

Interns Learn Job Skills at Parkwest Medical Center through Project SEARCH

While the Project SEARCH program at Parkwest is currently suspended due to COVID-19, we want to celebrate our excellent interns and hope to have them back at our hospital soon.

Project SEARCH has a long-standing presence in Knoxville with adult programs that help individuals with developmental disabilities learn job skills, and find gainful employment. Parkwest Medical Center proudly partnered with the Knox County School System and Sertoma to offer the community's first program for students ages 18-22 who are still in high school. The 2019-20 group of interns will experience an abbreviated internship due to it being the first year of programming, but going forward students will participate in the internship during the entire school year. Since Knox County schools are not currently in session due to COVID-19, the program is currently suspended.

Project SEARCH interns learn various job skills by training in at least three different departments within the medical center. The overall goal of Project SEARCH is to learn viable job skills and obtain employment within the school year. Employment can be sought at the host site or elsewhere in the community.

"We're so honored to be part of the first student Project Search program in Knox County. The interns who have been with us for the last few months are simply amazing. I love not only what all they are learning, but what an impact they are making within the departments where they are working," commented Parkwest Medical Center chief administrative officer Neil

Heatherly. "We love having them as part of our Parkwest family."

The 2019-20 interns were placed in rotations at Parkwest Medical Center in various departments, including central supply, nursing units, housekeeping, food services, pre-op, and surgery. Future interns will have opportunities as the program grows at Parkwest. Intern candidates for the upcoming school year recently participated in a skills day that included observation of them completing various tasks, and interviews with both the students and their families.

In addition to the rotations in the hospital learning various skills, the interns experience classroom curriculum around team building, workplace safety, technology, self-advocacy, maintaining employment, financial literacy, health and wellness, and preparing for employment. This curriculum is taught by Knox County instructor Shannan Dean and skills trainer Henry Naff. Additional support is offered by Ashley Copeland and Delia Robinson, Director of Employment at Sertoma as skills trainers.

"It is a privilege to work with the interns each day. I love seeing their excitement and confidence grow when they learn a new skill. An intern's can-do attitude can provide not only assistance to the department, but can also help to create a more positive work environment for everyone," said Ashley S. Copeland, CESP, Employment Manager with Sertoma, and skills trainer at Parkwest.

Knox County instructor Shannan Dean, who works with the students on a daily basis commented, "Every step, either big or small, has been a joy to watch through the eyes of Parkwest's employees. Our Project SEARCH interns have become more than trainees and have found a real place within the Parkwest family."



In early March, the students completed their first rotation. The ambulatory surgery staff thanked intern David for all of his hard work with a celebration in the department.



Intern Skyler worked in surgery, learning various tasks to help out in the department.



For his first rotation, intern Marquez worked in Materials Management and learned a variety of job skills.



Shaelynn's first rotation was in food services, where she learned a variety of job skills, including bagging items for retail sale.



Kyana's first internship rotation was on one of Parkwest's patient floors. She performed a variety of tasks and by the end of her rotation was assisting staff with answering call lights.

Some of the Job Skills Learned while Working at Parkwest:

Central Supply: Stock shelves, stock supply rooms, fill pick lists/orders, deliver supplies and break down boxes.

5 Riverstone: Make admission kits, stock isolation cubbies and patient rooms, deliver and pick up food trays, provide patients with towels and washcloths, and remove linen bags and trash.

Childbirth Center: Prepare baby packets and folders, deliver and pick up food trays, assemble admission bags, and stock supplies.

Housekeeping: Empty trash receptacles, maintain lobby areas, clean surface areas and restrooms, and dress stretchers and beds.

Food Services: Bag and tag bakery items, bag plastic silverware, and roll silverware.

Pre-op: Make bed rolls, stock drawers in patient rooms and refrigerators, and dress stretchers.

Surgery: Clean surgery rooms after surgery and prepare anesthesia area.

The History of Project SEARCH

Project SEARCH's primary objective is to secure competitive employment for people with disabilities. The program was developed at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, a research environment

that fosters visionary thinking and innovation. It all began in 1996, when Erin Riehle was Director of Cincinnati Children's Emergency Department. Since the hospital cared for patients with developmental disabilities,

it made sense to Erin that the hospital commit to hiring employees with disabilities, too.

She wondered if it would be possible to train people with developmental disabilities to fill some of the high-turnover,

entry-level positions in her department, which involved complex and systematic tasks such as stocking supply cabinets. As a starting point, Erin presented her ideas to Susie Rutkowski, special education director at

Great Oaks Career Campuses. Erin and Susie formed a partnership that was instantaneous, and together they launched Project SEARCH.

Since its inception, Project SEARCH has grown from a single

program site at Cincinnati Children's to a large and continuously expanding international network of sites.