

Project SEARCH at Children's Hospital Colorado was started in 2010 and has always relied on collaborative efforts. Over the years this team has grown into a truly outstanding collaborative, dedicated effort from the agencies and teams behind it. The collaborative efforts of this team have led to increased availability to funding, resources and services provided to the young adults in the program. It has also created a Project SEARCH program at UC Health allowing more students to participate. Jefferson County Workforce Center partners with Project SEARCH which offers another avenue to leverage resources and funding available to the program. Workforce has been able to provide expertise of career specialists as well as resource funding for the participating youth. This resource/additional funding source come specifically from the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act Program (WIOA). The types of services funded include training and youth development programs for young people who have left school, as well as education and employment supports for young people still in school. Specifically, WIOA supports can include work experiences, skills training, leadership development activities, supportive services, mentoring, financial literacy and transition activities.

The WIOA program has been able to provide many avenues of supports that are key to success. Funding has been made available for supportive services (i.e. transportation, clothing/uniforms etc.). Beyond supportive services, funding has been incorporated into Independent Living Skills assistance to help with budgeting, healthy lifestyle choices and even social events.

- Food assistance money has been provided in the form of grocery store cards and hospital cafeteria gift cards. This not only has provided the young adults with the means to purchase food while on site but has been beneficial in developing social and time management skills. Additionally, this support has allowed coaches to work with the participants on budgeting and appropriate food choices - a very valuable skill. In some cases food gift cards have been provided to allow participants to begin working on independent living skills in regards to creating shopping lists, pre-planning meals, purchasing food and preparing food.
- WIOA funds have also been utilized in the form of an incentive/reward. As this is an unpaid work experience the team felt it important to offer some method to recognize good work evaluations. Correlating with the rounding reports (every 4 weeks) that evaluate work performance a metric was developed to track progress and "reward" good evaluations. Supervisors are asked to evaluate on a 1-5 scale. Upon receiving the evaluation the scores are correlated with a small stipend (5=\$50,4=\$40 etc...). It was thought initially that incentives would be used for fun, spending money for the participants. The participants however have started to save the money as a group and partake in social events outside of the job (dinner, game night - even registered for a weekend race!). These events have increased friendships, socializing and overall team cohesion.

WIOA supports can continue with each young adult until employment goals are met plus a year of follow up services post-program. Each young adult has a career specialists who works directly with them to identify their specific needs and what additional supports WIOA can offer. Workforce has become an integrated member of the team and a relied upon resource for all of the participants, their families and staff.

Outside of funding resources, the Workforce Center has been able to support the staff and coaches in delivering job readiness curriculum that include workshops focused on employment goals, career readiness and job retention activities.

Link to learn more:

<https://www.childrenscolorado.org/about/careers/project-search/>

This school year Jefferson County Business & Workforce Center supported 19 Project SEARCH students

- All 19 are scheduled to graduate in May 2019
- All have completed two unpaid work experiences which gave them skills necessary for the workforce
- So far 6 have been hired or will be hired by the hospitals