



## The Cincinnati-born transition-to-work model for students with intellectual disabilities is being implemented in Ontario for the first time



*The Project SEARCH partners: (L to R) Fabio Crespino, United Way Greater Toronto, Ron Felsen and Kathy Witherow, Toronto District School Board, Jeanette Campbell, Ontario Disability Employment Network, Meenu Sikand, Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, Angela Bradley, Community Living Toronto, Sue Jewell, Toronto Rehab-UHN. (Photo: UHN)*

(Toronto - June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019) - Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN), Toronto District School Board (TDSB), The United Way of Greater Toronto, Community Living Toronto, and The University Health Network's Rehabilitation Institute (Toronto Rehab) partners together to bring international Project SEARCH model to Toronto.

Project SEARCH Toronto and partners celebrated the launch of the international, transition-to-work program for youth with intellectual disabilities. Beginning this September for their final year, ten carefully selected high school students from across Toronto will participate to gain the marketable skills needed for employment. The Project SEARCH model has been implemented across 600+ sites worldwide and upon completion, about 75 percent of the students find gainful employment within a year of graduation.

“Together with Toronto Rehab, we are so pleased to co-host the first ever Project SEARCH cohort in Toronto,” said Meenu Sikand, executive lead, equity, diversity and inclusion, Holland Bloorview. “We look forward to fostering great experiential learning opportunities for these co-op students, while also playing a role in creating social change and building the business case

for an equitable, diverse and inclusive workforce for youth with disabilities today and in the years to come.”

The Project SEARCH program model was introduced to Ontario 18 months ago, as an innovative best practice by the Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN). "After convening champions from private and public sector, and securing the community support funds from United Way of Greater Toronto, we are thrilled at the commitment and partnership that has brought Project SEARCH Toronto to life" said Jeannette Campbell, CEO of ODEN.

United Way Greater Toronto's Career Navigator program is an important partner for Project SEARCH Toronto. Career Navigator is the signature program of United Way's 10 year Youth Success Strategy and promotes success for youth facing multiple barriers through interconnected education, training, job placement, soft skills and wrap-around supports.

“Together with Toronto Rehab, Holland Bloorview looks forward to co-hosting the first ever Project SEARCH cohort in Toronto,” said Meenu Sikand, executive lead, equity, diversity and inclusion, Holland Bloorview.” Susan Jewell, senior vice president and executive lead, Toronto Rehab, noted, “Participating in Project SEARCH feels like a natural extension for us at Toronto Rehab. We feel privileged to help youth with disabilities develop the skills and confidence they need to compete in today's job market.”

“The value of Project SEARCH's hands-on approach to skill building and the independence they promote is immeasurable,” said Brad Saunders, CEO of Community Living Toronto. “Community Living Toronto has helped hundreds of people with intellectual disabilities across Toronto find meaningful employment. We are excited to be a partner in bringing this innovative program to our city so that we can continue to break down barriers and create a society where everyone can thrive.”

Students will spend 10 months studying and doing co-op placements in non-clinical roles at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital and UHN Toronto Rehab. A typical day begins and ends with classroom instruction, led by Toronto District School Board (TDSB) teacher, Lisa Cunha de Freitas, at UHN Toronto Rehab's Rumsey-Neuro Centre. Topics focus on life skills that will help make students successful in the work place, such as money management and building professional communication skills. Students are supported at their co-op placements by the teacher and job & skills developers from Community Living Toronto. After graduation, Community Living Toronto provides personalized employment support so students secure quality jobs.

Project SEARCH is powered by partnerships. The Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) and United Way Greater Toronto have been instrumental in mobilizing funding and

community support, in partnership with the two hospitals, TDSB and Community Living Toronto.

### **About Community Living Toronto**

Since 1948, Community Living Toronto has been a leader in developing community-based services and supports for people with an intellectual disability and their families. One of the largest organizations of its kind in Canada, Community Living Toronto provides services and support to over 4,000 people and their families across Toronto. Our mission is to change the lives of people with an intellectual disability by giving them a voice, and supporting their choices where they live, learn, work and play.

### **About the Ontario Disability Employment Network**

The Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) is a professional body of employment service providers united to increase employment opportunities for people who have a disability.

We have over 100 member agencies, all in the business of helping people with a disability get into the workforce. Members are from every corner of the province and support people of all disability types. Beyond Ontario, we have connections with organizations in most provinces and territories of Canada.

### **About Toronto Rehabilitation Institute**

The Toronto Rehabilitation Institute helps people overcome the challenges of disabling injury, illness or age-related health conditions to live active, healthier and more independent lives.

### **About Holland Bloorview**

Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital creates a world of possibility by supporting children and youth living with disability, medical complexity, illness and injury. Holland Bloorview is a top 40 Canadian research hospital that is fully affiliated with the University of Toronto and serves over 7,500 families annually. Providing both inpatient and outpatient services, Holland Bloorview is renowned for its expertise in partnering with clients and families to provide exceptional care and is the only organization to ever achieve 100 per cent in two successive quality surveys by Accreditation Canada. Holland Bloorview is a founding member of Kids Health Alliance, a network of partners working to create a high quality, consistent and coordinated approach to pediatric health care that is centred around children, youth and their families

## **About United Way of Greater Toronto**

As the largest non-governmental supporter of social services in the region, we're dedicated to creating the opportunities people need to improve their lives and build a better future. Our work is fuelled by ground-breaking research and powerful partnerships, which allow us to identify gaps and responsibly mobilize volunteer and financial resources for the most direct impact: effecting positive and lasting change, right here where we all live, work and raise our families.

-30-

## **Contact Project SEARCH Toronto:**

[contactus@projectsearchtoronto.ca](mailto:contactus@projectsearchtoronto.ca)

