Project SEARCH Employer Follow-up Study: Combined PS-NIH and PS-MCG 2013-14 Report

Executive Summary

Overview: The purpose of this study was to measure employer satisfaction with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Montgomery County Government (MCG) Project SEARCH (PS) programs between 2010 and 2013. Based on feedback from 34 PS employers, it appears that they were for the most part very satisfied with their PS interns, and even more likely to be satisfied with their permanent employees hired through PS. The most commonly cited benefits of hiring an intern through PS was additional support for routine office tasks and the opportunity to contribute to the advancement of individuals with disabilities. The majority of PS employers were also very satisfied with PS staff, although a few reported that communication between PS and job sites could have been better. PS employers cited regular check-ins, job coach support in training interns to complete work tasks, and job coach support in developing a schedule or checklist of tasks to be performed as the most helpful supports received through PS. The most common reason for participating in PS was a supervisor suggestion that the department get involved with PS. Although a considerable number of PS employers reported having originally had concerns about hiring someone with an intellectual or learning disability – especially reduced productivity and quality control problems – almost all felt that the PS program adequately addressed these concerns.

Project SEARCH Interns

Total Number of Interns. Twenty employers have had an intern for one 10-week job rotation, seven have had two interns, and seven have had three or more interns.

Accommodations. Interns have most commonly required accommodations training for and mastering job routines, addressing communicating issues, arranging work schedules, restructuring job tasks, and tracking hours worked.

Most Significant Benefits. Employers identified the most significant benefits to having a PS intern as having getting additional assistance with recurring office maintenance and routine tasks; the opportunity to contribute to the advancement of individuals with disabilities; employing conscientious, hard worker; and increased tolerance on the part of staff.

Most Significant Challenges. Employers identified PS interns’ most significant challenges to workplace success as lack of professionalism and social interaction skills, and difficulty staying focused on task.

Satisfaction with Interns. The majority of employers were “very satisfied” with their PS interns (n=22), seven were “somewhat satisfied,” and five were “neutral.” None were “somewhat dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied.”

Permanent Employees Hired Through Project SEARCH

Total Number of Permanent Employees Hired. Twenty-two of the 34 responding employers reported that they had hired a permanent employee through PS.
Satisfaction with Permanent Employees. The vast majority of employers who had hired a permanent employee through PS were “very satisfied” with the employee (n=19), although one was “somewhat dissatisfied” and two were “neutral.” None were “somewhat dissatisfied or “very dissatisfied.”

Project SEARCH Staff

Communication. Most employers were “very satisfied” with communication between PS staff and their job sites (n=27), and described PS staff as responsive and supportive.

Most Helpful Supports. Employers identified the following supports from PS staff as most helpful: regular check-ins; job coach support in training interns to complete tasks, develop checklists of tasks to be performed, and learn appropriate workplace behaviors; and trouble-shooting workplace difficulties.

Satisfaction with Supports Received from PS Staff. The vast majority of employers/supervisors reported being “very satisfied” with the support they received from Project SEARCH staff (n=29) (see Table 5), although a few reported being either only “somewhat satisfied” (n=3) or “neutral” (n=1). Further, one reported being “very dissatisfied,” although this person qualified their response by adding that they were only very dissatisfied initially, as support from Project SEARCH staff improved over time.

Change in Frequency/Quality of Supports. Employers occasionally noted a reduction in frequency of PS staff support when they hired a permanent employee, but agreed that the quality of support did not change.

Motivation for Involvement in PS. The most common reasons for choosing to participate in PS included: supervisor suggestion that the department get involved with the program, a desire to increase workplace diversity, word of mouth, having a family member or friend with a disability, and a desire to improve workplace morale.

Willingness to Hire PD Interns and/or Employees in Future. The majority (n=29) would consider hiring additional PS interns or permanent employees in future, although a significant minority (n=5) would not.

Prior Experience

Prior Experience with Employees with Disabilities. The majority of employers did not have prior experience hiring or supervising employees with intellectual and learning disabilities (n=21), but a surprisingly high number (n=13) did.

Concerns about Employees with Disabilities. Employers frequently identified the following concerns they originally had about hiring/supervising an individual with intellectual or learning disabilities: reduced productivity, quality control, and negative attitudes of coworkers. Twelve employers reported having no concerns.

Addressing Concerns. The majority of employers reported that PS had done “very well” addressing employers’ original concerns about hiring/supervising an employee with intellectual or learning disabilities (n=22), although seven reported that PS had only done “somewhat well,” and four were “neutral.” None felt that Project SEARCH had addressed concerns “somewhat poorly” or “very poorly.”