

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, June 6, 2023

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: PROJECT SEARCH IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

FROM:

Michael Coroneos, Deputy City Manager, Corporate Services, City Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer

ACTION: FOR INFORMATION

Purpose

The report provides a summary of Project SEARCH, a program that supports people with disabilities to overcome employment challenges, during its pilot in the City of Vaughan from September 2022 to June 2023.

Report Highlights

- The City of Vaughan collaborated with the York Catholic District School Board and Community Living York South to implement a pilot project of the Project SEARCH program, which aims to address the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in York Region to successfully transition from high school to gainful employment.
- Key successes include the integration of the program within several City of Vaughan departments and Vaughan Public Libraries allowing interns to acquire transferable job skills and experience with an overall reported positive impact on participants and staff.
- Eight (8) students graduated from the program.

Recommendation

1. THAT this report be received for information.

Background

Local and national data demonstrates a need for evidence-based programs to address challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. In response, the City of Vaughan collaborated with York Catholic School Board and Community Living York South to implement Project SEARCH.

Project SEARCH is an internationally recognized program designed to provide hands-on work experience and training for young adults with developmental or intellectual disabilities in their final year of high school. The program objective is to enhance their employability and promote inclusion in the workforce through a combination of classroom instruction and hands-on career training.

Aligned with the 2018-2022 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan's priority area of Active, Safe and Diverse Communities, Project SEARCH advanced the 2019-2022 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, which sought to eliminate barriers and promote employment for people with disabilities.

Previous Reports/Authority

[PROJECT SEARCH – EMPLOYMENT FOR PERSONS WITH DIFFERENT ABILITIES](#)

Analysis and Options

The program consists of an 11-month pilot as a collaborative partnership between the City of Vaughan, York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB), and Community Living York South as approved by Council. In September 2022, ten (10) interns were assessed, selected, and immersed in the onboarding, employment, and job skills training followed by internship placements within the City of Vaughan.

The Project SEARCH model represents a positive shift from traditional internship and volunteer opportunities, providing interns with the chance to engage in meaningful work.

Key successes of the program include:

- Internship within various departments allowing interns to acquire substantial meaningful work experience.
- Strong collaboration between City staff, partners and all stakeholders dedicated to helping interns secure employment.
- Overall positive impact on participants with interns, parents and partners reporting improvements in the confidence, motivation, decision-making, self-esteem, and health of interns throughout the program.

- Beneficial outcomes for hosting departments that include positive changes toward inclusive culture among staff.

Financial Impact

Project SEARCH costs have been allocated to the capital and operational budgets of both the Human Resources and Recreation Services departments. Additional expenses incurred encompass IT equipment, onboarding resources such as access cards, software acquisition, and allocation of staff time. The pilot project was funded through a combination of municipal funds and external grants secured by YCDSB and Community Living York South. The total budget allocated by the City for the project in 2022 was \$31,821.00. Most of the expenses were related to training, staff time, and logistical arrangements for hosting the internships. Additional costs included marketing and promotion of the program.

Operational Impact

During the pilot project, eight (8) students completed internships in the following departments:

- Animal Services
- Human Resources
- Facility Management
- Infrastructure Delivery
- Parks Forestry and Horticulture
- Recreation Services
- Transportation and Fleet Management
- Vaughan Public Libraries

As a result, participants gained valuable hands-on work experience, and the City's departments benefited from a more inclusive and diverse workforce.

The project was overall successful with few operational challenges that included:

- Lack of dedicated full-time staff resources to manage and coordinate the program to ensure a consistent and high-quality experience for all stakeholders,
- At times, the ratio of interns to skill trainers was below the recommended Project Search requirements, support required by the participants due to labour shortage issues.

The York Catholic District School Board recently indicated they do not have funding to sustain the program and contribute and supply students with an in-class instructor. The lack of funding from our partner and their inability to provide an instructor will not allow

the program to continue in its current model. Furthermore, a City dedicated staff resource may be required in the future for monitoring, implementing the program and supporting city staff mentors.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the pilot project demonstrated a positive impact and highlighted potential benefits of implementing Project SEARCH in the City of Vaughan. Staff will utilize 2023 Q3 to Q4 data to analyze the financial impact and explore strategies focused on alternate and sustainable program models. This will involve assessing the program's staffing needs, exploring potential funding sources and building partnerships with other organizations to ensure its sustainability and long-term success. By addressing these challenges and securing the necessary resources and support, Project SEARCH has the potential to become an invaluable tool for promoting inclusion and diversity within the city's workforce.

The City Council will be provided with a report that includes detailed finances by Q1 2024, outlining proposed strategies and funding options to implement Project SEARCH and expand the scope to adults living with disabilities.

For more information, please contact:

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Attachment

None.

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