

Vaughn: Unlocking the power of inclusive employment at Opportunity House



Kishwaukee United Way Executive Director and President Michele Vaughn, Ed.D.
(Photo Provided by Kishwaukee United Way)

By Michele Vaughn - Kishwaukee United Way
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In an era when workforce diversity and inclusivity are not just buzzwords but essential components of successful businesses, Opportunity House Inc. shines as a beacon of hope and opportunity.

The organization offers customizable employment solutions that benefit both employers and individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities while championing the cause of equality.

Opportunity House is one of the many answers to the pressing issue of staffing for businesses through its vocational employment skills training service that includes both group and individualized employment services.

Both types of service help employers boost their operational efficiency by providing a customized workforce that can fit their business needs.

The Group Employment team at Opportunity House can be tailored to a variety of tasks, from janitorial services to light assembly needs, filing, stocking and more.

One of the key features of the Group Employment services is the 1-to-2 ratio of Opportunity House support staff/job coaches to the client employee. The job coach remains on-site while the client employee completes their job tasks.

Coaches work closely with team members, aiding in the development of employment skills. The goal is integrated employment, where individuals with disabilities find their place in the workforce, contributing to both their personal growth and the economic growth of the community.

“We love our community partnership with O.H.!” Michelle Donahoe of the DeKalb County History Center said. “Collaborating with them was the perfect solution for our organization. The clients are hardworking and take pride in cleaning the history center. The workers are supervised, ensuring that expectations are met and are often exceeded.”

The key feature of Individualized Employment service is the 1-to-1 ratio of Opportunity House support staff/job coach to the client employee. This ensures a strong focus on the client/employee’s personal growth and skill development.

In the past 12 months, 27 individuals held individualized community employment. Also, 100% of employers surveyed said they are very satisfied with Opportunity House vocational services.

The turnover rate for employees with disabilities is significantly lower, standing at 8% compared with the 45% turnover rate for other workers. Businesses that employ people with disabilities also enhance their image, as 87% of customers prefer to patronize such establishments.

Opportunity House takes pride in being a catalyst for change in the employment landscape. They offer practical and effective solutions that not only empower individuals with disabilities but also benefit employers.

Embracing inclusive employment not only unlocks untapped talent but also promotes a more diverse, compassionate and successful business environment.

For numerous years, Opportunity House has partnered with Kishwaukee United Way. Through the generosity of grants and the annual KUW Day of Caring, the organization has experienced a significant enhancement in the services provided to clients.

For information, contact Johanna Blocker at 815-895-5108, ext. 108, or jblocker@ohinc.org. You also can visit www.ohinc.org.

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