



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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SRHC presented Yellow Brick Road Award after 15-year partnership with Project SEARCH–Kansas

(June 8, 2026) – Salina Regional Health Center was recently presented the Yellow Brick Road Award by Project SEARCH–Kansas for its 15-year partnership as a business host site for the program, which teaches job skills to young adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Salina Regional Health Center hosts the program in collaboration with the Central Kansas Cooperative in Education, USD 305 Salina Public Schools, OCCK, Inc., Workforce Solutions, Inc., Kansas Rehabilitation Services and Independent Connection.

Over the years, 157 students have graduated from the Salina program and 76% have gone on to find employment in the regional workforce. There are currently 16 graduates of the program who are employed across Salina Regional Health Center’s system of hospitals and clinics.

Across Kansas, high school graduates with disabilities have an employment rate between 16% and 17%. Many may not have had access to a workforce transition program like Project SEARCH.

“Many Project SEARCH students are not sure what they want to do with their lives as they enter the program,” said Cheryl Laaker, Project SEARCH–Kansas statewide coordinator. “They don’t realize the potential they have after high school graduation, like their peers do. But, as they move through internships in Project SEARCH, we begin to see them develop. And when they complete Project SEARCH they’re prepared – not to just move into an entry level position – but to move into a career.”

Salina Regional Health Center was one of the original host sites for Project SEARCH–Kansas when it first began organizing in 2010 – along with the University of Kansas, Lawrence

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Memorial Hospital, Wichita Public Schools and Newton Medical Center. Today, Project SEARCH is hosted at 16 locations across the state, which are part of a growing worldwide movement that is changing the face of employment for young adults with disabilities.

Salina Regional's affiliate hospital in Concordia, North Central Kansas Medical Center, also serves as a host site for Project SEARCH–Kansas. Project SEARCH was founded at Cincinnati Children's Hospital in 1996, which created the original curriculum for the program that is largely still in use today.

The Salina program accepts up to 14 students a year, and most of them are recent graduates from area high schools. To qualify for the program, students must have a disability identified by an Individual Education Plan or by a medical provider. Students accepted are those who will most likely have difficulty finding employment on their own.

"This program has had a significant, positive impact on area families," said Ardis Bryan, Project SEARCH instructor at Salina Regional. "Many families may have never thought their young adult could be working, and many weren't sure what they were going to do after high school graduation.

"Through this program these students learn to be more confident, take on responsibility and become more independent," Bryan said. "My favorite part is when they call years down the road – after completing this program – after finding employment. Some have bought their first car, or moved into their own apartment. A couple have even purchased their own homes."

Students in the program complete three, 10-week internships in differing departments around the health center. Each intern goes through an interview process for hire and a resignation process upon completion of each internship. Students work alongside hospital employees, receive instruction from their co-workers and take shifts like they would in an actual employment situation. An emphasis is placed on mastering soft business skills like teamwork, showing up to work on time, not abusing breaks, dressing appropriately and following directions.

"We're proud of the partnership we have with Project SEARCH and all that it has accomplished over the last 15 years," said Joel Phelps, President and CEO at Salina Regional Health Center. "It's simply phenomenal to see the growth these young men and women accomplish each year. We're also pleased to have added a number of these Project SEARCH graduates to our team where they fulfill vital roles in the delivery of health care services. We take pride in being a part of building a future for such special people."

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