

TennesseeWorks Employment Partnership Profile

Lowe's Millwork Plant, White House, TN

Employer Business

Lowe's is the second largest home improvement retailer worldwide and the seventh largest retailer in the United States. It has 1,835 stores in the United States, Canada and Mexico and employs approximately 265,000 people. Lowe's has a long held commitment to diversity in its workforce and has received national acclaim for the company's initiative to hire employees with disabilities at its fourteen distribution centers.

Lowe's operates a millwork plant in White House, TN. The plant, which has more than 230 employees, makes special order cabinets and doors for Lowe's stores throughout the country. Management at the factory sought assistance to hire and train people with disabilities to help meet its workforce needs.

"The partnership with the Clarksville TRC has been instrumental to our team's growth and is aligned with Lowe's value to serve our Community."

– Christopher Warren of Lowe's Millwork

Partners

Lowe's reached out to Nancy Hawkins, Business Employment Consultant with the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (TRC) in Clarksville for assistance in recruitment, screening, and training of employees with disabilities. Ms. Hawkins visited the plant and established a partnership between the TRC and Lowe's. She assumed the role of Single Point of Contact for Lowe's management and staff and began to develop supports based on the company's needs and human resources procedures.



Pictured from Left to Right: Tim Sugg, Cabinet Department Lead, Nancy Hawkins, VR Business Employment Consultant, Lewis Reyes, Client, Jill Dixon, Cabinet Department Coach, Chris Warren, Lowe's Facilities Manager

Employment Process

The first step in the process that was established for the Lowe's plant is assistance with recruitment. Ms. Hawkins provides information on the job opportunities at the Lowe's plant to people with disabilities served by the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. She then receives the applications from interested candidates and performs an initial screening. Candidates whom she thinks may be appropriate are then asked to attend soft skills training at the Clarksville TRC. This training not only prepares candidates for work at the plant but also serves as a second level of screening.

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Examples of Natural Supports in the Workplace

- Getting rides with co-workers to and from work
- Allowing employee to work in a quieter area
- Following a written or visual list of job duties available to every employee
- Creating a mentoring relationship with a co-worker or supervisor
- Involving co-workers as job trainers
- Having co-workers or supervisors cue when it is break time
- Using an existing scheduling system to increase productivity
- Getting feedback on work performance by supervisor

Candidates who complete the soft skills training and continue to be a viable candidate then begin 60 to 90 days of “job hardening” at the plant. Job hardening is an on-site training program where candidates learn one or more jobs with assistance from a job coach under contract with the TRC and mentoring from Lowe’s employees.

If the candidate successfully completes job hardening, they are invited to apply to become an employee of Lowe’s.

Nancy Hawkins said that the extra time and support candidates receive during job hardening has been a critical factor in developing skills that they need for successful employment at the plant. She lauded the mentoring by Lowe’s employees and noted that the familiarity Lowe’s staff gain with the candidates during job hardening is beneficial.

“Our citizens with disabilities can and must be important contributors to our workforce. Those businesses across Tennessee that employ persons with disabilities are leaders in not only improving community relations but also increasing the productivity as Lowe’s has shown in White House Millworks.”

– Trish Farmer, State Business Employment Consultant for the DHS Vocational Rehabilitation program

Outcome

The initial results of the Lowe’s partnership are very promising. Five of the first nine candidates were hired by Lowes. There are currently new candidates being trained. Nancy Hawkins said that the Lowe’s plant has a family atmosphere which has made for a great partnership.

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