

Taking Social Enterprise to the Next Level: Business is Booming

Cheryl Kauffman 23 March 2017

Summary



The unemployment of individuals with disabilities is one of the most challenging issues facing the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. According to Governor Tom Wolf, the current rate of unemployment is about 80% and unlikely to significantly improve without a concerted effort on the part of

schools, government, local businesses and the community to increase competitive integrated employment.¹

Woods Services was ahead of the curve when it established the Yellow Daffodil Flower Shop as a social enterprise over 50 years ago. The Flower Shop provided an integrated work experience for individuals with

intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD).

Concerned with the lack of community employment opportunities for people with I/DD, Woods recently implemented a business growth plan for the Flower Shop that created more jobs.

A recent study commissioned by Special Olympics and conducted by the Center for Social Development and Education at the University of Massachusetts-Boston suggests that 56% of individuals with I/DD are unemployed. Of those who are employed, 74% have part-time jobs and are not paid a livable wage. In another report, a Gallup survey of more than 1,000 parents/guardians of children with disabilities found "a troublingly low employment rate for adults with IDD and a puzzlingly low number who are even in the work force." Little will change, the report concluded, "until new ways are found to meaningfully incorporate this population into the labor force"²

Mollie Woods founded The Woods Schools (now Woods Services) in 1913 with the premise that all people had worth, and with the right opportunities could learn and "know the joy of achievement and live a fulfilling life."

Mollie's determination, pioneering leadership, and innovative approach centered on creating individualized supports for each person. She gained international recognition for her groundbreaking work that included advocacy efforts, research, and dissemination of best practices.

Continuing in Mollie's innovative spirit, Woods Services was ahead of the curve when it established the Yellow Daffodil Flower Shop as a social enterprise over 50 years ago. The Flower Shop provided an integrated work experience for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD).

Throughout most of its history, the manager of Yellow Daffodil was a social worker, someone trained in supporting individuals with disabilities. The managers may have had a little knowledge of flowers and flower arranging, but were not trained in business practices, sales or marketing. This practice served Woods well since the focus of the shop was on providing work opportunities and not on the business itself. It was a small operation and there was no pressure on the store to break even.

Due to the shortage of community employment for people with I/DD, Woods Services decided it needed to create opportunities for more people to work in integrated settings. Since it already had an established Flower Shop, Woods decided to convert it to a true affirmative enterprise, whereby it not only was providing supported employment in an integrated setting but it was competing with other for-profit businesses.

To ensure success and grow a competitive business, Woods hired a Flower Shop manager who had a horticultural background and had successfully operated a flower and gift store. Branding was developed and a

website and marketing campaign was launched. Woods opened a kiosk at a local mall where they sold handmade gifts and cut flowers and, last September, Yellow Daffodil opened its third location, a store front, in a nearby strip mall.

Yellow Daffodil has gone from providing employment for six people with I/DD, to now employing 25. The staff makes so many different products, in addition to flower arranging, that Yellow Daffodil can shift the employees around to accommodate each one's interests and talents. Jobs span the range from janitorial to floral deliveries to sales to candle making.

The benefits of employment are the same for a person with or without disabilities: it provides opportunities for socialization, independence and enhanced self-esteem. Don Holmes personifies these benefits. Don worked at Yellow Daffodil before its expansion and likes the variety of work he is now offered and the increased interaction he has with more staff both with and without disabilities. According to one of the staff, Don communicates much more now than when the shop was smaller. She believes that Don interacts with more people, whether they are customers or staff, and Don's confidence has increased.

The Yellow Daffodil continues to expand to impact more people like Don. Walls are being knocked down in the campus store, where most of the creative work takes place, to make room for additional work tables and a

much-needed walk-in cooler that was purchased with a grant from the Eamon Foundation. The refrigeration gives Yellow Daffodil the capacity to produce and store large orders for special events such as weddings. They also repurposed a mini-van from the Woods fleet to make floral deliveries.

Coming soon, Yellow Daffodil will offer online ordering for its candles and flower arrangements, thus increasing its sales and hopefully the need to hire additional employees. Woods believes the investment in expansion of Yellow Daffodil will continue to create more jobs for people with and without disabilities and that they have created a business model that can be replicated and is scalable.

References

1. "Executive Order 2016-03: Recommendations. Establishing 'Employment First' Policy and Increasing Competitive-Integrated Employment for Pennsylvanians with a Disability," PA Governor's Office of Administration (September 2016), accessed March 20, 2017, <http://www.dli.pa.gov/Documents/EstEmpFirstPolicy-for-Pennsylvanians-with-a-Disability.pdf>.
2. Gary N. Siperstein, Robin C. Parker, and Max Drascher, "National Snapshot of Adults with Intellectual Disabilities in the Labor Force," *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* 39 (2013): 157-165.

About the author

Cheryl Kauffman is Vice President of Communications and Public Relations and oversees advancement initiatives to engage stakeholders and individuals on behalf of Woods Services. She joined Woods in 2002. She has broad experiences in building and sustaining brand awareness, strategic communications, and external relationships.