

The Arc of New Jersey – Project HIRE Fiscal Year 2018 Summary

Project HIRE has been assisting individuals who live with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining competitive, integrated employment in the community for more than 35 years. Each year, we like to highlight some of Project HIRE's achievements and look ahead to ways we can expand the agency for the coming year.

Fiscal Year 2018 – The Stats

31 field staff members

4.79 average years working for Project HIRE

14 New Jersey counties served

33, 454 service hours logged

650 individuals served monthly

245 individuals placed in competitive employment

Staffing

Supported Employment agencies have a reputation of combating extremely high staff turnover rates. High turnover in direct support staff can negatively impact services. Additionally, retaining quality staff is vital to Project HIRE's success as we regularly promote from within. This is directly related to the fact that the average length in time working for Project HIRE is nearly 6.37 years for administrative positions held. Project HIRE is proud of the field staff members that provide direct support every day (and night) to participants at his or her job. When it comes to hiring practices, Project HIRE strongly believes that hiring employees who live in the communities they are serving improves services for participants and retention for Project HIRE employees. Our team enjoys the work they do because they are directly impacting the community, in which they live, in a positive way. The program employed an average of 38 field staff that have been with the agency for an average of 4.8 years. Finally, Project HIRE staff turnover rate is 16% compared to the 2018 industry average of 44%.

Growth in Services Provided

Project HIRE is committed to providing Supported Employment services across the state of New Jersey. Historically, these services consisted mainly of connecting participants with work opportunities or supporting participants on the jobs they have obtained. While these services still make up the majority of services provided, fiscal year 2018 gave the program the opportunity to expand into more areas and serve new participants who may not have been able to access services in years past.

The first area of note is Project HIRE's Transition Services. This service is designed to work directly with New Jersey school districts to provide students who live with disabilities with integrated work experiences in the communities they live. With the addition of DVRS funded Pre-ETS services, the program has been able to reach more students than before and is currently working with almost a dozen students in New Jersey through these services. While FY 2017 experienced significant growth (22% increase) in services directly provided to school districts, 2018 experienced a decline of 25% from FY 2017. The decrease is attributed to multiple school districts deciding to administer transition services internally, with support services provided by school aides, which resulted in Transition Agreements not be approved or greatly reduced compared to years past.

Project HIRE's Adult Services has seen an expansion in the types of services they are able to provide through referrals from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS). While there are many new services available, the most significant for Project HIRE is still Trial Work Experience. Trial Work Experience is a service that aims to identify how potential Supported Employment participants can benefit from DVRS services. Early in the introduction of this service, Project HIRE made a goal to become *the* Trial Work Experience provider in the state. Staying true to its word, Project HIRE Trial Work Experience reports are continuing to be used as an example by DVRS Central office when training other providers on how to properly vend the service. During fiscal year 2018 the program provided more than 800 hours of Trial Work Experience activities, a 23% decrease from FY 2017. There was no turnover in staff members completing TWE assessments and no complaints regarding services, the decrease appears to be related to inconsistent referrals and decreased number of hours required to complete assessments.

Plans for the Next Fiscal Year

Transition Services is a primary area in need of growth for Project HIRE. Using feedback from school districts he plans to remodel the services offered to districts and better align them with the needs students have that school districts cannot provide internally. Early suggestions include job placement activities for students nearing graduation, expanded job sampling experiences that are more individualized and will result in documented performance data to be used by schools and eventually by DVRS after the student graduates.

For the next fiscal year, the program director plans to focus on continued expansion in new DVRS service areas such as Trial Work Experience. Late in fiscal year 2017, the program director designated a Trial Work Experience Job Developer. This Job Developer currently has a full-time schedule consisting only of Trial Work Experience activities. The director will plan a campaign to connect with local DVRS offices on this topic.

During fiscal year 2018, Project HIRE provided services to the second Project SEARCH graduating cohort in Union County. Project SEARCH provides a select group of students with the opportunity to participate in a comprehensive internship and training program at the Overlook Medical Center in Summit, New Jersey in place of his or her last year in high school. The 2017/2018 Project SEARCH cohort was a success and the program met all required benchmarks. Four students from the graduating class are now gainfully employed with the Overlook Medical Center in career areas such as hospitality, maintenance and IT. Project HIRE was again chosen as the provider for the 2018/2019 cohort and is excited to pursue continued positive outcomes for the next graduating class.

The Division of Developmental Disabilities Supports Program continues to grow as more individuals are “flipped” to the new fee-for-service system. Another area of potential growth is the expanded number of services that can be provided for individuals who are seeking employment or even preparing to seek employment. By utilizing the services offered under Career Planning and Prevocational Training, Project HIRE will be able to provide more robust pre-placement services to individuals all over the state. These activities can include, job sampling/career exploration, soft skills training/preparation, assessments and seeking alternative employment for individuals who are under-employed or looking for a career change without leaving their current job.

Project HIRE works with individuals referred from multiple funding sources and must adhere to the requirements from each unique source. Individuals receiving supported employment services through the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) are experiencing a shift to the Supports Program in which providers must report and bill for services directly to Medicaid. Through staff training and working collaboratively with DDD supported employment monitors, the program director aims to meet and exceed the Medicaid requirements for documentation, reporting and submission of claims. The Supports Program expands the scope of supported employment services for DDD participants and Project HIRE is excited to provide new services such as Prevocational Training and Career Planning to qualifying participants.

Utilization of technology to improve service accuracy, quality and efficiency is another focus area for Project HIRE. The program director will be personally training staff members on ways in which technology can be used to enhance services for our participants. The program will also implement technological solutions for everyday business such as performance tracking, training and employee schedules. For the next fiscal year, a new electronic monitoring system will be selected. This system will better manage participant goals and help staff continue to improve documentation while making reporting the day to day work of direct support professionals easier and more efficient.

In these ways Project HIRE will continue its success, grow in influence and maintain its positive reputation in the Supported Employment sphere.