

# Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for People with Disabilities Remarks

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Goodwill Industries of the Valleys, located in Central and Southwest Virginia, is headquartered in Roanoke, Virginia. We assisted over 87,000 people in 2014, many who were looking to improve their employment options, providing services to veterans, ex-offenders, dislocated adults, at risk youth, low income seniors and single head of household women and homeless adults. Of that number, Goodwill worked with 1,100 people with disabilities last year.

Our organization has three sites in which the 14(c) Certificate is used and it is used only for center-based, commercial contract services. The Roanoke, Radford, and Rocky Mount, Virginia locations were brought together via a merger in 2000. A combination of small city (Roanoke) and rural (Radford and Rocky Mount) work-centers, the 14(c) center-based program had over 300 people on the certification in 2003. Prior to the Great Recession, Goodwill had begun a process on Community Placement to allow for greater integration into Competitive Employment.

**Today** we have **69** people working under a special minimum wage 14(c) Certificate. In 2014, our transition efforts resulted in 42 participants moving off the Certificate. **26** individuals or **59%** moved up to or above minimum wage positions within Goodwill or into community jobs. **10** individuals or **24%** transitioned into Medicaid Waiver programs and are not performing work. Others retired from Goodwill programs, for health issues, age related challenges, or relocation (**6** or **14%**). At present, we are no longer placing participants with significant disabilities into center-based work under the Special Wage Certificate. Goodwill is using a community work adjustment program to assess potential

work skills and then a supported employment program to place and follow along with those who are most often referred to Goodwill through Virginia's Vocational Rehabilitation agency.

Of the **69** participants still on the Certificate, we are faced with increased challenges.

1. The vast majority of this group have **multiple and the most significant disabilities**. That would include people with Intellectual Disabilities often coupled with a visual, hearing, orthopedic or other mental health barriers. The transition of this population is more costly, time consuming and difficult because of long term supports offered by Goodwill. One such support is transportation. Lack of transportation is in fact the largest single barrier to community integration in a rural region such as southwest Virginia. We do not have a centralized public transportation system and many of our participants cannot drive nor have the means to purchase a reliable vehicle. Other supports that Goodwill provides would include community socialization events, (outings, picnics, dances) job related counseling, navigation of benefits as well as monitoring medications.
2. **The rural nature of our Goodwill Territory limits opportunities** for securing employment. The higher levels of unemployment of the overall workforce makes jobs more competitive and our 14(c) workforce often does not meet the job demands. Those job demands would include critical thinking, being able to work with computer technology, and accomplish complex tasks. The number and variety of job opportunities are limited in small towns and small business owners are looking for workers who can work in many different areas including customer service, cash handling, driving a vehicle or being able to communicate effectively.
3. **The shifting economic climate** has forced Goodwill to limit center-based work as commercial contracts have constricted. Many small businesses have had layoffs or closures because of offshoring or consolidations (mergers, buy-outs). Obtaining competitive community jobs for people that may have limited

educational or credential attainment is increasingly difficult. Businesses in Virginia are creating new jobs in advanced manufacturing, health care, technology and retail services. Not all of our current population and probably very few can easily develop competencies for these jobs.

4. **Some employers and members of the workforce have attitudinal barriers** that restrict opportunities for those that may act, talk or walk differently. You will find in some smaller communities that the era of accommodation is still not fully embraced and as such, jobs are not available for those that have the most significant disabilities. While we see mobility access available in most communities, it is not always the case in the smaller rural areas. We find that some people and some businesses are resistant to progress and change comes more slowly.
5. **Workers have choice.** That too becomes a barrier to community integration. After years of working in a network of friends, transition is not always welcomed. When routines change some new and perhaps unwelcomed work behaviors change. Workers may decide to act out, have verbal outbursts or simply shut-down.
6. **Job productivity is not always predictive or stable** with our current team members served with the certificate. We may see people cycle from being highly productive to very distracted and wandering from their assigned job. In some cases medication changes can be the cause and other cases are brought about by environment changes. Because of shifting nature of productivity, some participants may need to return to a center-based environment to reset before they return to competitive employment.
7. **Parents and care-givers often favor a more protective work environment.** We have had parents contact us and ask not to move their son or daughter out of

the work center because of a fear they have that their adult child would be mistreated or made fun of.

In the midst of the challenges, our Goodwill remains committed to creating opportunities for those who have the work and social skills for community integration. Opportunities like Project Search, geared towards our young adult population for on-the-job training in a health care environment.

Nicole was one of those success stories. She came from her High School as a shy unsure prospect. Collaborating with the local schools and the Virginia Department of Aging and Rehabilitation, she is now working as a valued member of the Carilion Hospital network. She had the opportunity to have a number of job tryouts in the hospital and was later hired by the hospital as a full-time employee with benefits. Nicole lives independently and owns her own car which she drives to work. This is an example of what can work, however, not everyone functions at the same level. Our Source America (Ability-One) federal set-aside contracts is a blended approach where we sometimes see progression towards greater individual independence. People are working at a competitive wage in a cohort environment within a network of supports and with co-workers which are often their closest friends.

At Goodwill, we believe in Person Centered Planning and Informed Choice. That means individuals are actively setting their vocational goals, assessing their skills and planning to work on how to address any works gaps they may have. People understand the decisions they make and accept personal responsibility for those decisions.

While there is no easy answer to this complex situation, by being aware of those challenges, we can engage people individually and work with them and their family members to determine the best course as they work towards integration at a level that is right for them.