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Do We Still Need Sheltered Workshops?

Recent economic woes and budgetary analysis in local and state governments has many officials questioning the need and usefulness of sheltered workshops in the area. The current wisdom, which cycles through many changes, is that more people are seeking and should be seeking competitive/supported employment instead of the steady work sheltered workshops offer.

(Facts about the economic impact of sheltered workshops.)

We choose to put more focus on the human side of the issue. In the 43 years that Valley Industries has been in business, we have always had a waiting list of people wanting to work here. In the past three years alone, we have processed over 300 applications to our workshop and hired over 100 new workers. We decided to survey our employees to determine why they have chosen sheltered workshop employment over competitive/supported employment. The results were not surprising. Of those who responded, 25% have had competitive employment but came to the workshop system to get more hours, find more success, and prefer the overall environment here. 42% were unsuccessful at either getting hired in other industries or succeeding for any length of time, so they came to the workshop. All of the respondents agreed that they want to work. They enjoy coming to work each day, earning their own money, helping their families, and love the sense of pride and accomplishment of a job well done. Here are some of their stories.

Rosemary Barker

Rosemary Barker's family cannot imagine where she would be today if she had not been able to go to work at Valley Industries every day for the last 44 years.

Florissant Valley Sheltered Workshop had just opened its doors for business in 1967 as Rosemary was graduating from the Special School District. Fortunately her family was able to get Rosemary into the workshop right after she finished school and she has remained there happily ever since. After her mother's passing, her sister considered moving Rosemary to Washington, D.C. to be closer to them, but, they were not content with her options there and decided to let Rosemary stay in St. Louis with Valley Industries. Rosemary is very proud of the fact that she goes to work every day and earns money. Her fellow workers and the staff have continued to provide her with a sense of community, good friends, and a second family. Her family can only imagine the amount of unproductive sitting that Rosemary would have experienced in these intervening years, had it not been for the workshop. There is no way that any one in the family could have been able to keep her engaged in a meaningful way, while at the same time trying to lead normal lives themselves. But thanks to FVSW (now Valley Industries) they have been able to "have their cake and eat it too." All of them, including Rosemary, have been able to lead normal productive lives, thanks to her employment.



They look forward to Rosemary being able to continue working at the workshop as long as she is physically able. She would truly miss all of her friends and her sense of purpose and pride in her job if her time at the workshop had to end for any reason.

Haley Briggs

Haley qualified for services with the Special School District and for 18 years received an education and therapies from SSD. As Haley neared her twenty-first birthday and graduation, her family knew another decision about placement was going to have to be made. When asked what she wanted to do after graduation, Haley always said go to college or get a job because that is what she saw her brothers and neighborhood friends doing. So she participated in a job development program seeking a job with typical adults. Haley applied for several jobs but she received no offers of employment. At that time she and her family visited Valley Industries, a sheltered workshop. They were all impressed by the people and the facility, so Haley applied and was put on the waiting list.



Haley was at home for eight months waiting to hear about a job. She was fortunate that her mother was at home during the summer months, but the rest of the year, they had to rely on her brothers and grandparents to watch her while her parents worked. Her days were usually spent watching television and listening to music. Haley did go to work with her dad and mom one afternoon each week thanks to bosses who understood Haley's need for a purpose and her need to socialize with new people. That February, Haley got a call from Valley letting her know they had an opening, and she could start to work immediately. Her parents were sure this was the right placement for Haley when she came home so excited about the people she met and the job she did. Once more they were able to breathe a sigh of relief knowing that Haley had found an environment where she was challenged to meet goals and to do the best job she could. She feels supported by her supervisors who adapt and modify jobs to allow her to complete them with her physical disabilities, her physical needs are met by her personal care attendant, and she has developed many friendships that will last a lifetime. To top it all off, she gets a paycheck!

Every weekday morning for the last five years her mom tells Haley to have a good day as she leaves for work and her response is "always do!" Because of that her family can have good days, too, knowing that their daughter is well taken care of, being challenged, supported, has friends and is happy.



Dee Dee Homan

Dee Dee grew up in a suburb of Chicago, Illinois and attended traditional school until she was 7 years old. She then received special education classes. She reached the level of education and learning abilities equal to that of a normal 8th grader. When old enough to be employed, Dee Dee worked at a sheltered workshop in Chicago for over 30 years. She then moved to St. Louis with her widowed mother to be near her sister's family. Once settled here in St. Louis, they began the search for employment at another workshop. They visited two, which were not very impressive. After the passing of her mother, Dee Dee went to live with her sister. She joined a bowling league through the Saint Louis Regional Center and met several people who were employed at

Valley Industries. They "raved" about their jobs and place of employment, as did their parents. Her family made an appointment to visit Valley Industries, and Dee Dee began work in November of 2007 and remains very happily employed to this day. Her family were so impressed with Valley and its clean, organized and efficient working environment. They say Valley Industries is far more superior than that previous workshop in Chicago. The staff is committed to their employees, not only on a "physical" level taking great care of their needs, and safety, but also on an emotional level. They are always warm caring concerned and very accommodating to all the employees and their varying special needs. Her brother-in-law says, "Valley is the "Cadillac" of workshops."

Michael Schandler

Michael was in competitive part-time employment for 2 years, but was laid off when the Salvation Army moved their production department to another location. After being on the waiting list for 2 years at the sheltered workshop, Michael joined their workforce in November, 2009. This has provided Michael the opportunity to acquire job skills in a way he is able to understand: with supervision to ensure his safety, and continuous coaching to help Michael become a committed and motivated employee. His family sees this environment as so much more supportive, instructional, and educational than his competitive employment not only for job skills but also for social development. This is a unique and vitally important time in Michael's adult life. He is employed with peers, challenged by competent and caring supervisors, and is able to grow emotionally by coping with peer problems with guidance from the supervisors. His mom sees that Michael has matured significantly since joining the workshop and is much more confident socially. His family's hope is that this experience will continue on since it seems to be impacting a large part of his world.



Stephanie Stinnett



Stephanie's parents feel they are second in line to benefit from the supports of Valley Industries, their daughter is first. She has worked for Valley Industries, formally known as Florissant Valley Sheltered Workshop, since 1992. The environment of Valley Industries has had a positive effect in their daughter's development. She has been given the opportunity to work in safe, excellent facilities under caring supervisors. Stephanie is currently employed at an assistant supervisor and line leader. She helps the supervisors with attendance, replenishing job supplies, counting product, and alerting them to other worker production issues. (Stephanie prefers not to be photographed)

Brian Shorley

Imagine staying home with your family day after day. You do not drive and must rely on someone to drive you. Sound good for a week or two, but imagine if this was your life. That could easily be the life of Sandra's brother, Brian. Luckily he has a job at Valley Industries. Valley Industries is an important component of Brian's life. It is a blessing to have a safe caring employer for Brian. He loves his job. It is a big part of his life. He would be bored and possibly act out in a negative way if he did not have purpose in life. "His job" gives him self worth and helps him keep in touch with his peers. Most of all, it gives him an outlet other than his family. He has been at Valley Industries for the past twenty seven years. Sandra is grateful each day for such a wonderful place for Brian to go each day. The world is not always a safe place especially for people with disabilities. Sandra says, "VALLEY INDUSTRIES IS ALWAYS A SAFE PLACE." Brian would not do well in competitive employment.





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Our mission is to provide dignified, meaningful employment for adults with developmental disabilities, while providing outstanding quality and service to our valued customers.

Our vision is to be the employer of choice for people with developmental disabilities.

In order to receive Valley Industries updates throughout the year, please visit us at www.facebook.com/valley.industries. While you're there, be sure to **like+us**.

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I like working on tools, etc. I like the work. I have made friends. Staff are good.—Tom Moore

I like it. It makes me happy—Mike Thomas

To feel important. A place to go and feel useful. Enjoy being busy and being with other people. —Debbie Lasker

To be a hard worker.—James Keiper

Fulfillment. —Susan Pearson

Sense of pride. —Jerry Woodward

The competitive world held no promise.—Jim Cressey

It gives me the opportunity to have a job where I can try new jobs. Otherwise, I would not be able to work and have my own money.—Holly Brown

Full time employment. Work satisfaction - Luke loves the work. Self Esteem - validates Luke being an adult. Schedule works very well for our family. Pride in working every day - make Luke feel independent. Meeting people, making friends. Looks forward to going to work - very happy here.—Luke Sickling

Means working hard and earning money keeping my self too busy to be bored. Have plenty to do and make a few friends.—William Harris

What Does the Workshop Mean to You?

Independence.—Monica Deisner

To have a job and a reason to start each day that will be a rewarding day. Getting a pay check and seeing my friends—Janniece Finazzo

Happy to have a job.—Kris Myers

Clifford is very happy to be able to go to work everyday! It makes him feel like a man. He does not like to be home on days that the work shop has to close because of bad weather. He is very unhappy that the work is not getting done. My thoughts about his job is that I do not know what would happen to his everyday life if he did not have the workshop to keep his mind active. I am very thankful he has a job to go to every day! - The Family of Clifford Michaels

A great source of accomplishment - she has a great sense of doing something good every day. She enjoys being around her friends and doing different jobs every day. She enjoys the Christmas parties, cook-outs, and all activities. This has been a great job for Donna. She enjoys going to work every day. She talks about her supervisors and her friends. She has been there over 35 years and will be there 35 more! - The Family of Donna Genail