

PROJECT SEARCH PARTNERSHIP

**Sarah Wood, Healthy Living Coordinator
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In September 2016, I was asked to come to the Mayo Employee Fitness Center to show young adults with disabilities how to use fitness equipment as part of the Project Search initiative. The Project Search model involves an extensive period of training and career exploration, innovative adaptations, long-term job coaching, and continuous feedback from teachers, job coaches, and employers. As a result, at the completion of the training program, students with significant intellectual disabilities are employed in nontraditional, complex, and rewarding jobs.



Little did I know that this opportunity would turn into a one of the best parts of my job! After the equipment orientation, everyone wanted a designated fitness day each week, and wanted me to supervise them. It soon became known as “Fitness Thursday.” Every Thursday, the 11 interns, 2 job coaches, and the teacher would come to the fitness center for an hour and work out. Their workouts would vary between cardio, strength training, stretching, and dancing. Getting all the interns and job coaches, as well as the teacher and myself, dancing in the fitness studio brought ear-to-ear smiles all around. Most people would say working out isn’t fun, but when you find a group of people and a form of exercise you like, it doesn’t even feel like you are working out!

As I got to know the interns, job coaches, and the teachers even more, this group really started to touch my heart and bring a smile to my face every Thursday morning. The interns have such joy and happiness within them; they don’t care what anyone thinks, and they just let their beautiful personalities shine. That really hit home for me, since I am someone who is cautious and often wonders what people may think. This group allowed me to grow as an individual and be more comfortable in my own skin. I am very thankful to be a part of the Project Search–Eau Claire family and look forward to the new group of interns in the fall.