

Goodwill: Partnerships that work

Introduction

For 65 years, Goodwill Toronto has been on a mission: to help people with disabilities and others facing employment barriers find meaningful jobs in the community. A Canadian charity, Goodwill Toronto is part of an international network of Goodwill agencies, all of which are committed to improving peoples' lives through work.

Goodwill currently operates 40 retail stores in Toronto and southeastern Ontario. Through the collection and sale of donated goods, Goodwill funds a wide variety of employer- and market-driven training programs and services. These are tailored for people who face employment barriers which may include physical or mental health disabilities, lack of formal education or lack of previous work experience. By assisting people to become employable, Goodwill raises their standard of living and helps to improve communities as a whole.

Over the past three years, Goodwill has been creating programs that lead participants to guaranteed jobs in Canada's top companies. These programs succeed because the organization has developed strong partnerships with community, corporate and government agencies.

Guaranteed jobs at Wal-Mart

In the first half of 2000, Goodwill and Wal-Mart Canada collaborated on a Customer Service training program in Ottawa for youth and persons with disabilities. This program featured guaranteed jobs in Wal-Mart stores. While Goodwill is no stranger to Ottawa – the organization operates three Ottawa-area stores – this was the first time it ran a training program in the nation's capital. The program also ran at Goodwill's main training site in downtown Toronto.

The program was funded by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) and coordinated by the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work, a national organization dedicated to improving employment opportunities for people with disabilities. In Toronto, Goodwill also received valuable partnership assistance from DiscoverAbility, a community organization dedicated to building opportunities for persons with disabilities. In Ottawa, the in-class training was facilitated by Line 1000, an Ottawa-based agency that offers employment services and workshops for people with disabilities.

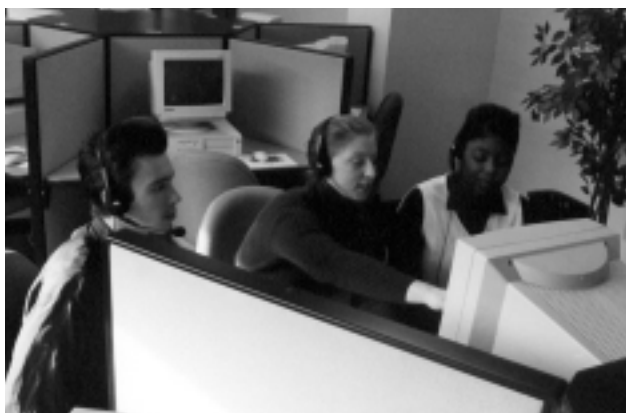
The students started with 12 weeks of in-class pre-employment training at Goodwill, focussing on

customer service, Wal-Mart corporate culture, employability skills and lifelong learning. They then had 12 weeks of paid on-the-job training in Toronto and Ottawa-area Wal-Mart stores. This training provided the students with the opportunity to gain hands-on experience working in the retail environment. In July, the students of both the Ottawa and Toronto programs celebrated their graduation into permanent, peak-time retail customer service jobs at neighbourhood Wal-Mart stores.

This is not the first time that Goodwill and Wal-Mart have teamed up in a successful program. The two organizations have collaborated three times in the past five years, successfully placing 45 youth with disabilities into full-time employment at Wal-Mart stores in Toronto, Mississauga and Calgary. To date, 85 percent of these graduates are still with Wal-Mart.

Award-winning call centre training

The Wal-Mart program follows in the footsteps of Goodwill's highly successful, award-winning call centre programs for at-risk youth and persons with disabilities. These programs guarantee employment upon graduation. Since their inception, the programs have placed more than 130 young people and 50 persons with disabilities into the call centres of Goodwill's employer partners.



In-class session of Goodwill's call centre training program.

Introduced in March 1997, the Goodwill Call Centre Program for at-risk youth grew from an innovative partnership of corporate, government and not-for-profit organizations. The in-class portion of the course is held in the Royal Bank Financial Group Centre for Training Excellence, located at the Goodwill head office in downtown Toronto. Imperial Oil Charitable Foundation supplies funding for course materials, marketing manuals and a variety of resources. Both Verizon Wireless and Universal TeleResponse contribute technological expertise. Covenant House, an organization that provides shelter and service to homeless and runaway youth, assists with expertise and advocacy in youth issues and has the network that helps connect the program to its target audience.

This program has achieved a remarkable 97 percent success rate in terms of placement and retention of jobs. To date, the total annual earnings of graduates amount to more than \$2 million.

Realizing that call centres also would be a good fit for persons with disabilities, Goodwill launched its second call centre program in December 1997. As with the youth program, this course guarantees employment for all graduates and involves a multisectoral partnership. HRDC, under the Opportunities Fund for persons with disabilities, provides funding for the program's operating costs. HRDC also covers the full cost of any assistive devices that participants need, such as software that translates on-screen information into voice for blind individuals. Other accommodations include custom-built chairs for people with physical disabilities, Braille printers and screen-enlarging software. Thanks to HRDC, the devices move with students to their place of employment.

Royal Bank Financial Group has played a major role in the program as the Title Sponsor, supplying funding for the learning space at Goodwill. In addition, it has been a major Employer Partner, consistently hiring graduates – all of whom are still employed. Another integral facet of the program is the participation of DiscoverAbility, which pro-



Graduation day for participants in the Wal-Mart program for people with disabilities.

vides ongoing sensitivity training for employer partners as well as expertise and advocacy in disability issues. The program has achieved a 92 percent success rate, and graduates to date have earned more than \$1 million in total.

Nearly 30 employers have committed to hiring Goodwill's call centre graduates including Scotiabank, American Express, Verizon Wireless, Bank of Montreal, Resort Condominiums International, Bell Mobility, Rogers AT&T Wireless, Interactive Media Group, St. John's Ambulance, Pizza Pizza and World Travel Protection.

Both Goodwill's call centre programs have garnered praise in Canada and across the border. The call centre program for at-risk youth was one of only eight programs in North America to win the 1999 Promising and Effective Practices Network award for excellence in youth employment programming from the US Department of Labor. Goodwill Industries International also recognized the program in 1998 as an Outstanding Community-Based Training Program. HRDC has consistently given both call centre programs its highest ratings in terms of employment success rates.

HELP (Hotel Employment Leadership Program) for Youth

In June 2000, Goodwill launched another guaranteed employment program for youth at risk and youth with disabilities, this time geared to the growing hotel and tourism industry. Once again, the partnership model was implemented in a collaboration with the City of Toronto, the Ontario government, the Greater Toronto Hotel Association and the Ontario Tourism Education Corporation. After eight weeks in classes at Goodwill and six months of paid internship, students move into entry-level customer service positions in major Toronto-area hotels.

Value in Partnership

Goodwill will continue to build programs which reflect the evolving needs of the labour market. This is one of the keys to the organization's success: creating market-driven training for growth industries which are a good fit for people with disabilities and other disadvantaging conditions. Goodwill has found that its most successful programs are those designed in a collaborative manner, with involvement from all of the stake-

holders. In Goodwill's training model, every stakeholder gains from the partnership.

Major government funders like HRDC, the Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works share a primary objective of funding programs that provide successful outcomes. With Goodwill's guaranteed-employment model, the job outcomes and job sustainability consistently exceed government standards.

Much of the appeal to employers is the fact that they are directly involved in the selection of the students. After an intense screening process, the employers interview prospective students and make the final selection. The employer commitment is further illustrated by the fact that the internships are completely unsubsidized.

Employers today face an ongoing challenge – to attract and retain strong, customer service-driven staff. Goodwill partnerships work because graduates demonstrate high performance levels and a far-above-average retention rate. With these programs, Goodwill provides the service of recruiting, screening and training sustainable, customer service-driven candidates for its corporate partners. At the same time, the employers receive recognition and the knowledge that they are supporting workplace diversity as well as Goodwill's mission. Over a three-and-a-half-year period, Goodwill's roster of employer partners has grown tenfold and the list continues to expand.

Goodwill programs involve an extensive curriculum, which is continually modified as training methods and industry developments warrant. At the outset of each training program, a 'Project Team' is formed, consisting of a representative from each employer partner. The group meets regularly and delivers input on how the curriculum may be adapted to meet the companies' needs and specific training requirements. Goodwill also has many other evaluation procedures in place, based on its philosophy that feedback is essential to maintain excellence in service delivery.

Goodwill's corporate sponsors, which donate funds and technology, see value from their philanthropy. Many people have moved from social assistance to self-reliance because of these programs, and are successfully climbing the corporate ladders of some of Canada's most enterprising companies.

As an organization dedicated to 'outcome-driven' training, Goodwill sees results that were nearly unheard of a few years ago. These programs are a shining example of partnerships that connect clients with meaningful, well-paying, market-focussed jobs. This is the organization's mission, and one which Goodwill and its corporate and community partners will continue to pursue well into the future.

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