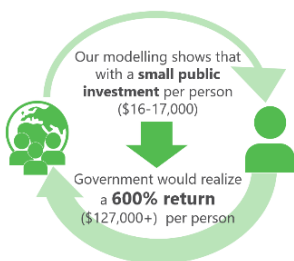


Expand access & impact: Project SEARCH Ontario



Project SEARCH¹:

- Provides **comprehensive workforce development training for students with disabilities** and special education needs to transition directly from their final year of high school to work.
- Consistently achieves **65-70%+ employment rates** of graduates in **complex, systematic roles paying above minimum wage**. This is more than 2x higher than Canada's reported 26-30% employment rate of individuals with severe disabilities.
- Grew from 2 sites (2019/20) to **19 sites** in Ontario in 2024/25. Interest continues to grow **but communities struggle to start and sustain this effective program**.
- Achieves its **unique results** with transition best practice components and by **braiding funding and expertise from education, employment and developmental disability sectors**.
 - Students immerse at a host business for hands-on work experiences enhanced by explicit teaching of work life skills.
 - Each cohort of 10 students is guided by 1 teacher (education partner) and 2 skills trainers (employment support partner).
- Faces a **sustainability and access crisis** - because **employment support organizations lack funding for the vital skills trainer role**. Cost per student estimated at \$16,000. Employment organizations are withdrawing support and sites may close or underperform.
- Could boost economic inclusion, address labour shortages² and **deliver strong cost-benefit**³.



- Graduates have the technical and employability skills needed to be part of Ontario's labour force.
- For every graduate that achieves the typical outcome of a job \$1-2 above minimum wage within 6-9 months of graduation:
 - Individual benefits from economic and social inclusion.
 - Lifetime cost savings to government is estimated at ~ \$127,000.
- With 27 sites and 189 students projected for 2025/26, if government enables funding for skills trainers the anticipated net lifetime cost savings is \$12-13 million. (Detail next page)

Funding options:

- 1 Make 1-year increased DSO Passport allocation to students accepted to Project SEARCH.
- 2 Prioritize accepted Project SEARCH students from waitlist for DSO employment support funding and flow funding to employment service/developmental disability support provider during Project SEARCH training year.
- 3 Other option for adjusting applicable funding parameters

Detail - cost benefit projections:

	Reference year 2024/25 (actuals)	2025/26 (projections)	2026/27 (projections)	2027/28 (projections)	2028/29 (projections)	2029/30 (projections)	Total funding required (5 years)
# sites (growth to 25/26 actual, projected up to 4 new sites/year)	19	27	31	35	39	43	
# students (projections based on 2024/25 median=7)	125	189	217	245	273	301	
Estimated costs for 1/2 sites requiring 1 skills trainer for cohort size 6 students or less (\$80,000)	n/a	\$1,080,000	\$1,240,000	\$1,400,000	\$1,560,000	\$1,720,000	
Estimated costs for 1/2 sites requiring 2 skills trainers for cohort of 7-10 students (\$160,000)	n/a	\$2,160,000	\$2,480,000	\$2,800,000	\$3,120,000	\$3,440,000	
Total cost/year	n/a	\$3,240,000	\$3,720,000	\$4,200,000	\$4,680,000	\$5,160,000	\$21,000,000
Projected lifetime government cost savings based on 70% graduates obtaining expected employment outcomes and cost benefit analysis ³	\$11,142,075	\$16,846,817	\$19,342,642	\$21,838,467	\$24,334,292	\$26,830,117	\$109,192,335
Net benefit (cost savings) at 70% employment rate (858 employed graduates)		\$13,606,817	\$15,622,642	\$17,638,467	\$19,654,292	\$21,670,117	\$88,192,335
Projected lifetime government cost savings based on 65% graduates obtaining expected employment outcomes and cost benefit analysis ³	\$10,346,213	\$15,643,473	\$17,961,025	\$20,278,577	\$22,596,128	\$24,913,680	\$101,392,883
Net benefit (cost savings) at 65% employment rate (796 employed graduates)		\$12,403,473	\$14,241,025	\$16,078,577	\$17,916,128	\$19,753,680	\$80,392,883

Contact us:

- Carolyn McDougall, Manager, Employment Pathways, Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital and Ontario/Canada Coordinator, Project SEARCH, cmcdougall@hollandbloorview.ca
- Ingrid Muschta, Director, Special Projects & Innovation, ODEN, imuschta@odenetwork.com

¹ [Policy brief: Remove system barriers to expand access and impact: Project SEARCH transition to work model for Ontario's youth with disabilities](#)

² As of November 2024, Ontario had a job vacancy rate of 2.6%, with approximately 177,900 unfilled positions <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250130/t003b-eng.htm>

³ [Cost benefit model](#)