

## SWWC's Project SEARCH Wins Award

The Minnesota Rural Education Association (MREA) honored Greater Minnesota schools with the 2015 Profile of Excellence Awards on November 16 at an Awards Banquet in Brainerd held in conjunction with the MREA Annual Conference: Great Beginnings. The Profile of Excellence Award recognizes innovative programs and efforts that serve as an example of educational opportunities for rural students.

Project SEARCH, a program of Southwest West Central Service Cooperative (SWWC), won Honorable Mention. Project SEARCH is a transitional high school for young adults with disabilities who live in southwest Minnesota. Students must be age 18-21, have a diagnosed disability, have met their academic graduation requirements, and benefit from attending one more year of high school.

The goal of Project SEARCH is to provide young adults with skills and work experience to support them in obtaining and maintaining competitive community employment. The program fills the critical community service gap for young adults with disabilities who have a desire to obtain gainful community employment but lack real world experience and will likely not have the opportunity to attend a technical college or university.

Avera Marshall Regional Medical Center has been the host business partner site since the program began in the fall of 2013. Avera Marshall provides internship opportunities for the students in areas such as materials distribution, dietary services and human resources.

Project SEARCH's first graduating class (May 2014) is 60% employed. Three of the graduates have been with the same employer for over a year, and one graduate recently left a job to accept new employment. Of the graduating class of 2015, 5 of the 6 students are employed and have met their 90 day employment goal. All of the graduates are receiving employment support from Vocational Rehabilitation and Advance Opportunities. Advance Opportunities also provides long-term job coach support (beyond 90 days) to ensure long term job success.

The partners who were instrumental in starting Project SEARCH, and who continue to be involved in the program's success, include: Avera Marshall Regional Medical Center (host business), SWWC (fiscal agent/provides teacher), Advance Opportunities (provides job coach and job placement services), Vocational Rehabilitation (funds job placement and short-term support), area school districts and Minnesota West Community and Technical College.

To learn more about Project SEARCH, visit our website and watch our video!

[www.swsc.org/ProjectSEARCH](http://www.swsc.org/ProjectSEARCH)



Pictured (l-r) receiving the award: MREA Board President, Dr Chris Mills; SWWC Board Member, Maggie Kluver; SWWC Sr. Director of Teaching and Learning, Lisa Gregoire; SWWC Board Chair, Maydra Maas; SWWC Board Member, Dr. Kathryn Kelly; and SWWC Executive Director Cliff Carmody.