

*Key Workplace Documents*

*Federal Publications*

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Partnership in Action: Examples of  
Employer/Faith-Based and Community  
Organization Partnerships

United States Department of Labor; Center for  
Faith-Based and Community Initiatives



U.S. Department of Labor  
Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

# *Partnership in Action*

**Examples of Employer/Faith-Based and Community  
Organization Partnerships**

## INTRODUCTION

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This publication builds on the *Making a Difference Through Strategic Business Partnerships: A Guide for Faith-Based and Community Organizations* guidebook by providing a series of snapshots of partnerships between employers and faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs).

FBCOs bring unique assets to the task of assisting individuals looking for training and employment. This is particularly true with hard-to-serve populations who often need long-term, in-depth assistance to find and retain jobs. Research conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor has shown that people with multiple barriers to employment (immigrants, welfare-to-work populations, the disabled, ex-offenders and others) need the kind of effective, holistic care offered by FBCOs.

Training and support services, however, are only part of the employment equation. FBCOs working with hard-to-serve populations also need expertise in understanding the needs of businesses and shaping their programs to support those needs. Partnership in Action is designed to help FBCOs build better partnerships with employers by offering several different examples of effective collaboration.

Some of these partnerships are between an FBCO and an employer, and some include the public workforce system and its network of One-Stop Career Centers (One-Stops). Other partnerships include other social service providers, community colleges, and local government agencies. While the partnerships may all take different form, all are important and all provide valuable models upon which other FBCOs might build similar partnerships.

In each case, the FBCOs profiled demonstrate how they were able to build on their comparative advantage and partner with employers in a way that emphasized their strengths while providing value to their employer partners.

There is no right or wrong model for partnership between FBCOs and employers. Successful partnerships can be structured in many different ways. This publication documents some of these partnerships and how they can be beneficial for both FBCOs and employers.

Employment often strengthens families, communities, and is a core mission of many FBCOs. This publication lays out replicable models that many diverse organizations can utilize and duplicate. It is important to note that it will require patience and perseverance for FBCOs and employers to work and walk in partnership.

The mission of the Department of Labor Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (CFBCI) is to empower the faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs) that help their neighbors prepare for, enter, and thrive in the workforce. The CFBCI was created by Executive Order 13198 and this resource was created to effectively disseminate information to faith-based and other community organizations with respect to department initiatives.

Private entities in this document are included for informational or illustrative purposes and this should not be construed as an endorsement of these entities, their products or services by the U.S. Department of Labor.

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## THE JOBS PARTNERSHIP OF FLORIDA

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### Organizational Background

In 1996, the idea for Jobs Partnership was formed in Raleigh, North Carolina, out of a relationship between businessman Chris Mangum of C. C. Mangum, Inc., and Reverend Donald McCoy of Pleasant Hill United Church of Christ. Mangum and Rev. McCoy met during the construction of the Pleasant Hill United Church of Christ's parking lot and immediately developed a strong friendship. Over lunch one day, Mangum revealed a pressing need for employees, noting that many of his larger trucks were parked due to a lack of drivers. Rev. McCoy responded by saying there were several able-bodied men and women in his congregation that were also unemployed. The idea of helping each other meet their needs seemed both reasonable and intriguing.

Acknowledging that if one business and one church experienced this kind of need, Mangum and Rev. McCoy reasoned there must be others in the business and faith communities with similar needs. So they utilized their extensive networks within the business and faith communities to find twelve others businesses and churches with which to form a partnership. These partnerships shared a common mission of reaching out to, mentoring, training, and employing their unemployed and under-employed neighbors in Raleigh. Within a few weeks, Mangum and Rev. McCoy each successfully recruited twelve other participants to join together and form Jobs Partnership of Raleigh.

It became apparent early on that leadership would be necessary to develop this new partnership. Thus, eight pastors of various denominations joined forces with seven business leaders to form a steering committee that represented the faith-based and business communities of Raleigh. This committee developed a strategy to accomplish the mission of successfully transitioning their neighbors from unemployment to financial self-sufficiency. Utilizing the model of classroom education, a two-fold curriculum was developed to teach basic workplace skills and ethics, as well as the necessary tools to find and keep a job.<sup>4</sup> Pastors from partner churches promoted this workforce development initiative in their congregations and in the communities in which they serve in order to identify individuals needing jobs.

### Role of Churches

Pastors look for individuals who meet either of the following criteria:

- Unemployed - currently out of work
- Underemployed - currently working but in need of a more meaningful opportunity

Pastors then meet individually with each candidate to discern his or her commitment to the following process:

- Attend all classes of a 12-week training which meets two nights per week for two hours each night;
- Participate in an accountability relationship with a mentor assigned by the pastor;
- Complete all homework assignments in the student workbook; and
- Complete an application and Covenant Agreement detailing the commitments made by the individual, his or her mentor, and others supporting the individual's goal of finding and retaining employment.

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<sup>4</sup>This curriculum is copyrighted and available from the National Jobs Partnership—www.tjp.org

## Role of Employers

The employment provided to candidates is one of the keys to the success of The Jobs Partnership. Partner businesses agree to:

- Showcase career opportunities and internal career ladders;
- Register their current job openings with The Jobs Partnership;
- Seek to employ qualified referrals;
- Provide employee benefits;
- Provide a “coach” on the job; and
- Offer feedback to the church sponsor.

Not only do partner businesses gain access to talented referrals who have already displayed a commitment to personal and skill growth, but these businesses also serve a valuable role as they give back to their community by helping to build the workforce of tomorrow.

### Jobs Partnership of Florida

The Jobs Partnership of Florida (JPFL) affiliate was started in 1996 through an initiative of a business association—the Orlando Regional Chamber of Commerce. One of the greatest benefits associated with JPFL’s origination through a Chamber of Commerce was that JPFL staff had a clear and broad picture of the community, its employers and their particular needs, and its network of community providers and services.

JPFL’s approach to providing workforce development services is very employer-focused. All of the JPFL staff have business backgrounds and experience and are able to speak and interact with employers in ways that many FBCO staff are not. The staff members have an employer mindset and understand that their own operation is also a business.

In its early days, JPFL began by trying to offer its students childcare, transportation, and other supportive services. Since that time, the JPFL program has narrowed its scope and to determine what it can do best for its clientele—both employers and jobseekers.

Now, JPFL has clearly defined itself as a life skills training provider. First and foremost, it is a job training organization. Job placement will follow. Trying to provide the other services was not only distracting and overwhelming for JPFL, but it also prevented JPFL from providing the very best life skills training.

For all the other needs and concerns of its clients, JPFL looks for partners and collaborations. Among its partners are:

- **Charity Cars ([www.800CharityCars.org](http://www.800CharityCars.org))**  
Provides donated vehicles to struggling families willing to work and become self-sufficient, tax-paying members of the community.
- **Consumer Credit Counseling Service ([www.cccscfl.com](http://www.cccscfl.com))**  
Dedicated to providing the finest professional financial counseling and education services available.
- **Dress for Success ([www.DressForSuccess.org](http://www.DressForSuccess.org))**  
Helps low-income women make tailored transitions into the workforce. Each Jobs Partnership client referred to Dress for Success receives one suit when she has a job interview and a second suit when she gets the job.
- **Frontline Outreach**  
Provides academic and recreational programs for urban youth and their families in Orlando.
- **Goodwill Industries of Central Florida ([www.goodwillcfl.org](http://www.goodwillcfl.org))**  
Provides vocational and job placement services to individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment so that they may attain long-term employment, improve their lives, and become participating members of their community.

- **One-Stop Career Centers ([www.servicelocator.org/nearest\\_onestop.asp](http://www.servicelocator.org/nearest_onestop.asp))**  
Provides no-cost recruitment and employment services to businesses and jobseekers in the Central Florida region of Orange, Osceola, Seminole, Lake and Sumter Counties.
- **Orange County Public Schools - Workforce Education**  
Provides educational opportunities for learners that integrate technical and academic training to meet the employment and personal needs of individuals and the community.
- **Orlando Regional Chamber of Commerce**  
Provides access to member businesses interested in recruiting qualified workers.
- **Valencia Community College**  
Assists Jobs Partnership graduates in achieving career and education goals in a productive and efficient manner.

These partnerships have been developed over time and with great care. Some came about in response to the specific needs of JPFL's clients, while others were developed as a result of JPFL's various contracts and projects with the public or private sector. In each case, JPFL built the partnership by emphasizing its ability to provide life skills training that yielded job candidates who would be exemplary employees. JPFL was able to describe how the partnership would provide benefits to itself, the partner, individual job seekers, and employers.

By focusing on its core mission of job training, JPFL has been able to improve both its services as well as its funding from a variety of sources, including the County of Orange, the Orlando Housing Authority, and numerous independent sponsors.

As JPFL has grown, it has evolved from trying to place its graduates in many different fields to focusing on developing strong and extensive partnerships within targeted industries. These targeted industries were identified as those with high job growth, strong wages and benefits, and good internal career ladders.<sup>5</sup> These industries represented such a large number of employers in the employment base in Central Florida that JPFL was ensuring a continuous stream of job openings and opportunities for itself and its clients. As a result, JPFL is working extensively with employers in the healthcare and hospitality fields.

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<sup>5</sup> For further information about the high-growth job training initiative, visit: [www.doleta.gov/BRG/JobTrainInitiative](http://www.doleta.gov/BRG/JobTrainInitiative)

## Employer Partnership: Florida Hospital

Florida Hospital is an acute-care health care system that reports treating more than one million patients throughout Central Florida annually. It is part of the comprehensive network of seventeen hospitals in the Adventist Health System's Florida Division, and it is very open and receptive to partnering with faith-based organizations. As with most health care providers across the nation, Florida Hospital has been in a non-stop search for qualified employees—both in terms of technical skills and experience as well as interpersonal and soft-skill qualifications—for many years.

JPFL and Florida Hospital first met in the fall of 2001 to identify and prepare individuals who could be hired as Health Unit Coordinators (HUC). HUCs provide critical support to doctors and nurses in a given unit within a hospital or medical facility. Starting wages for HUCs, at the time, were \$9.05 per hour with benefits and frequent opportunities to work overtime.

The model designed between JPFL and Florida Hospital to meet this employment need purposefully includes the local vocational school and the local One-Stop Career Center (One-Stop). Students going through JPFL are given an opportunity to learn about the HUC position and its requirements, responsibilities, and potential career paths. If they are interested and if they pass preliminary screening, they are referred to the One-Stop Career Center to assess whether they are eligible for a ten-week training program available through a local vocational school. By having interested students work with the One-Stop to gain approval for a training voucher while still in the JPFL training, JPFL is able to streamline the process and ensure that students are able to continue their training and preparation process without interruption.

If the prospective employee passes the initial screening, students start their vocational training once they have successfully completed the twelve-week JPFL soft-skills training. The vocational school, in turn, conducts the actual job placement to the hospital, thus allowing JPFL to focus on life skills training.

### Employer Partnerships: Recruitment

#### Central Florida Air Conditioning Contractors of America

**The Central Florida Air Conditioning Contractors of America is a contractor association comprised of 42 member companies. Each member company reported having a hard time finding reliable long-term employees.**

**These companies endeavored to find a workforce development partner organization and, in the process, learned about JPFL. The companies were particularly impressed with JPFL's emphasis on, and success with, life skills training. The member companies have always been willing to provide hard skills and industry-specific training to their employees and support a joint apprenticeship program. What these companies have trouble with is finding employees with a basic commitment to work, including showing up on time, getting along, being trustworthy, and caring about doing quality work. As a result, JPFL is in the process of developing and implementing a partnership with the member companies.**

**While not all the details have been finalized and changes may be made following a pilot test, JPFL will commit to actively recruiting individuals interested in the trade by tapping into their own pool of clients and jobseekers, working with and advertising to its network of church partners, and partnering with local agencies to identify and screen potential candidates for employment with these contractors. After the screening process, interested candidates will go through JPFL's standard soft skills program. JPFL will then refer successful graduates to the contractor association. The association will define a process by which its employer members can interview these candidates and by which candidates have an opportunity to interview with more than one employer, providing both parties with choice and the opportunity to find the best match.**

## MOUNT LEBANON BAPTIST CHURCH

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### Organizational Background

Mount Lebanon Baptist Church has been serving the people of Washington, DC, for over a century. Located just a few blocks from Capitol Hill, Mount Lebanon focuses on helping its neighbors get back on their feet by serving individuals in need and their families. This holistic approach to ministry has led to Mount Lebanon becoming a bridge that connects the unemployed with employers in their neighborhood.

Mount Lebanon is a member of the Washington Interfaith Network (WIN), multi-faith, non-partisan organization composed of Washington, DC, faith-based and community organizations. Founded in 1996, WIN includes churches, synagogues, unions, and public school members, representing every section of the city.

As a church in an urban setting, Mount Lebanon focuses the core of its ministry on the economic health of its members, its community, and its city. Necessarily entailed in this ministry is providing holistic services to the poor in the community.

As such, Mount Lebanon, both on its own and through its membership in WIN, has traditionally worked with employers to find opportunities for jobseekers. Much of this work originated with construction firms, contractors, and the building trades. One key aspect of Mount Lebanon's partnership with these employers was a series job fairs, during which Mount Lebanon was able to identify, screen, and refer interested and qualified candidates for employment. In time, Mount Lebanon enjoyed a measure of success in placing jobseekers from across the Washington, DC, community with local employers.

In the early 1990's at a conference hosted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Senior Pastor Rev. Lionel Edmonds met the Director of Government Programs for CVS Pharmacy, Steve Wing. Steve commented on the difficulty CVS was experiencing in trying to find and hire qualified individuals for their stores throughout the Washington, DC, region. CVS had recently taken out an expensive ad in the Washington Post announcing a job fair, but no one showed up on the day of the event. Rev. Edmonds mentioned to Wing that he would be interested in hosting a job fair at Mount Lebanon and that it might bring in large numbers of qualified and interested candidates to interview with CVS. CVS accepted his offer.

### Employer Partnership: CVS Pharmacy

**Mount Lebanon Baptist Church and Washington Interfaith Network (WIN) have been running job fairs in Washington, DC, for a number of years. Prior to working with CVS, most of the job fairs had been for employers in the building trades. Currently, Mount Lebanon, WIN, the City of Washington, DC, and various trade unions are negotiating an agreement that would promote and ease the identification, screening, selection, training and placement of qualified candidates in the building trades to meet the construction boom in Washington, DC, including the redevelopment of the old convention center site. Under this agreement, Mount Lebanon and WIN will provide life and employability skills, the trade unions will enroll qualified individuals in two-year apprenticeship programs, and contractors will have a pipeline of certified and trained workers.**

Over the next six weeks Rev. Edmonds promoted the job fair each Sunday during services, encouraging parishioners to attend and to tell family, friends, and others throughout the community. Rev. Edmonds also made clear CVS's expectations and job requirements, including dress requirements and punctuality, as well as benefits offered by CVS, such as salary, training and development opportunities, and career advancement.

The job fair was held on a Sunday to take advantage of the fact that people would already be at Mount Lebanon and to ensure that job candidates were appropriately dressed. Mount Lebanon reports that more than 120 interested jobseekers showed up at the job fair with more than 75 percent received second interviews with CVS, and 40 percent hire rate.

Since that time, job fairs for CVS and other employers have been hosted by many of the faith-based organizations that are members of WIN. Since this initial event, CVS and the faith community in Washington, DC, have forged a strong bond committed to employing jobseekers in Washington, DC. While job fairs alone do not bind the partnership between Mount Lebanon and CVS, they are an example of an effective labor exchange in which an organization with access to a supply of labor assists in matching the labor to employers who have a demand for labor.

The real key to the successful partnership between Mount Lebanon and CVS is the trust that has been cultivated by repeatedly delivering a number of successful job fairs. When CVS is able to continuously hire qualified candidates brought to the job fairs by Mount Lebanon and when Mount Lebanon is able to continuously identify qualified candidates that CVS wants to hire, then both parties begin to learn the value and benefit of working together. Add to the mix a host of tangential benefits enjoyed by both Mount Lebanon and CVS—i.e., positive community relationships and exceptional public relations—and strong partnerships are both likely and expected to develop.

The partnership between Mount Lebanon and CVS has grown to include the public workforce system in Washington, DC. Based in large part on the success of this partnership, the Washington, DC, Workforce Investment Board is planning to build a One-Stop Career Center on the grounds of the Mount Lebanon Baptist Church. This project will be funded through both public and private resources. Specifically, CVS has already committed funds to provide equipment and training materials to support pharmacist and photo lab technician training programs that will be offered on site at the One-Stop Career Center.

***“CVS is a trusted and faithful partner in our community. I have partnered with CVS on several job fairs in which members of my congregation have found fruitful employment and have begun a prosperous and productive career with CVS.”***

—Rev. Lionel Edmonds, Senior Minister,  
Mount Lebanon Baptist Church and  
President/Co-Founder, Washington  
Interfaith Network

***“Building relationships with employers is a long, slow process. Be patient, honest, and committed.”***

— Rev. Lionel Edmonds, Senior  
Minister, Mount Lebanon Baptist  
Church and President/Co-Founder,  
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## BRAND NEW BEGINNINGS

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### Organizational Background

Brand New Beginnings started in the mid-1990s out of an advocacy coalition called the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless. The Coalition's mission was to work with women trying to become self-sufficient by securing appropriate housing, jobs that provide a living wage, daycare, and reliable and affordable transportation.

Brand New Beginnings secured and renovated an abandoned building for use as family housing. The building was selected because of its proximity to schools, bus routes, and other necessities for the residents. While the original purchase price was only \$350, according to [ ] the renovation into a 24-unit residential facility took more than seven years and cost approximately \$2.7 million. It is now used as low-income rental housing.

Brand New Beginnings operates a fully supportive program to help its on-site female residents. It has a social worker, job developer, and substance abuse counselor on staff. Brand New Beginnings places a strong emphasis on its residents securing jobs that provide a salary so that residents are able to save enough money to eventually move into non-subsidized housing. Brand New Beginnings provides pre-employment, soft skills, and basic computer training; resume development; access to dress-for-success services; and mentoring services to its residents.

### Employer Partnerships

Brand New Beginnings has established a network of employer partners. The first step in identifying an appropriate employer is to ensure that they offer a competitive wage, have flexible work arrangements and schedules, and offer training and advancement opportunities.

**FBCO Tips for Success:**  
**Be flexible, enthusiastic,**  
**visionary, and focused.**

Brand New Beginnings invests time and effort in researching its potential employer partners. It gets to know the employer, the employer's specific needs and expectations for employees, and the type of relationship the employer expects to have with an intermediary such as Brand New Beginnings. At the same time, Brand New Beginnings makes sure that the employer understands what it offers, the value it can bring to the employer's organization, the skills and abilities of its residents and clients, and how a partnership between the employer and Brand New Beginnings would work. Brand New Beginnings believes that Spending time early in the relationship to learn about the employer can ensure fewer problems down the road and a higher likelihood of a successful placement.

When it appears that there is a foundation for a good partnership, Brand New Beginnings helps the employer to better understand the women it will be referring for placement. This step is not necessarily intended to move the employers to change specific internal practices, but rather to sensitize the employers to a range of issues so that both the employer and the employee are more likely to succeed. Where and when appropriate, Brand New Beginnings assists employers as they improve flexibility and programs to provide on-the-job training to employees.

One of the keys to Brand New Beginnings' success is making sure it is referring someone who is ready to work, knows how to handle herself in an interview, and has demonstrated ample desire to work. Brand New Beginnings understands that it is sending someone out to an employer who is representing its organization, even though they are not on staff.

Brand New Beginnings has hired a job developer to lead its efforts to find and work with employers. The job developer utilizes a wide range of resources and methods when seeking out new employers, including personal outreach, referrals through word of mouth, access to business networks through members of its board of directors, use of employer lists made available through community partners such as community development corporations, and, when all else fails, cold calling.

Among Brand New Beginnings' more than 40 employer partners are a number of hotels, department stores, nursing homes, and the University of Chicago bookstore.

Following placement, Brand New Beginnings monitors and works with the employees to help them successfully complete the initial stages of employment. Many of its residents have limited and uneven work histories and may be tempted to leave a job over a range of issues that may be easily resolved.

To date, employers have not had to pay for any of the services and placements offered by Brand New Beginnings. Funding has come through foundations, donations from a variety of private sources, and grants at the city, state, and federal levels. Employers do, however, get access to a range of tax breaks as one benefit of working with Brand New Beginnings' clients.

Looking toward the future, Brand New Beginnings plans to expand its network of employers, reach out to more non-residents through flexible funding sources, and expand its funding base. It will seek to expand its services with employers in the health care field—especially in nursing homes.

## ANDERSON INTERFAITH MINISTRIES

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### Organizational Background

Early in 1989, a small group representing a number of Anderson, South Carolina's, churches and synagogues gathered to discuss their common concern regarding individuals in the community who needed help. The congregants recognized that many people in need received no assistance, while others in need received duplicate services from various churches or religious groups who assisted in buying prescription drugs, paying utility bills, providing food, and meeting other needs.

This group of congregants sought to form an organization of Anderson churches and individuals who would serve as a clearinghouse for Anderson's citizens in need. Letters were sent to all houses of worship in Anderson to solicit financial support and institutional and personal involvement. On May 7, 1990, Anderson Interfaith Ministries (AIM) opened its doors in a building donated rent-free by one of Anderson's local churches.

One common characteristic of AIM's clients is that most have an inconsistent employment background. AIM's philosophy of creating opportunities and encouraging responsibility fostered the development of "Women and Children Succeeding" (WACS). The major objective of WACS is to provide quality childcare for mothers who receive government assistance and have found the resources to continue or complete their education. Assisting mothers with childcare can create an opportunity for the mothers to become fully educated, trained, employed, and transitioned from a state of dependence to one of independence.

Over the years AIM has assisted families in the Anderson County area through:

- An emergency assistance program;
- The WACS program;
- Building ramps and making minor repairs for elderly and handicapped clients;
- Providing food items to the poor and hungry; and
- Seasonal programs such as back-to-school backpacks and Christmas gifts.

Part of the long-term solution to AIM's clients' challenges was to get clients into stable, sustainable, meaningful employment. In response to this need, AIM launched its workforce development program for those clients seeking to enter, or re-enter, the workplace in late 2004.

AIM runs life skills training classes once each week. These classes provide basic knowledge on how to obtain and retain employment and are taught by the expertise and experience of three volunteers—all of whom are either retired human resources managers or retired plant managers. These classes cover such topics as:

- Interviewing skills;
- Resume preparation;
- Job search skills; and
- Employer expectations, such as timeliness, ability to work in a team, basic communication, and respect for others.

In addition to teaching classes, volunteers also:

- Counsel clients about employment and career advancement;
- Assist with resume and interview preparation;
- Coach and mentor clients during the job search and following placement in a job;
- Conduct follow-up interviews with clients; and
- Seek out information from employers and clients as to how AIM can improve its services and processes.

## Employer Partnerships

AIM's executive director has primary responsibility for arranging partnerships with employers. One of AIM's principle employer partners is a nursing home in Anderson. AIM identifies and refers individuals who express interest and have the potential to become certified nursing assistants (CNA). AIM screens its clients and identifies potential candidates. AIM provides the candidate with an overview of:

- The CNA job and its requirements;
- The health and nursing field in general; and
- The employer, its work conditions, and the opportunities available to employees, including available career ladders and advancement opportunities.

AIM staff also checks the candidate's work history for experience in related jobs, interest in the position and the employer, and criminal background.

### Employer partnerships are about:

- Finding and referring qualified applicants
- Improving employee retention
- Supporting employer and employee aspirations and goals

### Employer partnerships are not about:

- Social services
- Charity

Qualified and appropriate candidates are referred to the nursing home once they complete AIM's soft skills training and/or other workforce development preparation.

The nursing home, in turn, agrees to provide employment and basic training for those individuals who meet the necessary qualifications. Because the individual will not yet be a licensed CNA, initial employment will be in a different position. If the employee decides to pursue a CNA nursing certificate while employed by the nursing home, the nursing home will pay for the training.

AIM also helps meet the employment needs for a local flooring company, an owner of a chain of convenience stores, a new Walgreens pharmacy and warehouse facility, and Save-A-Lot Grocery Stores. A partnership also is being investigated with CVS. Under this partnership AIM would work with the local community college to identify and refer interested and pre-qualified individuals into a pharmacy technician training program at the college for eventual placement at CVS.

*“AIM’s philosophy is to be a hand-up not a hand-out organization. In order to truly help people you have to hold them accountable, and they have to be willing to put forth the effort to change and improve their situations. Our soft skills program has given us another level of accountability for our clients.”*

—Tracey Whitten, Director of  
Special Projects

## THE WILKINSON CENTER

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### Organizational Background

Located in historic Old East Dallas, the Wilkinson Center offers services to one of the most diverse areas of North Texas. The Wilkinson Center offers encouragement, guidance, and support to a variety of clients, including the homeless, those new to the city, and those working but still in need of supportive services.

Primarily established as a food pantry, the Wilkinson Center began in 1982 when Clayton Lewis, pastor of Munger Place United Methodist Church, saw children digging in the church dumpsters for food. To respond to this need, Pastor Lewis began assisting neighborhood families by providing food and clothing.

The Wilkinson Center became a 501(c)(3) organization in 1994 and has since expanded its mission to proactively moving people from poverty to self-sufficiency. Today, the Wilkinson Center has grown into a multi-service facility. It reports assisting more than 16,000 people each year with food, clothing, employment assistance, after-school children's programs, and other emergency services.

The Wilkinson Center receives referrals by way of neighbors, other agencies, and church congregations. Based on the Wilkinson Centers's data, since its inception, over 250,000 people—half of them children—have been served by the Wilkinson Center, making it a trusted and integral part of the community.

### Employer Partnerships

In the mid-1990s, the Wilkinson Center launched an employment program, where staff and volunteers performed basic tasks, such as identifying job openings, setting up interviews with prospective employers, and providing bus passes to clients.

The Wilkinson Center staff and volunteers undertook an extensive search for model employment programs and practices relevant for faith-based community service organizations. Through their efforts, they discovered the WorkNet Career Development Program. The WorkNet program,<sup>6</sup> based on the premise that “no one is unemployable,” develops skills and provides a foundation of knowledge that allows for an individual to make his or her desired career a reality.

The Wilkinson Center adapted WorkNet for its newly launched CareerWorks program. Candidates enter this program exclusively by referral from other partner agencies, and the Wilkinson Center requests that referred individuals be job ready when they enter the program. These partner agencies specialize in and address a variety of issues, such as addiction, abuse, and mental health. Participants are primarily women and all are the sole means of support for one or more children. Most participants are also homeless or in imminent danger of becoming homeless.

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<sup>6</sup>For more information about *WorkNet*, visit [www.worknetsolutions.com](http://www.worknetsolutions.com)

Due to the intensity of the program, only ten participants are selected for the program each month. Through intensive support and developing a positive work ethic, hurdles such as physical and/or mental health, substance abuse, criminal records, and childcare are addressed prior to launching a job search. Clients that are determined to be most job ready are referred directly to the One-Stop Career Center for services and immediate placement assistance, as the One-Stop Career Center is particularly helpful for those clients who are both job ready and capable of conducting self-paced and self-directed job searches. Approximately 100 participants are enrolled in the CareerWorks program each year and each receives two years of follow-up consultation to support their success.

The CareerWorks program engages participants in intense self-evaluation. The CareerWorks workshops become each participant's job for four weeks. They come to learn which job or career path will align with past personal and work experiences and how they can attain employment in that or a related field. They are coached in the culture of business and learn how to present themselves honestly and positively. They follow the curriculum and work through detailed self-assessments, such as "Marketing Yourself on Paper" and "Marketing Yourself in Person."

The CareerWorks program also provides participants vouchers from a local thrift store to purchase professional attire for interviews and employment. A volunteer fashion consultant even comes in to assist with coordinating their selections.

The CareerWorks program reports a 70 percent placement rate for graduates in careers where they are highly motivated to succeed. They also have a much better understanding of the language and culture of business and are equipped with tools to contribute to the success of their employers.

The Wilkinson Center has also developed a mutually beneficial relationship with a local staffing company All Star Staffing Services in Dallas, Texas. All Star Staffing has strong employer ties and specializes in working with individuals with criminal records or other significant barriers to finding traditional employment.

The Wilkinson Center believes they are building the foundation for a long-term strategic relationship. All Star Staffing has hired or found work for many CareerWorks program graduates to date, some of whom are hired by All Star itself until an appropriate position opens up. These graduates benefit from a few additional months to develop their talents and work on their employability skills.

The CareerWorks program is funded through a combination of public and private grants and individual donations. In addition, the CareerWorks program is attempting to develop a partnership with the local Workforce Investment Board, either as an approved provider or through some other means.

**"What can you do for my business?"**  
**At some point any good employer will ask you this question. You should be able to answer convincingly in less than three minutes by describing two to three specific services that will meet the specific needs of that employer.**

***"An agency needs to be flexible and willing to embrace new methods of service delivery when working with people who have extensive barriers to employment. Creating a program that helps build self-esteem and allows our students to dream has made a world of difference in our success rate for finding long-term sustainable employment."***

—Clayton Wright, Program Director, The Wilkinson Center

## THE SOURCE

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**Executive Director**

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### Organizational Background

In Grand Rapids, Michigan, over the last six years, there have been several connected efforts to address the challenge of lifting low-wage, entry-level workers out of poverty, while increasing the retention of these workers and thereby reducing employer costs.

As part of its Reducing Poverty Initiative, the Delta Strategy, a community problem-solving nonprofit organization, established the Employer Practices Group—a collaborative of business, nonprofit, and governmental organization leaders. This group developed a concept for an employee resource center sponsored by businesses and supported by the resources of nonprofit, government, and educational institutions. The goal of this model was to enhance the retention of low-wage workers and the development of all workers.

Butterball Farms, one of the members of the Employer Practices Group, took the lead in bringing this concept to life. The company enlisted eight other employers on the near southwest side of Grand Rapids to explore the possibility of implementing the concept as a model program called the SOURCE—Southwest Organizations Uniting Resources for Community and Employees.

These workforce efforts also produced the Welfare-to-Career Program (W2C) initiated in a local engineering company, Cascade Engineering. As a result of the W2C program, former welfare recipients have made significant progress toward economic self-sufficiency and are no longer receiving government benefits. Employers are also benefiting from the W2C program. Butterball Farms, a food processor, adapted many of the practices and reported more than a 400 percent reduction in turnover.

**Research indicates employers will work with intermediaries such as faith and community-based organizations when hiring workers if that organization can:**

- Vouch for the employee candidate;
- Screen and assess potential workers; and
- Provide mentors and resources to assist with personal issues and barriers to employment, such as childcare, transportation, housing, personal financial management, and physical and mental health.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Based on research conducted by the Center for Workforce Preparation of the U.S. Chamber for Commerce

## Employer Partnership

Companies involved in the SOURCE coalition draw many of their employees from economically depressed neighborhoods around their offices and plants. They were determined to learn from the experience of the Welfare-to-Career program to improve both hiring and retention. Critical elements of the SOURCE that produced successful results included:

- A comprehensive employment assessment to ensure all barriers have been identified and addressed prior to placement and continue to be resolved throughout employment;
- A comprehensive company orientation program immediately upon hire to help assimilate the individual into the company;
- Assignment of trained job coaches/mentors to ease the transition for employees;
- A career planning session with an identified and appropriate company official; and
- The creation of an atmosphere of inclusion, encouragement, and support led by the company's CEO.

Employers benefit most directly through reduced turnover as it saves on advertising, screening and training costs. SOURCE estimates that this translates into cost-savings of \$2000-\$3,000 for each entry-level turnover. In addition, the employers' collaboration allows them to leverage resources to provide more for their employees. Pooled resources allows them to provide more training opportunities than if they pursued training for employees individually. Health services, such as flu shots, insurance, and employee assistance programs, are offered on-site in an attempt to increase efficiency and reduce costs.

### Member Companies include:

- Butterball Farms, Inc.
- Hekman Furniture
- Richwood Industries
- TAS Solutions
- Decc Co.
- Pridgeon & Clay
- Spectrum Industries
- Vi-Chem Corporation

### Affiliates include:

- Cascade Engineering
- Michigan Department of Human Services
- Delta Strategy
- Goodwill Industries of Greater Grand Rapids
- Kent Regional 4 Cs

The SOURCE is based on geographic proximity of the businesses and maximizes the contributions of various local entities. Community-based organizations, such as Goodwill and Hope Network, prepare workers for employment at SOURCE companies. The Michigan Department of Human Services arranged to provide additional staff to help service the 2,600 employees among these companies. In addition, Grand Rapids Community College provides job skills training on-site for these employees, and Kent County Coordinated Child Care works with referrals from the SOURCE. Further, Michigan State University Kent Extension offers on-site financial skills training to any interested employees.

Goodwill Industries originally became the fiscal agent for The SOURCE, providing key administrative and financial services and eliminating the cost associated with creating a brand new nonprofit organization in the community. The original nine businesses provided start-up funding and in-kind support, and regional foundations and philanthropists have contributed additional funding. The Delta Strategy is in the process of developing plans for up to five adaptation/replication sites. The Delta Strategy is also exploring an industry-specific application in the healthcare sector and a population-specific application for the ex-prisoner community.

## **BUILDING EMPLOYER PARTNERSHIPS: CRITICAL STEPS FOR FBCOS**

- Educate yourself about workforce issues:
  - Local and regional labor market information and projections
  - Anticipated growth industries and occupations
  - Which industries and companies offer career ladders
  - What skill and employment gaps exist in the community
  
- Know your employer partners by finding out about the employer's:
  - Internal culture and work environment
  - Critical bottom-line concerns
  - Cost and rate of turnover
  - Job conditions, such as full or part-time, start and end times, whether there are shifts or split shifts, whether work is done in a team or independently, and wages and benefits
  - Growth and advancement opportunities and career paths
  
- Know your organization and your capabilities. Be honest with yourself and your employer partner about what you can provide and deliver and do not over-promise.
  
- Partner with credible organizations to convene leaders and to facilitate collaboration across business, government, and nonprofit sectors. This could include representatives from the local Workforce Investment Board, One-Stop Career Center, United Way, Chamber of Commerce, or a faith or community-based organization.
  
- Enlist other nonprofit organizations as partners. Their services are instrumental to addressing all barriers. If nonprofit organizations believe that one entity is dominating the collaboration, they may not participate.
  
- Develop quantitative and qualitative baseline measures with the ability to compare turnover to previous experience. These measures should include factors of interest to all stakeholders and potential funders.
  
- Seek diverse funding from the business community, foundations, public sector, and other sources to help ensure sustainability.

### **Cautions**

- **Building these kinds of partnerships take time. Trust takes time to develop, but it is essential. Be patient.**
- **The lack of real willingness to work together will jeopardize any partnership.**
- **Do not lose sight of your shared goals—value for employers, employees, and the nonprofit organization.**



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