



UnitedHealthcare Community & State Project SEARCH Innovation Spotlight



The Opportunity

Nationwide, individuals with a disability are far less likely to have jobs than those without a disability.

According to 2018 statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor, the unemployment rate for persons with a disability ages 16 and over was 7.9%, more than twice the rate (3.7%) of those with no disability.¹ Across Texas, individuals with disabilities accounted for only 6.2 percent of the civilian labor force 16 years of age and older (of 820,564 individuals).² Individuals with disabilities experience numerous challenges associated with participation in the labor force. Their unemployment rate is higher, they are more likely to work part time and, on average, they earn less than individuals without disabilities at every level of educational attainment.³

In 2013, the UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Texas set out to help more disabled Texans find competitive employment by launching Project SEARCH in its hometown of Sugar Land.

7.9%

of individuals with a disability are unemployed.

Just

18.7%

of persons with a disability were employed in 2017.



The Innovation

Project SEARCH was created in 1996 at Cincinnati Children's Hospital and is a business-led, one-year, school-to-work transition program serving students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Unlike a traditional school setting, this program focuses on total workplace immersion, combining classroom instruction, career exploration, and relevant job-skills training through strategically designed internships with host businesses. The unique, business-led, school-to-work program takes place entirely in the workplace. Starting in 2013, the UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Texas partnered with the national Project SEARCH organization and the Fort Bend Independent School District to create a program that would invite students ages 18 to 22 with disabilities to receive training at its offices in Sugar Land, Texas, with the goal of improving employment outcomes.

The Project SEARCH program provides an extensive period of training and career exploration, innovative adaptations, long-term job coaching, and continuous feedback from teachers, job coaches, and employers.

To supplement the internship, UnitedHealthcare and Project SEARCH adopted the HealthMatters curriculum. A comprehensive curriculum written specifically for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, HealthMatters is designed to show professionals how to help people make the best choices about health, exercise, and nutrition.

To support Project SEARCH's goal to help people with disabilities find competitive employment, and reaffirm our commitment to HealthMatters, UnitedHealthcare purchased and donated the curriculum to over 400 Project SEARCH sites across the country. This curriculum is critical to providing the blueprint for each intern to take charge of their own health, sustain their employment, and become leaders in their jobs and communities.



The Outcomes

Since 2014, the program has been producing positive results in Sugar Land. Of the 28 students to complete the inaugural internship class through 2017, 19 have found competitive employment working alongside coworkers with and without disabilities. Other students have found opportunities through volunteer-based positions or are being supported through their job search process.

Internationally, there are more than 500 Project SEARCH programs achieving employment within one year for more than 70 percent of participating interns.

Following completion of its inaugural class, UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Texas made a commitment to make Project SEARCH an ongoing initiative to extend the opportunities and results.

Additionally, UnitedHealthcare's participation in Project SEARCH has allowed the health plan to use its status as a Fortune 100 company to spread disability awareness and understanding and to strengthen community relationships and partnerships. The health plan continues to visit with numerous partners in its insurance consortium to spread the word about this program and the favorable results experienced in the various workplace rotations. These visits, while not always resulting in a job offer, opened a door with employers to consider current or future interns with disabilities for competitive employment.



Meet Ally

Ally is a 22 year old individual with Autism, an Intellectual Disability, and Speech and Visual Impairments. Ally significantly struggled with confidence and coping skills upon entering her Project SEARCH internship at UnitedHealthcare. However, the respect she felt by working in an inclusive workplace helped to transform how she perceived herself and how she interacted with others. She learned to advocate for herself, became instrumental in daily administrative operations, and by the end of her internship was interacting with employees of UnitedHealthcare building wide. She even independently planned and hosted a gathering to celebrate the managers, coworkers, and onsite staff involved directly with Project SEARCH. Today, she is employed with a local skilled nursing and rehabilitation facility and is living (and paying) for an apartment.



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¹U.S. Dept of Labor, Disability Employment Characteristics

²https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/organization/twic/Disabilities_Profile.pdf

³https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/organization/twic/Disabilities_Profile.pdf