

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

**Colleen Morrone, President and CEO
Goodwill of Delaware & Delaware County, Inc.
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Good afternoon, my name is Colleen Morrone. I am the president and CEO for Goodwill of Delaware and Delaware County. Our organization serves the three counties of the state of Delaware and Delaware County, Pennsylvania. We have been a part of the community for over 94 years. Since our founding, Goodwill's mission has been to improve the quality of life for people with barriers to self-sufficiency through the Power of Work. By empowering individuals to become more self-sufficient, Goodwill is helping to strengthen families, build communities and make a difference in the lives of residents of Delaware and Delaware County, Pennsylvania.

We do this by taking the generous material donations received from the community and selling them in our retail locations. These funds – and those generate by our industrial services, home medical equipment, temporary staffing businesses, and recycling initiatives – helped connect over 600 people to jobs in 2014. We also employ nearly 900 team members, making us one of the largest employers in the state of Delaware.

Understanding the needs of the local community and developing programs and services that address the complexities of overcoming the barriers to self-sufficiency is essential to Goodwill's success. Providing individuals with the skills necessary to become employed and helping them stay connected to the workforce is critical to those that Goodwill helps every year —especially those with a disability or disadvantage.

According to the US Census Bureau, in 2013, it was estimated that nearly 13 percent of Delawareans had a disability. Governor Jack Markell has been a strong advocate of policies that help with the employment of people with disabilities, making it his platform during his recent tenure as chair of the National Governors Association. Among the challenges to be addressed in today's competitive employment environment is the need for businesses to support the needs of individuals with disabilities by creating a culture of empowerment. Focusing on what individuals CAN accomplish and creating adaptive performance environments enables them to be productive and supports their personal goals.

The employment success of individuals with disabilities or disadvantages improves their self-esteem and helps family members and care givers with a measure of support knowing their loved one has become a more independent, self-sufficient individual. It is through these successes we wish to illustrate how, with the help of Goodwill, the following individuals have a better life and are able to support themselves, their families and to be actively involved in our communities.

Goodwill often provides a "second chance" to individuals who need to overcome a previous life event—whether a criminal background or long-term unemployment. These individuals often need resources and assistance to help them rebuild their lives and become valued members of the community. Having a criminal background or long-term unemployment can be difficult hurdles to overcome in securing a job; it becomes more difficult when you add a disability. Such is the case of George, who is responsible for maintaining a clean environment at our Recycling Center and Outlet.

George initially came to Goodwill as a referral from the Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. He had been struggling with mental health issues and complications from diabetes for several years. His situation was further complicated by a history of alcohol and substance abuse, an eighth grade education, and a thirty-year-old criminal background which included a felony and an escape from prison. George was enrolled in Goodwill's Industrial Cleaning Skills Training Program where he learned a new

set of marketable job skills that would enable him to rebuild his life. It was during this training program that his commitment to professional growth and development began to blossom. George shared that his motivation for self-improvement was forged during his time in prison where he committed to bettering himself in preparation for his release. Goodwill gave him the opportunity to restart his life despite his background and limited work experience.

After his training, George participated in a Job Club offered in Goodwill's community-based Job Resource Center where he worked diligently, submitting a multitude of applications with hopes of finding employment in industrial cleaning. George accepted a position at Goodwill's Recycling Center as a Donation Center Attendant. He quickly set himself apart from others by offering to work additional shifts, assisting other team members with assignments, and using his newly-acquired industrial cleaning skills to clean the restrooms and break room. George proved himself to be an exceptional worker and valuable team member. When the General Cleaner position at the Recycling Center became open, George was the logical choice to fill the vacancy.

Today, George continues to keep the Recycling Center and Outlet looking great, but, more importantly, he is a mentor and inspiration to his co-workers. With his personal motivation—and a little help from Goodwill—George is a shining example of how an individual with challenges can overcome their barriers to self-sufficiency.

For those with a physical or developmental disability, Goodwill provides training programs and a supportive working environment that enables them to improve their independence and self-sufficiency. Such is the case of Alyssa.

Alyssa's family knew very early that something was not right with her development. At the age of four, Alyssa was non-verbal. Her parents had decided to not let any issue stand in the way of a productive life for their daughter. During her last year of high school, Alyssa enrolled in our Goodwill's Project

SEARCH program which provides high school students with intellectual disabilities an opportunity to complete their last year of instruction while learning job skills in a work setting at Christiana Hospital.

During Alyssa's first day at Project SEARCH, it was clear her non-verbal days were long gone. With the excitement and innocence of youth, Alyssa shared her goals, which included living on her own, employment and growing her small business of designing pet toys.

While in the program, Alyssa was able to choose from a variety of internships that ranged from environmental services to stocking medical supplies to working with the medical and dental staff credentialing office. It was in this work that she found her passion.

Alyssa surprised herself and was pleased by her growth and success with the staff credentialing office. This success gave her the confidence to make a major life choice and pursue employment in a non-medical setting. Alyssa began a campaign to work for the State of Delaware. With her family's support, Alyssa began her quest by applying for a number of job openings.

As a result of her hard work and new skills, Alyssa secured a position in the offices of Rita Landgraf, Delaware's Secretary of Health and Social Services. Alyssa has continued to grow in skills and experience. She has blossomed into a young woman whose voice is heard as an advocate for herself and others as she is often called upon to speak publically about the possibilities for those with disabilities. This summer, Alyssa will celebrate her third anniversary working with the State of Delaware.

Goodwill also provides support for those who become disabled later in life through some event or situation. Such was the case for Doug, a long-term Goodwill employee.

In 1965, Doug was a recent high school graduate working in the steam room at a local leather manufacturer. When Doug and some friends were driving home from a party one night, he was involved in a motor vehicle accident. Doug sustained a traumatic brain injury and was in a coma for four months.

Unable to return to his job, Doug had to depend upon disability assistance from the government. While going through therapy, he was referred to Goodwill by the Delaware Division of Rehabilitation. At Goodwill, Doug entered the adjustment training/sheltered employee program.

Accustomed to working with his hands, Doug started at Goodwill by repairing donated bicycles and furniture. Over the years, Doug and Goodwill focused on what he could do rather than on what he couldn't do. This gave him the opportunity to support himself and eventually his family. Doug married in the 1980's and became the father of a son and daughter. He had a wide array of positions within Goodwill, working in the warehouse, receiving and sorting donations and completing light manufacturing tasks. Despite his limited mobility, Doug had many years of perfect attendance. He also participated in Goodwill's health and dental insurance plans and paid his individual employee contributions. He participated in Goodwill's retirement plan by saving 4 percent of his salary over a 25 year period and qualified for Goodwill's 4 percent match.

Doug is an example of the success of developing integrated work settings for persons with disabilities. He is representative of the population we serve in Delaware that enables us to pay all employees no less than minimum wage. In 2014, Doug earned over \$11 dollars an hour when the Delaware minimum wage was \$7.75 an hour.

At the end of 2014, Doug retired from Goodwill after 49 years of service. Goodwill gave Doug the opportunity to spend nearly 50 years being a productive, self-sufficient member of the community with the ability to support himself and his family, pay taxes and add value to society.

The success stories we shared with you today illustrate several principles outlined in a document titled, "A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities," authored by Delaware Governor Jack Markell. The blueprint focuses on the employment of people with disabilities and the role that states and other policy makers need to play in assisting businesses. The report also indicates that the number

of people with disabilities will double in the next 20 years because of returning veterans, workers acquiring disabilities during their careers, the aging workforce, and a new generation of youth with disabilities entering the workforce.

By **finding and engaging businesses** like Goodwill that want to employ people with disabilities, and applying strategies that promote employment for all, workers like Doug and George can have a long, rewarding career despite a disability or disadvantage.

All business, government, non-profit, education and for-profit can serve as **model employers** for those with disabilities. Simply by modifying their own employment practices and encouraging natural supports in the workplace, businesses can become leaders in hiring people with disabilities while encouraging other businesses to follow their lead.

In **preparing youth with disabilities for the workforce**, we can incorporate career-readiness content into their curriculum to establish an early emphasis on working and launching a career for those with disabilities. People with disabilities, 20 to 24 years of age, have an employment rate less than half of their typically-abled peers. When organizations like Goodwill partner with school districts to create innovative career-exploration programs like the Project SEARCH initiative in the Red Clay School District or the STEP-UP program in the Upper Darby, School District in Pennsylvania, students like Alyssa have an opportunity to learn new skills that will lead to a career, personal growth, and independence.

Please keep in mind these success stories and the challenges overcome by George, Alyssa and Doug as you make your recommendations on ways to increase opportunities for competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities. Thank you for the opportunity to share our Goodwill success stories of helping individuals overcome barriers to self-sufficiency through the Power of Work.