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GOODWILL INDUSTRIES OF HOUSTON CASE STUDY

1. Organizational Overview

History

Goodwill Industries of Houston is part of Goodwill Industries International, which was founded in 1902 in Boston, MA. Since then, Goodwill has expanded to more than 200 North American cities. Internationally, there are over 40 associations in 23 countries. This case study will focus on observations at Goodwill Houston, TX.

Goodwill Industries of Houston, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, has been in operation since 1945, when it was established by W.C. Morris, Sr. and the Rotary Club of Houston. In its nearly 70 years of operation, Goodwill Houston has grown to a \$93M “social enterprise,” employing 1700 people at 49 retail stores and 51 donation centers. The organization is committed to “Changing Lives through the Power of Work” and serves the Greater Houston and Galveston area.

The overarching theme of Goodwill’s programs can be summed up as such: “While Goodwill is non-secular, it embraces spirituality, heart and stewardship, focusing on the dignity of every single human being. It operates on the premise, ‘Give a man a fish and you have fed him a meal; teach a man to fish and you have given him a way to feed himself for the rest of his life...’”

Mission Statement

Goodwill Houston’s mission statement is: We provide education, training and job opportunities to people with disabilities and other barriers to employment, improving the lives of individuals, families and communities.

Organizational Structure

Goodwill Houston describes its operating model as that of a “social enterprise,” meaning that while its stores are run similar to for-profit corporations, the organization tends to hire people who are economically disadvantaged or have disabilities, and the profits generated fund various social programs including job training and housing. The network of stores across Houston supports their workforce development centers, known as Job Connection Centers, of which there is one veteran-specific center. These centers serve nine counties.

Goodwill Houston has a Board of Directors, a CEO/President, a CFO, a VP of Workforce Development and a VP of Operations, who has the responsibility for 49 stores and 51 donation centers. The programs at the veteran-specific Job Connection Center are overseen by Director of Workforce Development Bill

Sala and Senior Manager for Mission and Veterans' Services Alma Duldulao-Ybarra, each of whom also have responsibility for non-veteran specific programming elsewhere in the Goodwill workforce development network.

Goodwill Houston employs over 1700 people, full and part time, and has a volunteer workforce that includes what Goodwill Houston staff call "professional volunteers" who are people who want to give back, "court-ordered volunteers" who are completing community service as part of a judgment or court order, and "mission volunteers" who are performing community service to gain employment references.

Programming

In its Veterans Job Connection Service Center, Goodwill Houston has knit together a series of programs through various funding sources which serve veterans of all eras. Eligibility criteria are simple – the veteran must not have been dishonorably discharged, and he or she must have served on active duty for one day; those ineligible for government or privately-funded programs are supported by an internally-funded catch-all program to ensure comprehensive services to all.

The *Vets' Employment and Training Services (VETS)* program is funded internally by Goodwill Houston. This program provides workforce development assistance to veterans who do not qualify for the below described grant-funded programs.

The *Incarcerated Veterans Transitional Program (IVTP)* provides referral and career counseling, job readiness training and placement assistance, and life skills support to veterans who are either currently incarcerated but will be released within 18 months, or who have been released from incarceration within the last 6 months.

The *Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP)* is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans Employment and Trainings Services (DOL VETS). The program helps homeless veterans find employment through classroom training, job search activities, job preparation, on-the-job training, job placement, placement follow-up services, and vocational counseling. Goodwill Houston defines "homeless" as "unsheltered, already living in temporary housing or facing eviction." The grant is competitive, and the next funding renewal is in calendar 2015.

The *Female Homeless Veterans and Homeless Veterans with Families Program (FHVRP)* is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans Employment and Training Services (DOL VETS). This program is an employment services program that assists female homeless veterans and homeless veterans with dependent children. Staff also provide referrals to housing and supportive services such as healthcare.

Operation: Good Jobs (OGJ) is funded by a grant from the Walmart Foundation through Goodwill Industries International. OGJ combines employment services with what Goodwill calls "family financial strengthening services," or services outside the scope of normal job training that will assist the family with needs such as healthcare or legal assistance. This program is unique in the sense that it is funded by a pay-for-performance model. Monies are paid based on outcomes at specific parts of the job placement process: enrollments, placements, obtaining certifications and sustained employment milestones (6 months, 12 months). This program is specific to post-9/11 veterans and their families.

Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) is funded by a grant from the Veterans Administration. SSVF provides temporary emergency financial assistance for veterans and their families when they are homeless or in immediate danger of becoming homeless. The program also provides financial assistance for a number of needs that support employability, such as child care, transportation, housing in the form of rental assistance, utility-fee payment assistance, security deposits for housing and utilities, movers, and emergency supplies. Program staff also assist with applying for VA benefits and other programs.

Vets' Advantage, funded by United Way Houston, provides supportive services for veterans in the form of a weekly veterans' support group.

Vested in Veterans and Veterans Vested in Work is partially funded by Bank of America and partially funded by Goodwill Industries International. These programs provide employment services and connection with post-secondary education providers.

Veteran Populations Served

Goodwill Houston serves veterans from all eras. All veterans' programs require other-than-dishonorable discharge and a least one day of active military service.

Funding Sources and Strategies

The majority of veterans served by Goodwill Houston's are funded through competitive grants from the US Departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs, with some post-9/11 veterans served through the Walmart-funded Operation Good Jobs. Smaller grants including those from the Wounded Warrior Project and regional organizations like Work in Texas and Lone Star Veterans Association supplement programming.

This, however, does not describe the total funding model. The broader organization gets its revenue almost entirely through Goodwill Store sales, and revenue from the above-cited grants makes up less than 10% of the total per year. Consequently, should Goodwill lose in a subsequent competitive grant cycle, or should Goodwill decide to launch a program without outside grant funding, the existing revenue from store sales provides an "economic engine" which can sustain workforce development operations in the absence of outside support.

2. Measurement and Data Supporting Effectiveness & Impact

Types of Data Routinely Collected

In general, the data collected at Goodwill Houston is driven by the reporting requirements of the various grants. Data collected at the program level relates largely to job placement activities. The SSVF Program Manager shared that the two largest metrics used are the number of enrollments and the number of job placements. In addition, average hourly wage at placement and certifications/credentials obtained are also tracked for reporting purposes.

Data on sustained employment is captured due to mandatory follow-up requirements for various programs. This is obtained by contact with the client at specified intervals, by phone or email. Demographic data is captured as part of the assessment and enrollment processes. Information such as age, veteran status (though not branch of service, specialty, etc.), number of people in household, and education completed are also tracked.

In addition to the above, Goodwill Houston collects and analyzes financial data much like a for-profit enterprise. Budget data are captured and reported for use in annual planning.

Data Analysis and Reporting

In April 2014, Goodwill Houston went live with a new case management system, Empowered Case Management (ECM). Using the new system, Goodwill Houston runs a number of reports that program managers can use to evaluate performance. Some of the reports that were shared with the team include:

- People Served – produced on a monthly basis for the Board of Directors. Includes mission volunteers and enrolled clients in various programs.
- Key Performance Indicators Report – metrics for the case managers. This includes number of assessments, enrollments and placements, comparing goals to actual achievements.
- Programs Performance Report – key performance indicators by program, comparing goals to actuals.

Since Goodwill Houston receives federal grants, the organization completes and submits reports required by the terms and conditions of their grants. Government grant reporting typically consists of expense reporting and technical reporting, which includes details about the programs and accomplishments, such as target numbers of hires (HVRP) or numbers of families re-housed (SSVF).

Internally to the broader Goodwill Industries network, Goodwill Houston submits an Annual Statistical Report, which benchmarks it against other Goodwill systems across the country in a series of key metrics such as store donations and sales, and workforce placements. Finally, Goodwill Houston completes all required tax and compliance filings. Goodwill Houston completes an annual financial audit and program audits as well, the opinions for which are shared in their annual reports.

How data are used for getting to impact

Data are evaluated at the program level to identify variance in demand due to seasonality, establishing strategic direction and identifying and justifying changes in administrative processes. For example, the Workforce Administration Manager cited an example in which enrollments for a specific program declined due to a particularly complicated onboarding procedure. As a result of this trend analysis and problem identification, the procedure was redesigned to be less complicated. Utilization of this data system for decision-making, and having a staff member such as the Workforce Administration Manager focus on analysis and reporting, is one of Goodwill Houston's strengths.

Formal Evaluation Activities (internal and external)

Metrics from the Empowered Case Management software are compared to previously established benchmarks for each program manager and staff member in an annual Key Performance Indicators Report. Beginning with a strategic planning process for the organization's goals, individual goals are set by the specialist/case manager based on experience and the point in the performance cycle at which they joined the organization. Actual performance is monitored on a periodic basis and the goals are adjusted as necessary.

3. Strategic Themes

Employment and Education

Goodwill Houston is fundamentally an employment-focused organization with a thorough network of services which support employment training and readiness (including education) either provided on site or through one of Goodwill's many community partners. Within the continuum of employment-focused organizations, where one end of the spectrum may focus on those with a more formal and advanced educational background, the Goodwill Houston mission is to serve the most disadvantaged members of the community – those either facing homelessness, currently homeless, recently exiting homelessness, or recently exiting incarceration. Goodwill Houston executes this employment readiness mission through an extensive workforce development and education curriculum as well as through connections to a network of private sector employers, a business advisory council, and its regular employment symposiums, all of which will be described below.

With regard to education as a focus of concern for post-9/11 veterans, Goodwill Houston staff highlighted the challenges of those who have already taken advantage of their benefits and their efforts to support those who have yet to do so. Goodwill staff echoed the commonly cited problem of predatory institutions which seek veterans for GI Bill funding, then provide little to no academic guidance to veterans who are unsure of what to study or who haven't assessed the career consequences of their choices. One staff member states, "I have a guy now who just finished four years in culinary arts. He's working security. He doesn't even want to do culinary arts. I said, 'Well, why would you have [studied that]?' 'Well, they said that I would be good at it.' So I ask these guys, 'Well, what do you want to do?' They're looking like, 'Aren't you going to tell me what I'm supposed to do?' Because they've never had the option or the opportunity to say or even think about it, they're just automatic. [In the military,] orders are barked out, and you follow." As a result, Goodwill staff work with those who have yet to use their benefits to identify career goals and subsequent academic pathways to support their goals.

Community Connectedness

In order to supplement its workforce development training, Goodwill Houston relies on an extensive network of relationships with service providers throughout the community to ensure that its clients' needs are met. This list includes the local VA system, Houston Community College, Texas Veterans Commission, American GI Forum, Wounded Warrior Project, Lone Star Veterans Association, Hiring Our Heroes, South Texas College of Law, the National Guard, Veterans Courts, Homeless Courts, Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, Career Gear, Dress for Success, and many others. These organizations provide a host of additional training, funding, and resources for Goodwill Houston clients in such areas as housing, substance abuse, food and clothing, transportation, and childcare. They also serve as sources for referrals to Goodwill Houston.

Some of these relationships are born out of joint grant applications. One of Goodwill Houston's most important partnerships is with the United States Veterans Initiative, or US Vets, a national organization with a local affiliate in Houston with which Goodwill Houston applied for the Department of Labor's Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) grant. Through this partnership, US Vets addresses the homelessness needs of veterans, whereas Goodwill Houston provides the workforce development training necessary to employ the veterans, restore their income, and help them begin to pay rent again.

Another partnership, the Coalition for the Homeless, includes the Housing 140 Committee for the VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) grantees in Houston, a group which meets monthly to

coordinate activities. According to SSVF Program Manager Darrell Arline, “All SSVF programs in the city are going to use one intake form, so that a veteran doesn’t go to Goodwill, then the veteran goes to U.S. Vets and it’s totally different what we offer...We wanted to have everybody on one page. We’re not trying to be competitive with each other. There are enough veterans to go around. Worry about helping the veterans. That was the biggest thing, just coordinating services and making sure when a veteran comes into every door, it’s the same thing across the board.”

As a collaborator in the broader community, Goodwill Houston participates in United Way’s Veterans Leadership Circle, VA Stand Down days, and leads its own community-wide resource fairs. These annual events include community colleges, social services agencies, vocational schools, and other community partners. These relationships within the community coupled with Goodwill Houston’s reputation as a service and resource provider, all collocated at their central location combines in such a manner that Goodwill’s veterans’ center has become a major hub for the veterans’ services community in Houston. The staff mentioned that while outreach was a difficult and time-consuming task in the past, “[Houston] has been trained that you need to be at Goodwill Monday. If [someone] would mention to anybody in this city that they’re a veteran, they’re going to direct them here. Everyone’s sent here and even people that are not. The city knows that we are the premier place to send a veteran.”

Likewise, the city has learned that Goodwill has become the premier agency to partner with. Goodwill calls their network of partners the “Community Partner Service League” and formalizes all partnerships with memoranda of understanding. Senior Manager for Mission and Veterans’ Services Alma Duldulao-Ybarra described an iterative process by which the partners meet to assess the value and status of the relationship and identify points of weakness: “We develop an MoU together and then see each other pretty much every quarter, because we have these community partner meetings. We provide them with a snapshot of how the program is doing and also, at the same time, we try to make it a one-on-one situation, like a return for them. We’re presenting how well we’re doing, but we’re still presenting, ‘Hey, there are still gaps. There are still issues that come up. How can we fix that?’ It’s not just a presentation kind of community partner meeting, but it’s also a session to look at the gaps and how we can address them.”

Finally, in order to identify the right partners, Goodwill Houston uses what they call a “community organizing wheel.” This tool plots the mission or desired program outcome in the middle, with different sectors of the community radiating outward, such as government, education, civic, faith-based, etc. By identifying which partners already exist toward the accomplishment of that mission in that sector and which partners are missing, Goodwill Houston identifies target partners and begins developing relationships for future work. By strategically diagramming their goals as such, they can ensure that all of their client’s needs are met in the most holistic way possible and that they are truly integrated into every facet of their community’s social services landscape.

Veteran Programming Differentiation

Goodwill Houston staff provided insight into several forms of differentiation – both between veterans and non-veterans, and among segments of the veteran community. In referencing the differences between working with veterans and other recipients of workforce development training, staff highlighted a special need to connect with veterans through having staff who can relate and/or understand the life experiences of their clients. As echoed by several other organizations, it is recommended that any staff member providing direct services to veterans either be a veteran, have

experience working with at-risk populations, having lived through some hardship in life or having lived through conflict as a civilian, as one Goodwill Houston staff member had (in this case, an immigrant from Bosnia). One staff member explained as such: “Either you have to have been through something, or you’re just a very compassionate person as it relates to people, caring about their needs, because the veteran...if they see that you’re just in it for a paycheck, they will know. They will know.”

An additional differentiator specific to the Goodwill Houston veteran client population is (anecdotally) the high incidence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Staff stated that the vast majority of their clients suffered from some form of PTSD, though the source of trauma often varied – some veterans have PTSD from combat, women veterans may have it from MST, others may have experienced trauma while incarcerated, and still others who did not serve and were not incarcerated may have PTSD, a phenomenon which confounds the staff at Goodwill. Acknowledging the prevalence of trauma among their clientele, the staff has learned that some veterans’ symptoms must be accommodated in unique or specific ways, such as leaving doors open, preventing loud noises, ensuring the veteran does not sit with their back to the door, etc.

Within the veteran clientele, three separate cohorts seem to have emerged – younger (broadly defined, but generally referring to post-9/11 veterans), older, and female veterans. Goodwill Houston staff characterized these cohorts as having distinct sets of challenges and attitudes which, in some cases, cause the staff to alter their strategies when training and placing the veterans in the workforce. Younger veterans were characterized as having higher technical skillsets and higher (sometimes unrealistic) wage expectations due to their military experience as compared to older generations. These veterans are characterized as qualified for better jobs than their older counterparts, and are generally looking to begin careers rather than simply finding employment (for example, the post-9/11 program, Operation Good Jobs, has a higher wage target than other programs). Some of these veterans are still struggling with transition challenges and learning to navigate the employment landscape – perhaps suffering and learning from early mistakes made post-transition. Often, the additional (non-employment-specific) challenges they face – substance abuse, PTSD, legal issues, etc. – are not yet chronic and can be treated or reversed. Early intervention, in this case, is key.

Older veterans, however, were described as more difficult to assist because the issues they face are more chronic and “institutionalized.” If a veteran is 55 or 60 and is suffering from substance abuse or PTSD, it is a much more significant employment barrier because it is a much harder issue to treat. Legal, financial, or health-related issues may be decades old and therefore much more difficult to resolve. Finding employment for this cohort is much more focused on simply earning a wage rather than establishing a career, and in the modern economy even this can be a challenge. Older veterans, particularly those who have experienced chronic homelessness, have significant challenges working with technology and are sometimes reluctant to ask for help simply because they are embarrassed at their lack of knowledge. One staff member stated that, “To apply for anything, you’ve got to set up a password. They’ll sit there – I’ve seen them – for 30-40 minutes staring at the screen because they don’t know how to create a password. They’re like, ‘What am I supposed to put?’ Sometimes they don’t even ask. They just sit there. Two-and-a-half hours go by. You’re like, ‘Do you need help?’ ‘Oh, I was wondering what this little thing does.’ ‘The mouse?’...It hurts them that they don’t know, and they’re ashamed to say that they don’t know. It’s a pride thing. They’re ashamed to admit. So it’s almost easier for them to stay homeless and stay under the radar than to come in and ask for help and to acknowledge, ‘I don’t know any of this stuff.’”

A final differentiator between age cohorts (though not applicable to all), is the attitude held by some older veterans in relation to the way that post-9/11 veterans are treated in comparison to the way that these older veterans were treated when they returned home. One staff member described this attitude: “The older veterans – some of them that come in from Vietnam, from Desert Storm, the Korean War – they’re ticked off at the fact that they feel like the OEF/OIF kids are getting everything. They’re like, ‘Man, we worked harder than them. We got less pay and we had less technology. We didn’t get anything. And now, these young guys are coming in and you guys are offering them this?’” For some, struggling to find their way off the streets and return to the working world, it can feel that the country has forgotten their service altogether.

The Goodwill staff also noted specific needs of women veterans as a separate and differentiated group, though these will be discussed further below.

Women Veteran Efforts

One of the primary challenges in serving women veterans is simply finding them and gaining their trust sufficiently enough to serve them. This is often driven by the prevalence of military sexual trauma (MST) among the female veteran population and the associated inherent distrust of anything related to the male-dominated military and veteran community. To mitigate this, Goodwill Houston has created a “center within a center” for women veterans by providing for them a specific entrance and exit to the building. Certain male staff members are trained to be aware of and sensitive to the issues these women face, and these are the only men the women veterans interact with inside the building.

An additional challenge presented by this male-dominated community, exacerbated by the problem of MST, is the lack of transitional housing for women veterans. Goodwill Houston has established a special partnership with Titan Management, an agency which provides temporary housing for female veterans with children. This was necessary as a differentiation from the typical transitional housing options because there are few, if any, transitional housing developments specifically for women. Most are only for men and, given the women’s history with MST, they will simply not be housed there. Additionally, due to the lack of shelters for women, when a female veteran walks in, Goodwill staff automatically puts her in a hotel for the first seven days until a longer-term solution can be brokered, whereas a male veteran can be placed in a shelter.

An additional differentiator for the women veterans that Goodwill Houston serves is that they are more likely to be single parents. Whereas the men in Goodwill’s programs are sometimes more concerned about matching a career with their skills or their desired professional identity (and therefore are willing to wait for the right opportunity), mothers are more predisposed towards focusing on simply getting a job to take care of their family, and then working to improve from there toward the end goal of the right career. That said, mothers taking care of children have little room to negotiate on wages if the job they are accepting is not going to provide enough money to support their family, or on the hours of the day they work if they do not have adequate child care options. Due to this difference in priorities between populations, one staff member noted that “The females come in a lot more prepared. They’ll have all their documents ready for you. Some of the men, it’ll take three, four, five days to get their stuff... But they have children. I mean they have families...It’s like kids are a motivation.”

One differentiator noted by other providers serving homeless veterans and echoed at Goodwill Houston is that homeless veteran single mothers are often highly resistant to seeking services and are highly

resourceful and ritualistic in their methods of surviving the homeless lifestyle. One veteran's ritual (and final outcome) was described as such: "She would take her children from the car to McDonald's, they would wash up, and she would dress them for school. She knew that Kroger marked down certain things at the end of the day. She would go in with her food stamp card, she would buy these things. They would sleep in the car...She just had a system and she didn't want to ask anybody for anything. Then when she realized, 'These people are really here to help me,' she's been very, very successful. She got a \$60,000 a year job."

Finally, while all veterans must redefine a new post-service identity in some way, female veterans often must go through a process of reclaiming or redefining their femininity, and those female veterans who are or have been homeless have faced such intense personal struggles that they have not had such an opportunity. For its female veterans, Goodwill Houston established a relationship with a local makeup company and, through the Women of Worth program, provided makeovers. As a staff member noted, "It might be not anything to me or to you, but to a person who hasn't gotten their hair done in months — for one of the ladies, they cut her hair. They did her face. It was just phenomenal to see. Somebody [who staff member Zeljka Mijic] knows owns every King Dollar in the city of Houston, and she gave the ladies all of these wraps. She gave everybody who came a wrap. She had a professional photographer and a red carpet. Who does that? Who gets to do that? So these people felt so uplifted. They each got a bag, and it had makeup in it, and lip-gloss."

While women veterans need access to professional training and must redefine their professional identity through Goodwill's workforce development programs just like their male counterparts, Goodwill acknowledges their unique needs as women by segregating them from the male population, supports their needs as mothers, and allows them an opportunity to restore their broader sense of self.

Reintegration with Family

Consistently across the organization from the CEO to program coordinators, Goodwill Houston leaders and staff referred to the work that they do as a "family strengthening initiative". In the words of Senior Manager for Mission and Veterans' Services Alma Duldulao-Ybarra, "We're not just serving the veteran or that client, we look at providing services in a holistic sense, so that the whole family can benefit." While Goodwill is a workforce development organization, the workforce mission clearly depends on and supports a broader system of wellness indicators, such as family life, financial stability, and physical and mental health and well-being.

To support this family strengthening initiative, Goodwill acknowledges the stresses that service, transition, unemployment, mental health problems, and incarceration can place on a family. Consequently, Goodwill also expects that these stressors will impede their clients' parenting skills, so staff have incorporated stress management (and specifically family stress management) training into their life skills curriculum. While staff acknowledge the sensitivity of calling someone's parenting skills into question, they look for subtle ways to incorporate elements of parenting training into the broader curriculum.

Additional family support efforts include providing child care during training, either on site or through a separate provider. As training lasts two days per week, three hours per day, Goodwill acknowledges that their clients will never be able to achieve independence if this time commitment prevents them from attending class due to child care requirements. As with all other barriers to employment, they do

everything they can to eliminate this challenge. Finally, the Operation Good Jobs program provides direct support to family members of veteran clients, servicing spouses and adult children and providing them with credentials of their own.

Independent Sector Involvement

Goodwill Houston's relationships with the private sector are critical to its success as a workforce training center. Independent of its funding relationships with Walmart and Bank of America, Goodwill has an extensive network of business relationships which financially support its clients and operations, rather than solely as destinations for employment.

Goodwill Houston (not veteran-specific, though veteran program inclusive) has established what it calls its Business Advisory Council, comprised of local employers, and charged with advising their workforce development programs. This council meets nine times per year. Upon development of a new program, Goodwill staff presents the idea to the council for questions and feedback from the private sector perspective, serving as a form of quality assurance element from the "consumers" of the workforce produced by Goodwill's curriculum. Member companies and individuals also participate in quarterly employment symposia. During these events, individuals such as owners of companies, heads of HR divisions, etc., come to Goodwill to participate in mock interviews and assist with job preparation skills for Goodwill's clients, facilitating interaction between the clients and the private sector. This provides an important opportunity for the clients to practice their professional skills with someone other than Goodwill staff.

Finally, Goodwill has developed an extensive network for the purpose of placing clients in employment. This has required significant effort and relationship building. As Director of Workforce Development Bill Sala describes, "We learned really quickly that employment is a very personal thing. It's not personal for you as a vet. It's personal for me as your agent, because we establish relationships. We covet these relationships with employers that will consider hiring our people. They know because of the way we cultivate the relationship that we're not going to give them somebody that's not ready for employment...The employers kind of get to know us and know that we're not going to try to — some agencies might try to force-feed you, because they need the numbers. We won't do that."

Throughout the life cycle – from funding to program design, to the ultimate delivery and placement of the trained workforce, Goodwill Houston's staff must be closely tied to the private sector in order to realize successful outcomes for the veterans they serve.

Media

Whereas Goodwill Houston's veterans' programming is all located in one center, it fits within the broader landscape of the Goodwill Houston network. Likewise, veteran programming serves as a portion of Goodwill Houston's overall messaging and media efforts, but they have undertaken some veteran-specific initiatives.

Goodwill has had an evolving media strategy over the last decade. In the past, the public perception of Goodwill was solely focused on Goodwill as a discount store, and according to CEO Steven Lufburrow, the general public often failed to even make the connection that they could donate used items to Goodwill which would then be used in the stores. In the last several years, however, the major focus of public messaging has been reframing public perception that Goodwill is a system – that donating to

Goodwill leads to store sales, which then feeds workforce development programs. Likewise, the messaging effort has been focused on simply letting members of the public who need services know that Goodwill is the place to come for workforce development assistance. Once this system has solidified in the public psyche (donations lead to sales, sales lead to workforce support), the additional messaging that this supports veterans is also added.

In addition to the effort to simply educate the public on the work that Goodwill conducts, Goodwill Houston has developed two strategic relationships with local media affiliates to tell the stories of their veterans and veteran programming. Recently, the local NBC affiliate launched its Military Appreciation Month, featuring 15-30 second stories about veterans served by Goodwill scattered throughout its month of programming. While this relationship was initiated by NBC, Goodwill subsequently engaged their local ABC affiliate to launch a story of the month about a Goodwill client (non-veteran specific). While this initiative is not limited to veterans, it does include veteran stories from time to time.

Transition to Civilian Life

A commonly cited difficulty for Goodwill Houston clients seems to be the disorienting nature of the transition from the structured life of the military to the lack of structure and supports of civilian life. While this transition seems to have not only caused some of Goodwill's veterans to be unsure of what types of employment to pursue, it also seems that the lack of supports originally provided by the military have added a layer of financial complexity which the transitioning service member had not planned for, and therefore has put them in the situation which resulted in the need for Goodwill's services.

Multiple staff members cited the challenges that their veterans faced and described the notion that not only did the service member feel that they were more valued within the military – because they were getting paid considerably more – but that they once had access to the commissary, the gym on base, on-post housing, etc., and that in the civilian world, they had none of that. Through her own transition experience, one staff member described the drastic contrast of having everything provided by the military to having to survive outside of such a robust support system: “I was like, ‘God, I need my commissary.’ I went to the gym for free. I didn’t pay a gym membership. I mean, we went to the movies for free, the soccer was on base, the Girl Scouts, the Boy Scouts, and the school was on base. So my kids have never ridden public transportation.” Another staff member continues, “The people that we see are ill-prepared. They just weren’t [ready]. I talk to guys every day all day that say, ‘I just didn’t know it was going to be this hard. They said, ‘Just go, get out there, and you’ll find a job. There are plenty of intervention programs out there. There are plenty of folks out there to help you. Go get your job.’” And it’s not. It’s a culture shock. They get frustrated really easy. If it’s not there in a week, they’re frustrated.”

This set of assumptions that their clients have when leaving the military – that certain things will be provided to them, that they will get higher wages than they really will, or that finding employment will be easier than it turns out to be – also carries over to making assumptions about interpersonal and legal relationships which can be financially damaging. One staff member described the culture of trusting one’s command when they ask a service member to sign a document, and how that trust can fail a veteran later in life: “When you’re getting ready to deploy, you’re filling out how many sheets of paper. So those guys are signing. A lot of the company commanders are saying, ‘Hey, hurry up and sign this. Sign the care plan.’ They just put whatever because they don’t really — every time you go to medical or

something you're just accustomed to signing documents and just sending it back. You can trust that in the military because you have that S1 or somebody that's going to take care of the paperwork. So you know that it's going to be taken care of. But in the civilian sector I tell these guys, 'Guys, you've got to read. You can't just assume that these folks have got your best interests at heart. You've got to take responsibility and take ownership.'"

While Goodwill Houston's veterans' staff does not have the opportunity to serve veterans at the point of transition, they unfortunately have to treat the effects of poor transition, and in many cases train the veterans to walk through the transition themselves. In some cases, Goodwill staff teach the veteran to understand their new financial and employment environment such that they can understand the civilian world better and be successful members of society.

Social Connectedness

Goodwill Houston staff help to bridge the civilian-military divide primarily in two ways – by identifying new opportunities to introduce veterans into the workforce, and by ensuring that veterans are well integrated into that workforce. First, by broadly training employers about the value of veterans and encouraging them to integrate veterans into the workforce, Goodwill staff advances the general cause of veteran employment prior to attempting to place their individual clients. But more specifically, by identifying new and unique opportunities to introduce veterans to otherwise untouched segments to the workforce, Goodwill staff also help introduce the causes and concerns of veterans to the broader population. For example, one staff member described his habit of identifying job opportunities for veterans after hours: "We're working all the time. When I go to the movies, when I go to a restaurant, and they're backed up, and they're giving bad service, [I ask] 'Can I speak to the manager?' and they think I'm going to complain. I'm like, 'You need people.' It's like, 'Come on. I help military veterans get jobs – managers, cooks, whatever. Can we do this?'" That staff member is introducing the managers of those movie theaters or restaurants or any other establishment to the notion that veterans exist as a potential workforce, that they need jobs and that they may be assets to society, and intentionally or otherwise, he is thereby closing the civilian-military divide, if only slightly.

The divide is also closed by bringing veterans closer to civilians, and sometimes Goodwill Houston staff must train their veterans to interact appropriately in a civilian working environment. As has also been articulated by other employment organizations, the need to acclimatize veterans to working with and leading civilians is critical in order to foster their success in the workplace. One staff member describes a specific situation in which this readjustment of behavior became necessary: "[We have] a guy who is a former Marine...He's like, 'Well, you can't ask these kids to go over there and sweep that floor for me please.' He's like, 'You've got to tell them to get your ass over there and sweep that.' He'd say that. He just said, 'Well, I'll tell you what, we'll just get rid of that whole crew and get a bunch of Marines in here. I'm telling you their profits will be off the chart.' This guy was like, 'We should get rid of these civilians around here. Then we could get something done.' I'm like, 'Oh, my God. Did he just say that?' When you get into the civilian sector, there is a protocol and a proper way to ask somebody to do things. People have an option to say no...We might bring him back in and do a peer-to-peer type group or might talk to him and assess him again and say, 'These are the things that were pointed out to us that we want you to work on.' So we're constantly staying in contact with them to make sure that they're successful." While much discussion around the civilian military divide is focused on civilians understanding veterans, Goodwill Houston understands that it is necessary for the success of their clients to teach veterans to understand civilians as well.

4. Key Learnings and Reflections

Catalysts of Impact

Perhaps the greatest strength exhibited by Goodwill Houston, which then extends to its veteran workforce development programming, is the economic engine provided by its retail stores. Over 90% of Goodwill's revenue comes from store sales, in comparison to the great majority of other nonprofit organizations which are largely reliant on grants. While all but one of Goodwill's veterans' programs are grant-funded, store sales provide a back-up source of funding to replace lost revenue should a grant proposal fail or should a government program be discontinued, as was the case of the former Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program. Due to this funding, Goodwill is also able to fund a catch-all program which enrolls veterans which do not fit eligibility criteria of any of its other programs, a capability rare among its peer organizations, which provides a critical stop-gap for the Houston veterans' community.

An additional benefit of store revenue is the ability to fund additional specialty staff, such as human resources, IT, grant administration, and public relations. Many nonprofit organizations are so resource constrained that these functions are often secondary priorities and are not thoroughly or expertly attended to. By providing staff to focus on these specialty roles, Goodwill Houston is able to focus on data tracking systems, quality grant proposals, and a thoughtful public relations campaign, while allowing programmatic staff to focus on the needs of their clients.

A second organizational strength (for the veteran workforce programs specifically) which serves as a differentiator from peer organizations is a clear and thoughtful strategic planning process which reaches all the way down to programmatic staff and is used to hold these staff accountable for their annual performance. This planning process begins with the Goodwill Houston advisory board which articulates a five-year strategic plan, which is then combined with an internal SWOT analysis conducted through consultation with program managers and including requirements from grants, such as benchmarks and goals which must be achieved each year. This internal planning is then considered within the context of United Way of Greater Houston's five-year Community Needs Assessment, which is published every three years. The sum of these inputs is converted into the veteran workforce programs team's strategic plan and then into each program manager's services deliverable sheet, which includes program outcomes, target numbers of community partnership meetings, employer symposiums, and MoUs. Each program manager signs this document and is held accountable for achieving these benchmarks. Such a robust and thorough planning and accountability effort is unique among the organizations studied and a sign of a highly mature staff and leadership team.

Finally, Goodwill Houston's veterans' center is a unique model for the Houston community. Within this workforce center, veterans have access to a suite of services and community partners, but also to one of the most thoroughly connected organizations in the city. Due to its partnership network, Goodwill Houston can help resolve nearly any need or problem that a veteran may face either on site or through referral. This one-stop-shop not only attracts veterans but also service providers, as these providers understand the significant draw that Goodwill Houston has become to the city's veterans. By gaining access to the center, they also gain access to Goodwill's clientele, which then helps them meet the mandated targets for grants which fund their operations. In a way, this center serves akin to a VA Stand Down, though for 365 days a year, attracting both veterans and providers alike.

Barriers to Impact

In the context of Goodwill Houston's strength as a one-stop center for nearly all veteran-related needs, one potential challenge that the workforce center faces is the ability to provide mental health services on site. As reported by staff members, many of Goodwill's clients suffer from PTSD and need some form of mental health support, though they are often resistant to seek treatment at the VA. Due to the high degree of trust built between the clients and the Goodwill staff, Senior Manager for Mission and Veterans' Services Alma Duldulao-Ybarra believes that such trust would transfer to a mental health professional located on site. This would help solve an additional challenge commonly faced in the workforce development process, which is the frequent misdiagnosis or lack of diagnosis of mental health challenges, which eventually leads to lack of retention of Goodwill clients in their employment placements. It is possible that better connection to mental health services, potentially on campus, would lead to increased diagnoses and treatment, and therefore increased job retention.

Ongoing Efforts to Enhance Impact

Moving forward, both Alma Duldulao-Ybarra and Director of Workforce Development Bill Sala seek to increase the number of parenting classes, whether through the workforce development curriculum or through other community partners. As discussed above, this is a sensitive topic for some of the veterans, as recommendations to attend these classes can be a perceived slight to the veteran. Alma states that, "We have to find a strategy, so it won't be shameful to receive those kinds of parenting classes, because there's an assumption being made. What we'll have to do is maybe revise our curriculum, include more of those things about the parenting aspect of it. We do it informally right now...It's an opportunity where we've brought in child abuse or CPS, or those kinds of organizations to talk about how to manage your child, how to be an effective parent. [We'll need to] market it in a way that's not a reflection of them, it's a way to enhance what they're doing." As a result, Bill and Alma believe it the expansion of availability of these classes is a critical component of the family strengthening initiative.

Additionally, Ms. Duldulao-Ybarra has a goal of establishing a Veteran Advisory Group, resembling the currently existing Business Advisory Group, in order to provide feedback about the conduct, format, and impact of their programming. Where surveys are currently conducted after events for quality control, she envisions this group as providing assessments of the programs and the system of veterans' services. Additionally, she would like to expand the survey effort to include post-placement surveys and retention surveys to gauge the long-term success of the programs. As the Senior Manager for Mission and Veterans' Services, Ms. Duldulao-Ybarra is searching for a more robust way to measure the success of her team's programs from the perspective of the consumer of those services provided.