

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Albert K. Blackwelder
Interim Chief Operating Officer
Emory Crawford Long Hospital

*An Employment Program for Individuals With Developmental Disabilities**The Business Challenge*

A shortage of registered nurses and medical technicians continues to create staffing deficits in most hospital clinical departments. Moreover, many of the tasks performed by these individuals are routine and time-consuming and do not require the level of expertise that nurses and technicians possess. This work system contributes to a loss of job satisfaction amongst these employees, further adding to the overall staffing challenge.

The Solution

To address this acute staffing shortage, Emory Crawford Long Hospital (ECLH) adopted the Project Search program originally created by J. Erin Riehle, Director of the Emergency Department at Cincinnati Children's Hospital. Her intent was to expand a local diversity initiative and fill needed positions by employing young people with developmental disabilities (DD). Through her partnership with a local school district and county board, she created a transition program for high school students with DD to learn critical work and employability skills in real work environments.

At ECLH, Program Search is a collaborative effort with operating partners Briggs & Associates (Briggs), an Atlanta-based company with a 20-year history of developing non-traditional employment for individuals with DD, and the Dekalb County School System (DCSS). The operating structure is:

- ECLH provides classroom space for eight high school seniors each year, work environments for student rotations, access to key department heads for training and assignment locations, and employment at the completion of successful performance;
- Briggs, the organizing partner, develops the work sites for the student rotations, provides long-term career support once they are employed, and onsite staff to oversee the program; and,
- DCSS selects the students for the program and provides a staff of three to train them in their rotations.

The Results

August 2007 ushered in the fourth Project Search class. The employment rate of the prior three classes is nearly 100 percent. Twenty-four high school students were transitioned to jobs as technician/nursing assistants in the emergency department, operating room, nursing floors, central sterilization, pharmacy, materials management, medical records, rehabilitation, guest services, anesthesia services, patient accounts and human resources departments. An additional eight former high

school graduates with DD were hired. Today, this program is recognized as the best in the state of Georgia for transitioning high school students with DD to non-traditional jobs that average \$9.00 per hour, with benefits.

The lives of these students have been dramatically changed because they have been able to transition directly from high school to paid jobs, unlike 67 percent of their peers with DD. Several of the students are now the highest wage earners in their families, are living independently, and are no longer dependent upon Social Security.

Project Search has raised the bar regarding expectations of the types of jobs people with DD can hold. Participants are performing tasks that were previously done by nurses, technicians, or clerical personnel. They are doing these tasks with more accuracy, enthusiasm, and at a lower cost. Furthermore, these individuals are having a positive impact on employee morale.

The successful hiring rate has attracted the attention of additional funding sources at a time when resources are otherwise unavailable. Project Search initiatives have been implemented at other Atlanta area hospitals and banks, due to the leadership of ECLH.

[The Organization](#)

Emory Crawford Long Hospital, located in midtown Atlanta, is part of Emory Healthcare, the largest and most comprehensive health care system in Georgia. As one of the nation's leading community-based, acute care teaching facilities, ECLH has been recognized nationally for its work in cardiology and heart-related diseases. It also has an outstanding reputation in the fields of reconstructive surgery, maternal and infant care, orthopedics and gastrointestinal diseases. Its mission is to provide excellence in patient care, enhanced by education and research.

This page was last modified on September 26, 2007.



[Return to Home Page](#)