

A Model-Setting Approach for Putting High Barrier Individuals to Work in Metro Atlanta

By Joy Wilkins, CEcD

FOSTERING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AT THE MOST PERSONAL LEVEL

In 2011, Goodwill of North Georgia, Inc. and partners launched an intensive suite of services to help individuals overcome significant barriers to employment. These services were delivered through a program known as *GoodTransitions* that took place from July 2011 to June 2015 through funding provided by the U.S. Department of Labor. *GoodTransitions* helped 387 individuals attain the competitive employment needed for transitioning to a better life. Participants included low-income, non-custodial parents who were not paying their child support obligations. The Goodwill team helped participants rise above these challenges not only to take better care of themselves but also, in many cases, their children. In doing so, they fostered economic development at the most personal level.

Advertisement

INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL



Accredited Economic Development Organization



INTERNATIONAL
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
COUNCIL

The Power of Knowledge and Leadership

Become an Accredited Economic Development Organization (AEDO)

The AEDO designation recognizes the professional excellence of economic development organizations and provides them with useful feedback on their operations, structure, and procedures.

The benefits of AEDO status include:

- ★ Increased visibility
- ★ Exclusive use of the AEDO logo
- ★ A profile in IEDC's bi-monthly newsletter
- ★ Participation in the Annual Meeting of AEDO Organizations

For more information go to: www.iedconline.org Or call: (202) 223-7800

a model-setting approach

FOR PUTTING HIGH BARRIER INDIVIDUALS TO WORK IN METRO ATLANTA

By Joy Wilkins, CEcD

People with seemingly impossible-to-overcome barriers can be found in every community, large and small, urban and rural. Oftentimes, these individuals may see themselves as unemployable, or find that the world around them deems them to be so. As a result, regardless of the level of job creation and business growth generated within a community, these individuals are at risk for being further and further left-behind.

An increasingly important question facing the economic development profession today and into the future is as follows: what can be done to help high-barrier individuals – those facing major obstacles from participating in the workforce and economy – rise above their challenges and become productive members of society? To help answer this question, following is a case study on one high-performing and model-setting program that took place in Georgia. This program involved dynamic partnerships among workforce developers, human services providers, employment specialists, business connectors, employers, and mission-driven funders.

INTRODUCTION

It was through a four-year demonstration grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor in 2011 that Goodwill of North Georgia, Inc. and partners launched what they referred to as the *GoodTransitions* program, an intensive suite of services that moved the needle with respect to helping people rise above significant barriers to become gainfully employed. Helping individuals overcome significant barriers to employment is nothing new for this Goodwill, an organization that recently celebrated



Photo courtesy of Goodwill of North Georgia, Inc.

its 90th anniversary and has long had a highly successful track record in serving individuals and employers throughout north Georgia. With this said, individuals served through the *GoodTransitions* program collectively represented above average challenges to overcome.

The purpose of the grant was to see if providing transitional training jobs – along with training in job readiness skills, soft skills, life skills and occupational skills – actually helps high barrier individuals to obtain and retain employment. In addition to training and placement, this grant sought to provide participants with intensive wrap-around, supportive human services for long-term impacts – an approach that has long been modus operandi for Goodwill. By design, those served through this particular program were low-income, non-custodial

Joy Wilkins, CEcD, is an advisor, speaker, facilitator, instructor, and author on community development, economic development, and leadership development matters. (joy@servingcommunities.net)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
Special thanks to Marylee Putnam, former Goodwill program director for *GoodTransitions* and Reuben Lawrence, former Goodwill case manager, for providing extensive information on the program's operations and outcomes. Views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of Goodwill, its current or former staff, or anyone affiliated with the agency.

FOSTERING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AT THE MOST PERSONAL LEVEL

In 2011, Goodwill of North Georgia, Inc. and partners launched an intensive suite of services to help individuals overcome significant barriers to employment. These services were delivered through a program known as *GoodTransitions* that took place from July 2011 to June 2015 through funding provided by the U.S. Department of Labor. *GoodTransitions* helped 387 individuals attain the competitive employment needed for transitioning to a better life. Participants included low-income, non-custodial parents who were not paying their child support obligations. The Goodwill team helped participants rise above these challenges not only to take better care of themselves but also, in many cases, their children. In doing so, they fostered economic development at the most personal level.

Goodwill served as the lead organization for the *GoodTransitions* program, which the agency did throughout the program's duration. The program was led by a member of the senior management team within Goodwill and, at its peak, included a collaborative and multidisciplinary partnership among 17 staff members within the agency.

al parents with open child support orders, and helping these individuals meet their child support obligations was also a desire for both grant administrators and program leaders.

By its conclusion in June 2015, the *GoodTransitions* program had exceeded the performance goals set forth by grant administrators – putting a total of 387 individuals to work with area employers. Individuals served through the program hailed from six counties in metro Atlanta – Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, Gwinnett, and Henry counties. With the assistance received, program participants were hired for good jobs that enabled them not only to take better care of themselves but also, in many cases, their children. In doing so, the Goodwill team fostered economic development at the most personal level.

A COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVE FROM THE START

GoodTransitions would not have been possible without outstanding partnerships from the very onset and throughout the course of the program. The \$5.7 million demonstration grant from the U.S. Department of Labor was designed in consultation with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Justice. The Georgia Department of Human Services' Division of Child Support's Fatherhood Program invited Goodwill to partner in applying for the grant. After Goodwill was awarded the grant, the two would later partner in launching the *GoodTransitions* program and recruiting potential participants.

The program's success was also made possible with the collaborative efforts of a number of other external partners in the Atlanta area. Beyond the Georgia Department of Human Services, other key partners included:

- **The United Way of Greater Atlanta:** provided \$250,000 in start-up funds to cover needed expenses not covered by the grant, such as transportation costs for the participants.
- **Area Workforce Investment Boards:** provided referrals for the program.
- **The Urban League of Greater Atlanta and The Center for Working Families, Inc.** (nonprofits that offer workforce development services): provided training in soft skills and job readiness for program participants.
- **Families First** (a nonprofit that focuses on connecting, strengthening and sustaining families): visited with program participants to help them deal with

access and visitation and to develop better communication with their children and the custodial parent.

- **Atlanta Regional Commission:** helped with forming partnerships with businesses to provide transitional and permanent jobs.
- **Morehouse College and Georgia State University:** served as program evaluators. Evaluations by these institutions of higher learning yielded insights that not only informed Goodwill's efforts during the *GoodTransitions* program but future efforts as well.

Goodwill served as the lead organization for the *GoodTransitions* program, which the agency did throughout the program's duration. The program was led by a member of the senior management team within Goodwill and, at its peak, included a collaborative and multidisciplinary partnership among 17 staff members within the agency.

AIMS OF THE PROGRAM

To meet the directive of the demonstration grant, the *GoodTransitions* program aimed to serve men and women, age 18 years old or older, who were low-income, non-custodial parents with open child support orders. Beyond these qualifying characteristics, participants could also be unemployed or underemployed individuals, dislocated workers, people with disabilities, high school dropouts, people with criminal records and other disadvantaged individuals.

Also, while Goodwill provides training and job placement services to numerous populations, through *GoodTransitions*, the agency focused on serving a specific targeted population. This resulted in an exciting opportunity to learn how to serve a specific cohort and consider which approaches work best given their unique needs and interests. It also revealed some insights into common needs shared by these individuals.

In order to receive grant funds, Goodwill committed to the following performance goals:

- Enroll 500 non-custodial parents into the *GoodTransitions* program.
- Provide transitional training jobs and supportive services, such as assessments, case management and help with transportation for program participants.



Photo courtesy of Goodwill of North Georgia, Inc.

Goodwill Employment Specialist Quandarius Brinkley works with *GoodTransitions* participant Anthony Davis on his résumé.

- Assist with placing 60 percent of the program participants into competitive employment.

Goodwill's performance was also measured according to goals set for the participants after they were placed in a permanent job. For example, grant administrators wanted to see an average wage of \$9.00 per hour earned by program participants placed in a permanent job. The majority of placed individuals were also expected to retain their jobs for a measurable period of time. Last but not least, program leaders hoped to see at least half of the participants meet their child support obligations upon being gainfully employed.

RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

Goodwill and partners recruited more than 3,000 candidates through a variety of outlets. In order to determine who should be enrolled in the program, Goodwill implemented Assessment Week, a boot camp of sorts that proved to be a successful process for screening and qualifying program candidates.

The *GoodTransitions* team worked through a number of important details in order to launch Assessment Week. For example, where were the sessions going to be held, and what tools would be used to assess the participants? Who was going to lead the sessions, and what additional materials would they need? After a significant amount of upfront planning, the team held the first Assessment Week in November 2011.

On average, Assessment Weeks were conducted twice a month for two years until program participation goals were met. During these weeks, the team reviewed each candidate to assess eligibility for grant services. They weighed considerations such as whether a candidate could get a job on his or her own, needed help in vocational rehabilitation beyond what Goodwill could provide, and whether the person could be truly helped through this program. Candidates also had to meet certain financial guidelines, and, if male, they had to comply with selective service registration requirements.

According to program leaders, at least 30 percent of those attending the first day of Assessment Week sessions did not return. While some individuals did not meet

Photo courtesy of Goodwill of North Georgia, Inc.



Goodwill Employment Specialist Ameedah Williams assists GoodTransitions program participant Ronald Clark in one of Goodwill's Career Centers.



Photo courtesy of Goodwill of North Georgia, Inc.

GoodTransitions program participant Robert Felder shows Goodwill Director of Information and Training Jonathan Wilson some of the products he merchandises daily at his new job at BJ's Wholesale Club.

income or selective service requirements, it was understood that several individuals did not return because they did not want to submit to a drug test.

Once eligibility was determined, evidence of motivation, reliability, and dependability was most important for selecting participants for the program. The attendees would do group exercises led by a vocational evaluator. Case managers, job coaches, and employment specialists were in the room to observe, assess and assist as needed.

The team used a specific rubric for recommending whether participants were appropriate for the program and could move on to random assignment. Some participants were referred to vocational rehabilitation or provided other help if they were deemed to be not a good fit for the grant program. Rubric considerations included:

- **Punctuality and attendance:** Did the participant attend course sessions on time and work productively?
- **Curiosity (ability to ask appropriate questions):** Did the participant make an effort to understand and clarify concepts?
- **Motivation:** Did the participant demonstrate interest in course material and participate in skills training?
- **Critical thinking, reasoning and problem solving:** Did the participant resolve assigned or encountered problems with/without help?
- **Writing sample:** Did the participant's writings demonstrate an understanding of concepts?
- **Employment history:** Did the participant work in the last three months to two years, and was this work consistent or moderately consistent?
- **Criminal background:** Did the participant not have a serious criminal background?

For each rubric area, participants received a score of "2" for having an above average performance, "1" for average and "0" for below average. Those individuals who

GoodTransitions program participants received a full array of services available through Goodwill. As an early step and before they were placed in a transitional job, participants received training on sexual harassment prevention because program leaders identified this as a leading and essential educational need.

received all “2s” did not qualify for *GoodTransitions*; they did not appear to have significant barriers to obtaining competitive employment on their own. Those individuals who received a cumulative score of less than “6” were deemed to need assistance beyond *GoodTransitions* and referred to an appropriate resource.

After a three-month ramp-up, the grant allowed two years to enroll all participants in the program. From November 2011 to November 2013, a total of 1004 individuals were deemed to qualify for the program and assistance. Of these, a total of 504 participants were randomly selected to be served through *GoodTransitions*.

What surprised program leaders was the largely homogenous nature of the group beyond the common characteristics of being low-income, non-custodial parents with open child support orders. For example, most of the participants were male and had a criminal background.

PUTTING PEOPLE TO WORK

GoodTransitions program participants received a full array of services available through Goodwill. As an early step and before they were placed in a transitional job, participants received training on sexual harassment prevention because program leaders identified this as a leading and essential educational need. Next, they were introduced to the concept of creating their Individual Employment Plan (IEP), a plan they would continue to work on with Goodwill staff throughout their participation in the program.

The participants also took a Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) assessment with a vocational evaluator. Case managers helped participants review their career and financial goals, assess whether their goals were realistic, and consider their talents, what they could do to support their families, and what additional training was needed to help them reach their goals.



Goodwill partnered with Atlanta Toyota to deliver training for participants to become Certified Forklift Operators.

HOW ECONOMIC DEVELOPERS CAN GET INVOLVED

Economic developers are usually the main conveners, connectors, and facilitators of dynamic collaborations among multiple stakeholder groups within the communities they serve. Ever so importantly, they are the main connectors to area business owners and other employers. In many cases, they are also able to stay in tune with other community-based organizations that are focused on helping high-barrier individuals develop the skills needed by businesses and other employers and participate in the workforce and economy.

From a big picture standpoint, economic developers can provide the macro view with respect to industry trends and needs in order to strategically inform workforce developers, employers, and individuals alike. In addition, given they are usually uniquely positioned to know who is doing what, where, and for whom in their respective communities, economic developers can serve as the *bridge* between the workforce developers, employers, and individuals. Facilitating connections and fostering regular communication among and between these three parties so that workforce development efforts best align with employer needs is an essential role economic developers can play in serving their local constituencies.

Indeed, economic developers have the potential to serve as the “marriage counselor” between people and the economy.

While many grants are designed to have participants partake in upfront training for some length of time and then be placed into competitive employment, this grant was different. *GoodTransitions* participants started working in their transitional training job during the week immediately following Assessment Week, enabling them to earn money right away. To make this happen, participants were placed in jobs at Goodwill stores so they could work while receiving training and supportive services. Upon arrival, the participants were given a clothing card to buy clothes from the store so they could meet the dress code.

Regarding the training, beyond basic job-readiness training, staff considered whether there was any specific occupational skills training that Goodwill could offer during the course of the program that would help improve the participants’ chances at employment. The training provided was highly individualized to fit participant needs. Examples of training arranged by staff to help participants included Occupational Safety and Health Administration certification, commercial drivers’ licenses, CPR and first aid certification, forklift certification, floor tech certification or apartment maintenance certification.

Program participants were assigned a job coach who evaluated their work habits (punctuality, general attitude and demeanor, dealing with co-workers and supervisors, serving customers, handling work flow processes, managing conflict, etc.) at the stores and provided feedback to participants on a daily basis. The participants continued to receive training every day on job readiness while earning a paycheck at their transitional job site.

ABOUT THE JOB CLUB

On Fridays, instead of working at their transitional jobs (whether at Goodwill or a community site), participants were required to attend a job club. Initially, individual clubs were held at each Goodwill store that served as a transitional job site. The program would vary week to week and was customized to meet participant needs as determined by the job coaches.

Participants received coaching on preparing their resume, preparing for an interview, and calling on employers. They learned from employment specialists about job searching techniques and specific behaviors that would improve their chances for getting a job. They also received further guidance from their job coach and case manager on how they could become more ready for the workforce. The participants were paid to attend the job clubs.

In April 2013, the clubs at each store were combined into one larger Job Club for all participants. While the clubs were a helpful experience for participants beforehand, the combined Job Club reached new heights in terms of value and impact. Program leaders see it as one of the best things to come out of *GoodTransitions*. They noticed a different level of creativity and freshness among participants as they came together from various transitional job sites.

Participants were able to interact with and learn from peers and Goodwill staff they did not work with or see regularly. The unified club was observed to bring new energy to the participants' experiences, as well as provide more channels for encouragement and reinforcement.

Over time, the Job Club training became more in-depth. Sometimes the training was provided by Goodwill staff and other times it was provided by partners. Job coaches, case managers and employment specialists were all on site so that participants could benefit from multiple perspectives. Participants received training on topics such as:

- Anger management,
- Balancing work and home,
- Basic computer skills,
- Building a positive relationship with your boss,
- Career planning and salary negotiation,
- Conflict resolution,
- Customer service,

Throughout the time of their assignment, their job coach advised them on their tasks at hand, how to carry out directions, and how to get the job done. Job coaches provided ongoing feedback and guidance on what participants needed to change in order to be employable. They also provided daily encouragement to them. Case managers were on site periodically and as needed to meet with and provide individual counseling and support to participants, as well.

As participants improved at their Goodwill store jobs, their job coach and case manager determined when they were ready to move on to a community site. This was a transitional job with an employer contracted by Good-

- Diversity in the workplace,
- Effective communication skills,
- Financial management,
- Getting along with co-workers,
- Goals and motivation,
- How to keep a job,
- Interviewing skills,
- Problem solving and decision making,
- Resumes and cover letters,
- Sexual harassment prevention,
- Stress management,
- Succeeding at job fairs, and
- Workplace safety and health.

In addition to this training, the Job Clubs provided a venue for other learning activities. Program participants eventually developed and led some of these activities. They started a book club, led discussion groups, and invented new group activities. As an example of the latter, they created a financial literacy game for participants to take home and play with their children.

What impressed program leaders most was how Job Club participants bonded and developed a genuine camaraderie and concern for each other. They assisted staff with identifying and addressing participant needs. As one example, one participant delayed his start date for a competitive employment position for three weeks until he researched the new health insurance laws and made sure everyone in the club understood the laws and signed up for coverage.

Even after graduating to competitive employment, program alumni often returned to the Job Club to offer words of encouragement and share their real-life experiences and stories with participants. They talked about how they had to pull themselves together and accept help to find employment, and their stories resonated with the participants. Their words of advisement about the importance of listening to the case managers, job coaches, and employment specialists also provided impactful reinforcement. The alumni experienced firsthand that the program worked, and they were eager to let others know about it.

will. Community site employment provided participants with greater autonomy than their previous transitional jobs. Job coaches were not on site and there were typically not many (if any) other program participants on site, either.

Case managers checked in on participants regularly, and continually monitored and assessed their progress. This was an important precursor and step toward moving into competitive employment, that is, a permanent job provided by a regular employer. Participants received assistance with purchasing tools, clothes, glasses and anything else needed for the job.

Once a participant was deemed ready for competitive employment, the case manager completed a Participant Employment Profile (PEP) and the individual was matched with an employment specialist. Prior to this point, the employment specialists visited job club meetings to provide job-seeking tips to participants. They also met approximately every two weeks with case managers to provide advisement about individual cases and situations.

Once an employment specialist was matched with a participant, he or she would search for possible jobs based on the participant's PEP and IEP. The specialist would look for a job that matched participant goals, skills and geography, and worked in tandem with the case manager and job coach to find a suitable placement.

Ultimately, each participant had three individuals – the case manager, job coach, and employment specialist – who served as an integrated team to help him or her be successful in transitioning from the program to the gainfully employed. Staff kept and shared meticulous case notes on their involvement with participants to ensure that everyone was “in the know” on important information for best serving them. They worked together to help participants to become job-ready, prepare for interviews, and become successful members of the workforce.

In addition to helping participants develop appropriate workplace behavior, the *GoodTransitions* team also helped them with developing realistic expectations. For example, some participants thought they could go to work immediately. Others were unaware of their barriers. Through the care and attention provided by the case managers, job coaches, and employment specialists, the participants were able to gain a better understanding about their limitations and their opportunities for gainful employment.

Goodwill case managers also helped participants with developing a better relationship with their children, when possible. They worked with the participants to tap into their innate desire to connect with their children, and provided counseling in this regard. Indeed, the key motive for many participants to stay in the program was the understanding that their participation could have a long-term impact on their children.

Throughout the course of their participation in the program, participants attended weekly “job club” meetings. The job club ultimately became a dynamic vessel for mentoring and peer-to-peer support which program

Throughout the course of their participation in the program, participants attended weekly “job club” meetings. The job club ultimately became a dynamic vessel for mentoring and peer-to-peer support which program leaders point to as a critical success factor. Once participants moved into competitive employment, they were considered graduates of the program.

leaders point to as a critical success factor. Once participants moved into competitive employment, they were considered graduates of the program.

ABOUT THE PATH TO EMPLOYMENT

Dealing with a criminal background was viewed by participants as their most challenging barrier to employment. Staff saw the lack of transportation also as a lead barrier. Other challenging barriers identified by a team with Georgia State University included poor mental health and self-esteem, substance abuse and addiction, lack of job-seeking skills, computer illiteracy, reading illiteracy, poor communication skills, and lack of housing. The *GoodTransitions* team worked with each participant individually to overcome these barriers.

Despite these barriers, some participants did well in rising above them during the course of the program. Not surprisingly, however, others did not do so well and had to repeat some steps. For example, some participants did not transition to their community site well and had to return to a Goodwill store for further training. Likewise, some participants struggled in competitive employment and had to be re-assigned to a transitional job at a Goodwill store or a community site. Several participants had to be placed in competitive employment jobs more than once. Program leaders indicated that a lack of impulse control was a leading cause.

When a participant exhibited certain negative behavior (poor attitude, frequent lateness, conflict with others, trouble following direction), job coaches would address it immediately and the case manager would make a note of it. After the first instance, the participant received a verbal warning. After the second instance, the participant had a conversation with their case managers about the negative behavior (what shouldn't have been done) and explored ways to stop such behavior (what can be done better in the future). After the third instance, a written “behavioral contract” was developed with the participant, with specific action steps for preventing the negative behavior.

The decision on how to proceed with difficult situations depended upon the severity and specifics of the case. With the goal of helping participants go back to work and keep their jobs, Goodwill staff did not seek to dismiss participants from the program but sought earnestly for corrective ways to address the challenge. In



Photo courtesy of Goodwill of North Georgia, Inc.

Large employer partnerships allowed for many different kinds of training opportunities, including the automotive center at BJ's Wholesale Club.

some cases, participants were placed on “interrupt” status (that is, a hiatus from the program) to take care of personal situations. They were allowed to return once they could again meet the program requirements.

Goodwill staff also determined if the participants needed more one-on-one coaching. For example, if participants did not show the same type of misbehavior until working outside a Goodwill store, staff would return them to the store to work with a job coach on addressing the problem.

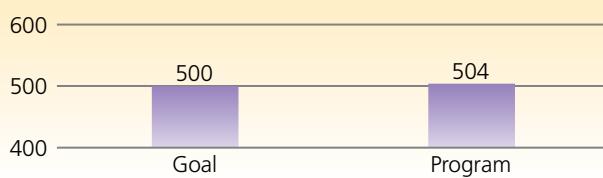
OUTCOMES

From the onset, Goodwill had agreed to meet certain performance goals with respect to:

- Number of program participants,
- Percentage of participants who entered work,
- Those who stayed working for three consecutive quarters,
- Those who were paying child support, and
- Average salaries earned by participants when employed.

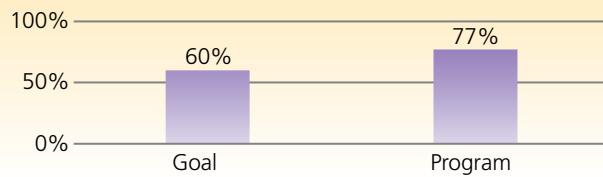
Goodwill exceeded each of these goals through the *GoodTransitions* program.

PROGRAM GROUP PARTICIPANTS



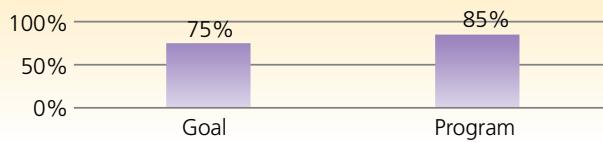
A total of 387 participants (77 percent of the 504 program participants) went to work through the program, largely in jobs with business employers. Staff made a total of 625 placements, as some participants were placed more than once.

PEOPLE PUT TO WORK



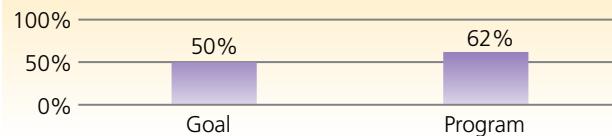
The following chart illustrates that the vast majority (85 percent) of the participants worked for three consecutive quarters after graduating from the program.

PEOPLE WORKING FOR 3 CONSECUTIVE QUARTERS PAST QUARTER OF PLACEMENT



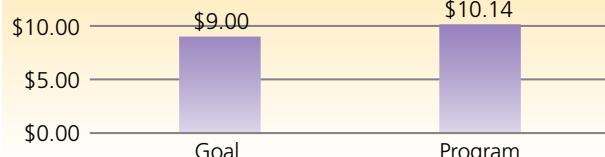
Nearly two-thirds of the participants made child support payments for three quarters past their quarter of placement, regardless of whether they kept their jobs.

CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENTS MADE THREE QUARTERS PAST QUARTER OF PLACEMENT



While the average wage per hour earned by participants was \$10.14, more than 40 participants earned hourly wages at \$14 and above. The highest wage earned was \$30 per hour.

AVERAGE WAGE PER HOUR



Ultimately, individuals with some of the highest barriers to employment – people with a criminal background – received life changing help. While this was not the intended focus of the grant, it became the focus given so many of the participants served through the program had a background for offenses beyond having an open child support order.

Goodwill staff successfully worked with participants to help them talk about and overcome their backgrounds and earn respect from their employers. Staff also leveraged trusted relationships in place with employers who agreed to provide job placements for the participants. Many participants were able to be reunited with their children and heal broken relationships with their loved ones. Participants also received essential help for dealing with mental health problems, substance abuse issues, and other obstacles holding them back. Goodwill exceeded expectations in helping these returning citizens rebuild their lives.

CONCLUSION

Four years and 387 changed lives later, Goodwill can look back at the *GoodTransitions* program with a feeling of great accomplishment. Experiences with the program confirm that it does take a multifaceted team (of workforce developers, human services providers, employment specialists, business connectors, employers and mission-driven funders) to help individuals with significant barriers overcome them and become gainfully employed members of our society. Such interventions not only help these individuals but also employers who repeatedly point to workforce issues as a leading concern with respect to maintaining or strengthening their competitiveness. What Goodwill accomplished through *GoodTransitions* is nothing short of economic development at the most personal level – helping individuals improve their productive potential to take care of themselves and their loved ones, and contribute to the world around them. ☺

LESSONS LEARNED

During the course of *GoodTransitions*, program leaders had the opportunity to develop, test and pilot a variety of approaches. Following are examples of some lessons learned as revealed from their experiences.

- **Assessment Week:** Including a team process for recruiting, assessing and vetting potential program participants was clearly the difference maker for ensuring that the right people were served through the program.
- **Transportation Assistance:** The lack of transportation is a leading barrier for participants who are struggling to make ends meet. Had assistance to take public transit not been available, several participants would not have been served through the program.
- **Holistic Approach:** Case managers, job coaches, and employment specialists working as a team to serve each individual participant provided a holistic, customized approach. Participants not only attained essential occupational skills but also the supportive human services to overcome job readiness and life management barriers.
- **Job Club:** The Job Club provided a valuable way for participants to stay connected and engaged with each other. Gathering regularly provided opportunities for valuable peer-to-peer learning and mentoring. In addition to receiving job search support, participants received help in developing essential life skills.
- **Dealing with Substance Abuse:** The high level of substance abuse among participants was beyond expectation by Goodwill staff. Program leaders identified intense training on substance abuse and its impacts as a core and mandatory component to ideally incorporate in similar programs offered in the future.
- **Partnering with Business:** Through building, maintaining and strengthening trusted relationships with businesses in the region, employment specialists were able to exceed program goals in placing participants in permanent jobs.
- **Importance of Credentials:** Many of the participants received an industry preferred certificate. Given that industry-preferred credentials are a major hiring criterion among employers, program leaders suggest that it become mandatory for all participants in such programs to earn at least one certificate.
- **Sustainability Planning:** Goodwill was not interested in simply executing a one-time program. Instead, the team followed a plan to apply the learning from this program in other efforts to serve through current and future programs, and also to sustain some of the momentum achieved during the program.

INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL



Accredited Economic Development Organization



INTERNATIONAL
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
COUNCIL

The Power of Knowledge and Leadership

Become an Accredited Economic Development Organization (AEDO)

The AEDO designation recognizes the professional excellence of economic development organizations and provides them with useful feedback on their operations, structure, and procedures.

The benefits of AEDO status include:

- ★ Increased visibility
- ★ Exclusive use of the AEDO logo
- ★ A profile in IEDC's bi-monthly newsletter
- ★ Participation in the Annual Meeting of AEDO Organizations

For more information go to: www.iedconline.org Or call: (202) 223-7800