for interagency collaboration and participation in work-based learning opportunities. Brooke et al. (2009) had seven core indicators for educators to use with agencies in planning for competitive employment services. The Project SEARCH program incorporated each of

the seven core indicators. The seven core indicators included the following: benefits planning, individualization of job goal, quality of competitive job, consistency of job status with that of co-workers, employment in an integrated setting, quality of job-site supports and fading, and presence of ongoing support services for job retention, and career development.

There was a structure composed of committees in place for educating the public on people with disabilities being employed and sustainability of the Project SEARCH program. There were at least three groups created through Project SEARCH DRH that assisted in educating businesses and finding employment for participants. Wehman et al. (2002), Carter et al. (2009), and Riehle (2006) each published articles or research that supports educating businesses on hiring individuals with disabilities. The committees that educated the business community for Project SEARCH DRH and all individuals with disabilities included the Business Council/Job Development, Follow Along/Retention Committee, and the Marketing/Communication Committee. There was an application and selection process for the potential interns to go through prior to participating. Acceptance was up to the Application and Selection Committee but participation is up to the young adult's IEP team.

Additional Findings

A finding from the study was the aspect of the Project SEARCH program being unique, there was a consensus among participants that not many programs offer being immersed in an internship out in the community for young adults with developmental disabilities. In particular, Project SEARCH DRH did not provide transportation to and/or from the hospital, they had a service provider work with students on the job site all day,

and there is collaboration with funding. The focus of the program was on job readiness skills for obtaining and retaining employment. There was no other focus such as trying to prepare them for state or district assessments. Importantly, student behavior improvements was thought to be the result of complete immersion in a community setting rather than being in a job-like setting within a classroom.

The collaboration process for the partners was difficult. Each agency had its own goals within their entity. Sharing power had proven to be an obstacle for the team, as revealed in the interviews. Some of those interviewed focused on the collaboration within their district to increase awareness about the program. They stated collaborating internally had been a smooth process. This was in contrast to the collaboration process between all partners. Overall, however, those interviewed stated there needed to be greater understanding about each other's agencies and terminology.

The DRH representative interviewed stated they participated in the program because it was an opportunity for their organization to provide young adults the opportunity to learn and grow as individuals. However, the hospital also was provided opportunities for growth. Hosting a Project SEARCH site also allowed the hospital the opportunity to gain more knowledge of people with disabilities. Managers within departments learned to hold the interns accountable regardless of their disability, thereby the opportunity allowed them a real-world learning experience. At the time of this study, the hospital had yet to hire any of the interns. The hospital acted as a training facility for the interns. They were not required to hire the intern at the end of their rotation or upon exiting the program. The DRH representative, mentioned through the interview process that she had seen an increase in job skills obtained by the interns. Each agency

interviewed gave specific examples of how they have seen each intern grow through-out the school year due to the participation in the program.

Recommendations

I have several recommendations for future studies on work-based programs for young adults with disabilities. It would be interesting to see how businesses who participate in hiring or providing internship opportunities for young adults with disabilities view the changes in culture of their business. For Project SEARCH in particular, more research should be collected regarding processes used for seeking employment from those sites with 80% or better successful outcomes. Additionally, it would be beneficial if there were further research on the collaboration of the entities brought together in the creation of various Project SEARCH programs around the world.

Further research could also be completed on how or if having people with developmental disabilities obtain competitive employment has improved their quality of life. Furthermore, future studies related to the changing attitudes of young adults regarding their own abilities due to participating in such programs or being hired competitively would be beneficial. An interesting question to pursue is: What factors do the family and individual with a disability attribute to the success of being competitively employed? It would also be beneficial to have a deeper understanding of how families of young adults have been impacted by the participation of work-based outcomes and/or competitive employment of their family member.

There are changes that I would make regarding my study. One change would be the number of participants involved in the interviews. I would be curious to have standard pre and post program interviews across all Project SEARCH sites. I would also

include additional interview questions that are more specific to the themes brought out by this study such as self-confidence, increased communication skills, and empowerment. Additionally, I would interview employers of those students hired and the managers of the departments that the interns participated.

Additionally, I have recommendations for the program due to unexpected findings in the study. Not all interns were competitively employed. It appeared that some of the students were not appropriate for the program due to their inability to work independently in the work environment. The agencies involved in the program should consider revising and or adhering to the application and selection process of the interns. I also suggest that the agencies investigate why the 12 slots that are available are not filled. It could be due to the districts not meeting NCLB criteria for graduation rates. Additionally, it could be beneficial to open the enrollment to fourth year seniors. They could also look into accepting tuition from other districts outside Harris County. Another option to explore may be to accept private paid adults with age restrictions.

VR was not satisfied with the service provider holding the license. Since that service provider held the license for Project SEARCH, they are automatically going to provide services for the interns through Project SEARCH DRH. At the end of the internships, the interns may stay with that service agency or chose a different service provider. The fact that all agencies involved have not clearly defined what they consider successful outcomes outside of Project SEARCH, has created friction. For instance, a young adult may have obtained competitive employment but depending upon their goals set with VR, VR may not consider this a successful outcome according to their criteria. Another example is if a student is employed at the end of the program, but not

competitively, a school may consider that a successful outcome but VR could not. Project SEARCH would not consider it a successful outcome and it would not meet Senate Bill 40 Boards goal targets. If agencies are considering starting a program with braided funding, they should consider these factors regarding who will purchase the license for the program and expectations within the Memorandum of Understanding.

It would have been a benefit to provide the core group with more opportunities for open communication. It would have been helpful if each agency explained more about their goals and how they would support the overall goal of Project SEARCH. Thought should be given to which organization should hold the license for such program and limitations that it may cause. Additionally, if the schools provide the instructor, there may be limitations as to who those instructors may be able to teach. If the program wanted to open the opportunity for young adults who have graduated high school, for instance, an instructor from a high school may not be able provide them services.

Consideration of the service provider's reputation and statistics is important. It is a great opportunity for the service provider in this case. However, if any of the partners, including the families of those served, are not satisfied with the service provider, they have no choice but to use the service provider because they hold the license in order to complete the program. It may be beneficial if employment specialists were provided more professional growth opportunities such as how to effectively complete job task analysis.

Discussion

Based upon the research reported in this dissertation and my own experiences in education, I believe this program does change many people's perspectives regarding

individuals with disabilities and employment. As a leader in the field of education, I feel it is important to examine collaborative programs such as Project SEARCH and immersion in work-based programs for various students. The Project SEARCH program focuses on individuals with developmental disabilities. There are other groups of young adults, who also will not be ready upon high school graduation for employment, training, or higher education. As educators we should have a plan for all students. It is our job to prepare all young adults for life after high school.

When considering future leadership decisions in education, I want to focus on how it will benefit the students. This will be a challenge when it comes to funding for those individuals who do not necessarily fall in the developmentally disabled category or even free or reduced lunch category. Leaders in the community will need to come together and discuss the needs of the community and the direction of employment and education on a regular basis. As every student has different needs, the programs will need to be flexible with its teachings and placement. More importantly, leaders will need to think outside the box and not fear creating new and innovative programs through studying best practices.

Conclusions

The results of this research indicate on-the-job training is a time of growth for young adults with developmental disabilities. Regarding their desire to work, the interns showed capabilities not evident while in the school setting. The skill most discussed as an area of improvement was social skill development. Transition has been evolving over the years from secondary to post-secondary. The federal government has shown more interest and created higher expectations for school districts in order to meet outcomes of

employment, training, and/or post-secondary education for students with disabilities.

Therefore, these increased expectations are forcing districts and agencies to be more creative in how they prepare these young adults for post-secondary goals. There is also more focus on the interest and preferences of the individuals with disabilities.

By participating in the Project SEARCH program, participating school districts increased options for young adults with developmental disabilities. The results of this study have supported the local districts decisions to provide opportunity for on-the-job training for students with disabilities. Although Project SEARCH is a program has demonstrated positive outcomes for young adults internationally, it is not the only program that can reap these kinds of outcomes. Project SEARCH is one option for a select group of students who have had limited to no opportunities for competitive employment previously. Participation has also created relationships between the school districts and community partners. It has increased awareness throughout the Harris County business community regarding employment of people with disabilities.

During the interview process, parents had some recommendations in order to provide them a better understanding of their young adult's capabilities. Some mentioned possibly allowing the parents to observe the interns on the job. This could improve communication between the parents and the interns regarding the specific job tasks and skills needed which may help all involved when preparing for and seeking employment. When a program like this is created, it is also important to ensure the internships created have the full scope of the job responsibilities the intern needs to learn. For some students, this would not be appropriate, but many employers are seeking a variety of skills and multitasking.

The various committees created for Project SEARCH at this site should be reviewed. There has been a great deal of work to create charters, organize events, and publicize them. Perhaps these committees are useful but only during certain times of the year or only during different growth periods of the program. Restructuring and merging certain committees may not only prove beneficial but provide more individuals the opportunity and time to be more involved. Since the key to the program is competitive employment, it would behoove those involved to create and educate everyone involved on how to find job leads for the interns. It is important to remember that the only individuals hired full-time to work for this program are the instructor and employment advisors. All other individuals on committees and doing other work make time for it as an addition to their already demanding duties.

The curriculum for the program appears to provide not only educational but life-long benefits. The curriculum is tailored to suit each student's needs for the employment setting. The business liaison, instructor, and employment advisors should do fidelity checks on the internships themselves. It needs to be verified that the departments are providing appropriate work-loads and variety of skill sets to the interns. Although interns' skill sets have improved, it is still proving difficult to find jobs for interns after the program. The reasons for this could be many. I believe that a big factor is the location of our residents that participate. Many of the participants are unable to drive or the distance over which they can have someone drive them to and from work is limited. Transportation is an issue in general in Harris County. Some of the participating districts state lack of transportation has been a reason certain candidates for the program, did not apply or participate. The reasoning behind not providing transportation to such a

program is justified, in my opinion. Whether the interns are participating in the Project SEARCH program or are employed, they will have to find transportation to and from a facility. If there is no way for them to have transportation to a place of employment, they will likely not be competitively employed. However, if it is the reason behind not filling all 12 spots of the program, offering transportation may be a solution in the future.

During the study, one of the interns was asked to leave the program on the day before the program was completed. The intern had stolen food from a staff refrigerator and not been honest about it. Then, the intern kept taking unauthorized breaks. Next, the intern had been vocal about not wishing to participate in the program during the school year but the parents of the intern kept him in the program. Finally, The intern's lack of desire to be competitively employed and participate ultimately affects the programs outcome. In the post-Project SEARCH interview, the intern still expressed he had obtained skills through participation.

Project SEARCH at DRH has only been in place since the 2010-2011 school year. The sustainability of the program depends on various factors. Not only must there be young adults who meet the criteria to apply to the program, the IEP Team must be willing to send them to participate. There are 12 slots available for four different districts to fill between all of them. The slots for the young adults have not been filled the first two years. However, this is not necessarily uncommon for other Project SEARCH sites internationally. Having 12 students is what is typically needed for the program to financially be able to stand alone. In order to fill more slots, the Executive Board voted to open enrollment for seniors as well as the fifth through seventh year young adults for the 2013-2014 school year.

Summary

Special education is a subject I am passionate about since my niece has a learning disability. Since she is in high school, I am growing more interested in post-secondary outcomes. Her school has not appropriately educated her and I fear for her future. I feel if the district had instructed her effectively, then she would have more opportunities in college, training, and/or employment. I also know many people with disabilities who have not had appropriate education, support, or training in order to obtain competitive employment. This experience has sparked a desire for providing opportunities for young adults to have positive post-secondary outcomes in their area of interest.

It has been my experience that some school programs prepare their students well for the transition after high school, but many others do not. I am concerned about the education, or lack thereof, many students with disabilities have in school. I am further concerned they are not connected to or knowledgeable about the appropriate outside agencies that can increase their quality of life. Many times, there is not a focus on skills such as team work or appropriate work behavior in high school.

My goal was to learn how to implement a program or create a plan for students with disabilities which will increase their independence and hopefully result in competitive employment. I wanted to explore indicators needed for curriculum in order to make a program successful for these young individuals. My goal was also to increase awareness in districts of the need to teach appropriate skills to these students.

I am thrilled I was able to be involved with a program has had so much success internationally and is the first Project SEARCH in Missouri. Engaging in the project has allowed me the ability to understand the multiple facets of different agencies and the

trials and tribulations of collaboration. Ultimately, I have also gotten to see how this program has changed the lives of these young adults and their families in a positive manner. To be surrounded by others who have the same passion about the topic as I do, has been inspiring and provided me hope for more inclusion of people with developmental disabilities within the workplace.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire for parents pre- Project SEARCH:

Why did your family choose to apply to Project SEARCH rather than other programs offered by your district?

What is your goal for your child at the end of the Project SEARCH program?

Are there any concerns you have for your young adult to participate in the program?

What do you feel is your role as a parent of a student in Project SEARCH?

Has your young adult had any other work experience opportunities? (including any kind of job prep, interviews etc.)

Interview for parents post-Project SEARCH:

Is your intern currently employed?

If the answer is no, did you find the Project SEARCH program to be beneficial to your son/daughter and/or your family? Why?

If the answer is yes, is your son/daughter employed full-time and/or in employment in an area of interest?

Do you feel your intern left Project SEARCH with skills he/she did not possess before entering the program?

What do you know about Project SEARCH now, that you wished you would have had a better understanding of before applying or participating in Project SEARCH?

Interview questions for students pre -Project SEARCH:

How many job interviews have you had prior to Project SEARCH?

What specific job skills do you feel you have?

What do you expect to learn in Project SEARCH?

What type of job do you hope have due to your experience in Project SEARCH?

What are things you feel you do well?

Are there things you feel you need further support/training?

Interview questions with employer:

What do you think of when you hear the word disability?

What factors were involved in your agencies participation in Project SEARCH?

What reservations were there in the decision making process?

What feedback have you received from your staff from participating?

What feedback have you received from your patients from participating?

Has your perception of people with disabilities changed since allowing this program to be integrated into the culture?

What is the collaboration process like for participating in the program?

Have you seen a difference in young adult behaviors? (social skills, interpersonal skills, self-advocacy skills) If so, example.

Interview questions with agencies (service provider, Senate Bill 40 Board,

Vocational Rehabilitation, school districts):

What factors were involved in your agencies decision to support the first Project SEARCH in Missouri?

How is your agency involved in Project SEARCH?

How does funding work for Project SEARCH with your agency?

What is the collaboration process like for participating in the program?

Have you seen a difference in young adult behaviors? (social skills, interpersonal skills, self-advocacy skills) If so, example.

Interview questions with employment specialists:

How are you involved in the training process for the students?

How do you collaborate with the teacher, hospital departments and students in order to provide on-the-job training?

If there are only two employment specialists, how do you manage your time amongst the students?

How do you take the data to show task mastery?

At what point is a student considered “independent” at a task?

Have you seen a difference in young adult behaviors? (social skills, interpersonal skills, self-advocacy skills) If so, example.

Interview questions for Project SEARCH DRH Instructor:

How is your role as a Project SEARCH instructor different than a special education teacher’s role that teaches employment skills?

Tell me about the curriculum.

How do you involve the parents in the process of educating and supporting their children?

What skills do you see the students that you have had thus far need to work on while in high school?

How do you prepare the students for the culture of Barnes Jewish St Peters?

How do you determine which internships are appropriate for the students?

Why do you think this program different than other programs offered in the county?

Explain the students schedule process for the year?

How do you prepare the students for their interview process?

What is the collaboration process like with all of the community partners?

Have you seen a difference in young adult behaviors? (social skills, interpersonal skills, self-advocacy skills) If so, example.

Vitae

Teresa D. Green graduated from Arcadia Valley High School in Ironton, Missouri. In 1997, she entered Mineral Area College to complete her Associate's Degree in Park Hills, Missouri. She graduated in 2000 with her Bachelor's Degree in Psychology with a minor in Marketing from Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri. Upon entering the workforce as a teacher's aide for an alternative school, she later returned to college to pursue her Master's Degree in Special Education which she obtained in 2005. She continued coursework to include a Special Education Administrator Certificate the same year. She has her teaching certificate in both Special Education and Teaching English as a Second Language. Her anticipated graduation date for her Doctorate in Instructional Leadership is May of 2013. Teresa is honored to have continued her education on two scholarships. One being from her hometown of Ironton, Missouri called the William Edgar Foundation Scholarship and the other from the Charles Cummins Foundation as nominated by her colleagues.

Teresa has worked in education since 2000 upon graduating with her Bachelor's Degree. She worked as a teacher's aide for three years in alternative schools in Ironton, Missouri and then Houston, Texas before transitioning to a teaching position. Teresa taught Special Education classes at the middle school and high school levels for three years before accepting a Process Coordinator position in 2006. Teresa has been a Process Coordinator for seven years.