

How WACOSA Helps People with Disabilities Successfully Work and Live in Our Communities with Your Help



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RIC'S ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE

Ric was referred to WACOSA after experiencing a brain injury while in college. The injury left him in a comatose state for nine months and doctors did not expect him to recover. Beating the odds, Ric not only recovered, but after arriving at WACOSA, he began to thrive. His journey started working on in-house production with the staff support he needed. He soon joined a community work site with other clients at a local business. Eventually he was accepted into WACOSA's 18-month ThriftWorks! retail training program.

With community employment being his long-term goal, he successfully built important work skills in addition to his self-confidence. Ric would have been content staying at WACOSA; in fact, he pleaded to stay. However, WACOSA, who wishes to maximize each client's potential, encouraged him to continue expanding the boundaries of his work-life journey. Fast forward to today...Ric has been independently employed for over five years at a local retailer and is extremely proud of where he came from and where he is today.

"I've come a long way because I'm not a person who gives up. The people at WACOSA treated me with such respect. My favorite part about coming to WACOSA was just being able to be out in the community and do normal stuff."

-Ric



PERSEVERANCE PAYS OFF FOR KEITH

In addition to Keith's developmental disability, he had significant behavioral challenges and responded aggressively when over-stimulated or experiencing sensory overload. Initially, WACOSA's team of professionals tried various projects and work options without much success. Keith was directed to the DocuShred program, where he was able to focus on an individual task without interruptions, allowing the staff to

really get to know and understand his challenges and create a work environment that best matched his needs. After a few years of working in DocuShred, Keith was able to land a job in the community due to WACOSA's patience and persistence to find the right fit. While impressive, this type of team creativity and resolve is the norm, not the exception.

The impact of financial support to WACOSA is felt *every day* by the hundreds of clients, like Ric and Keith, who receive the individualized support, community experiences, training and work opportunities needed to lead a full and productive life.

UNEMPLOYMENT & UNDEREMPLOYMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

According to the Minnesota Council on Disability, more than 13% of people with disabilities were unemployed in 2020. The national unemployment rate for people with intellectual disabilities is more than 20%. Equally challenging is the large number of underemployed individuals -- the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that while a full third of people with disabilities were working part time, nearly 75% would work more hours if given the opportunity.

In a report titled, "Ready, Willing and Disabled", it was noted that persons with disabilities are five times more likely to be unemployed and/or

underemployed and claiming benefits than able-bodied peers. At the same time, there is a national shortage and deficit of available workers.

With support from engaged donors, WACOSA can be a part of a solution by:

- 1) debunking myths and misconceptions for employers to consider employing nontraditional workers who are just as capable, and
- 2) continuing to work hard to train and support workers with disabilities to transition into more permanent jobs.

People with disabilities want to work but sometimes require additional assistance and specialized services. This is where WACOSA excels in fulfilling its core mission by providing a broad array of life enrichment activities and transformative work experiences that bridge the gap between a client's skills and the training needed to become employable.



ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

History: Incorporated in 1963, WACOSA began as a grassroots organization by parents seeking support and services for their children with disabilities. The organization evolved to be a regional leader in training, employment and life enrichment services, serving nearly 700 adults with a wide range of abilities annually.

Program Services: WACOSA provides a wide range of critical programs and customized assistance to help clients secure employment. These include: School-to-Work Transition support at area school districts, Day Support Services, Community Work, Supported Employment, Retired Senior Services, expanded use of technology through Connect Academy, Life Enrichment activities, and Vocational Training with the ultimate goal of competitive employment. Many clients have spent much of their lives working at WACOSA since the continuum of services stretches from graduation through retirement.

Evolution and Growth: The cutting-edge programs and caring environment make WACOSA a preferred employer and service provider for people with disabilities, ranging from persistent mental health issues to people with severe physical and mental challenges. Each WACOSA client is served in the program that best matches their skills and talents with the appropriate support to reach their individual goals for employment, life enrichment and retirement.

Locations: Clients primarily live within an eight-county area in central Minnesota, with six service locations located throughout Waite Park, St. Cloud and Sauk Centre, including a multitude of off-site community placements.

Program Funding vs. Cost of Service: WACOSA receives traditional state and federal funding, often referred to as "fee for service". However, such funds are quickly diminishing and for the past decade payments have **not** covered expenses. Providing an array of employment and support services for WACOSA clients annually costs approximately \$2,500 *above* what is reimbursed by state and federal government funds. Despite traditional funding challenges, WACOSA has been able to flourish because of two important sources of additional income:

- 1) Revenue from mission-driven, entrepreneurial ventures such as the thrift store, document shredding and recycling, and:
- 2) The generosity of donors who have opened their hearts and provided financial support seeing their gifts as a strategic investment in the lives of people with disabilities.

Employees: WACOSA is a people-oriented, person-centered organization that would not exist without talented, committed and caring staff. The heart and soul of WACOSA centers around a skilled, dedicated group of professionals who treat every client with kindness, compassion, dignity and respect. Their extra-ordinary efforts improve work experience outcomes and are directly reflected by the many successful accomplishments of their clients. WACOSA often provides additional staffing beyond the minimum reimbursable amount and continues to invest in people with the very best training, educational benefits and compensation that the organization can afford.

A grateful parent commented: "Our son was in a program at WACOSA and Roxanne helped him find a job. She was fantastic and persistent in her quest to help Tim find employment."



WACOSA AT ITS BEST

People with disabilities want to work but sometimes require additional assistance and specialized services. This is where WACOSA excels in fulfilling its core mission by providing a wide range of life-enrichment activities and transformative work experiences that bridge the gap between a client's skills and the training needed to become employable.

When a prospective client is referred, WACOSA's team of specialists go into action. They assess skills, assemble an individualized plan to reach life enrichment and employment goals and help

clients achieve as much independence as possible in preparing for the future they envision for themselves.

Everyone wants to feel important, valued, needed and productive. Earning a paycheck is a life experience we should all have an opportunity to achieve. For many clients, it's not the amount of the check that makes them feel important, but the fact they work in a job that allows them to earn a paycheck. WACOSA makes this possible every day for hundreds of individuals with disabilities.

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AN ASSET TO MINNESOTA COMMUNITIES

WACOSA has a robust economic connection to local communities through its employment and business services. While employers struggle to find enough workers, many manufacturing and assembly tasks are performed by WACOSA clients. WACOSA has worked with over 500

businesses to complete a variety of outsourced tasks including assembly, packaging, shredding, janitorial, cleaning, stocking, food service, retail sales and improving the environment through active recycling programs.



A recent business customer commented: "WACOSA has been a joy to work with. The accuracy has been exceptional, and they meet their project deadlines."

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS AND CHALLENGES

Without sacrificing quality, the ultimate goal is "**better services for more people**". There is a waiting list of capable individuals willing and able to work. Accordingly, in the next five years WACOSA hopes to expand its client base by 10-15%. To achieve this ambitious goal, funds are needed to redesign space to achieve greater

program capacity, and efficiency. A key challenge will be hiring quality staff. While continued growth is important, service numbers are just part of the future story of WACOSA... what often cannot be measured is the pride someone achieves from the satisfaction of doing a job well and being gainfully employed.

ENDOWMENT IS THE KEY TO FUTURE SUCCESS

An Endowment Fund is designed to keep principal gift amounts intact while using only the investment income for charitable efforts. Looking to the future, the annual distribution from the **WACOSA Endowment Fund** will be used to:

- **Ensure long term viability and sustainability.** People with disabilities will always be a part of society's population demographic, especially with the significant increase in people with autism. Hence, there will always be a need for the high quality programs and services WACOSA has provided over the past six decades.
- **Build on a history of success and innovation.** The entrepreneurial culture of WACOSA will continue by funding new, cutting-edge programs that require startup costs and specialized staff training/equipment beyond normal operating expenses. In addition, we will enhance and expand proven training, employment and life enrichment programs like ThriftWorks!, DocuShred and Connect Academy, as well as recycling partnerships with area businesses.
- **Smooth out financial shortfalls.** The cost of providing essential services far exceeds the funding provided. For example, providing a broad array of transportation services and fare assistance for clients to get to work locations annually costs \$250,000 more than WACOSA receives in reimbursement. Being hired for a job, as well as getting to the job, go hand-in-hand, which is why WACOSA is willing to invest significant resources to provide reliable transportation for clients.
- **Invest in people.** To attract and retain skilled professionals and care providers, WACOSA strives to be the preferred employer who helps individuals overcome barriers to employment. WACOSA hosts privately funded classes and seminars beyond minimum training requirements. To strive for the best possible outcomes, WACOSA must invest in the best training, educational benefits and competitive compensation the organization can afford to provide.

WACOSA ENDOWMENT FUND ADMINISTRATION

The management and administration of the WACOSA Endowment Fund involves a board-approved, third party relationship with the Central Minnesota Community Foundation, a highly respected organization that manages and professionally invests over \$110 million for hundreds of nonprofit organizations, in addition

to individual donors. The investment guidelines for the Central Minnesota Community Foundation and the annual income made available for distribution from the endowment are determined by policies approved by the WACOSA Board of Directors.

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INVESTMENT IN A FUTURE FILLED WITH HOPE AND PROMISE

Whether a person gives an endowment gift while still alive or through an estate gift, the charitable legacy will continue in perpetuity for the benefit of providing individuals with disabilities the opportunity to work and live in their community.

Please consider becoming a member of the **WACOSA Legacy Society** by including WACOSA as a charitable beneficiary in your estate plan or establish a named endowment fund to honor and remember a loved one. The earnings from the endowment fund will be used to improve programs, expand services, and offer a broader array of life-enrichment activities and

transformative work experiences to current and future generations of individuals with disabilities and their families.

Now is the time to make sure that every person with a disability has the opportunity to live, work and enjoy a life that is successfully interwoven into the fabric of our communities. Please partner with WACOSA to help people with different abilities find their gifts and bring those gifts to the world. The impact of your support will be felt every day throughout our organization. Thank you!

"We make a living by what we get.

We make a life by what we give. -Winston Churchill



Main Mailing Address

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PROGRAM LOCATIONS

Administration Offices

310 Sundial Dr.
Waite Park, MN 56387

Annex

321 Sundial Dr.
Waite Park, MN 56387

Sauk Centre

712 Lincoln Loop
Sauk Centre, MN 56378

North & South Program

320 Sundial Dr.
Waite Park, MN 56387

1st Ave

51 1st Ave. S.
Waite Park, MN 56387

WACOSA Seniors

1527 Northway Dr.
Saint Cloud, MN 56303



Safe, secure & convenient

Document Shredding

Open to public and private sector
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Thrift Store

Changing lives one sale at a time

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