

WorkQuest

FOCUS

on Jobs for People with Disabilities

WorkQuest Newsletter LV
April 2022

The Lighthouse of Houston: Building an impactful community for the blind and visually impaired



Darryl Minor packages bar soap on the Lighthouse of Houston's largest manufacturing line.

Since 1939, The Lighthouse of Houston has been dedicated to assisting people who are blind or visually impaired to reach their full potential. The Lighthouse of Houston currently serves 5,000 individuals annually through its health and community programs, independent living centers and assisted living facilities.

In addition to providing job opportunities and being a nonprofit education service center, The Lighthouse of Houston is also a Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) within the State Use *WorksWonders* program. Through this program, The Lighthouse of Houston is able to provide state agency customers with bar soap, CDs, DVDs, flash drives, and various janitorial products.

The Lighthouse of Houston currently employs 20 individuals with disabilities working across all of their *WorksWonders* Program product lines. Providing these work opportunities has allowed them to help individuals reach their full potential and become independent members of society.

Darryl Minor has been a testament to the impact The Lighthouse of Houston can make on individuals. From a young age, Minor attended their summer programs for children and teens who are blind or visually impaired. Now, he enjoys helping others while he

is working in the warehouse at The Lighthouse of Houston on the organization's largest contract, packaging bar soap. "I love being able to help anyone who needs it when they ask for my assistance," Minor said.

Being an employee at The Lighthouse of Houston has also allowed him to be a part of a united community with his fellow co-workers. "The best part of my job is the work camaraderie we all have because it makes each day more enjoyable."

Jenna Dhayer, president of The Lighthouse of Houston, has seen firsthand the importance of their organization's mission. "We want to give those who are blind or visually impaired more opportunities to live independently and actively contribute to society, and this mission is at the forefront of all we do," Dhayer said.

Knowing how deep of an impact The Lighthouse of Houston can make for people who are blind or visually impaired, Dhayer emphasizes the importance of serving individuals of all ages, adding, "we want to make sure that all ages are touched by The Lighthouse of Houston—from infants to older adults, everyone has services available to them."



A Message from President and CEO Fred M. Weber, Jr.

As we settle into 2022, we are excited to build upon the success that the State Use *WorksWonders* Program experienced in 2021.

During the reporting period reflected in the Texas Workforce Commission's (TWC) 2021 Annual Report, wages and benefits increased over \$10 million from the previous fiscal year. Additionally, of the more than 6,500 individuals with disabilities employed through the Program for the 2021 reporting period, more than 850 of them – approximately 13 percent – were reportedly outplaced into competitive employment.

2021 saw the adoption of multiple changes to 40 Texas Administrative Code, Chapter 806, which outlines administrative rules for the *WorksWonders* Program – the most significant of which revolves around the incorporation of transition and retention plans for each individual with a disability employed within the Program. WorkQuest will continue to work alongside the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to ensure that CRPs are informed about these changes to the administrative code, so that individuals employed within the Program can continue to receive the support and guidance they need to be successful in the workplace.

This spring and summer, WorkQuest will hold its annual compliance and safety seminars. These seminars function to update and inform CRPs about rules and regulations that they are required to follow in order to continue participating within the Program. Please monitor the WorkQuest website to find when and where a seminar will be available near you.

WorkQuest has begun preparations for the annual Artie Lee Hinds Award Dinner and Products and Services Expo – scheduled to take place Monday, Sept. 19, and Tuesday, Sept. 20. We are excited to announce that we will be returning to the Doubletree Hotel Austin to host both of those events this year. More information for the events will be available on the WorkQuest website in the following months.

The support that our CRPs and purchasing agencies have shown toward the *WorksWonders* program during the last 44 years has been essential to its growth. We would like to extend sincere gratitude to them for their continued commitment. The *WorksWonders* program would not be where it is today without them.

We look forward to continuing our work together for another outstanding year in 2022.

Sincerely,

Fred M. Weber, Jr.
President and CEO

Community Rehabilitation Program Transition and Retention Plans Developed

In the Spring of 2019, at the conclusion of the 86th Texas Legislative session, Senate Bill 753 (SB753) outlined that *WorksWonders* Program community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) holding section 14(c) subminimum wage certificates would be required to increase the wages of all employees working on state use program contracts earning subminimum wages to at or above the federal minimum wage. The bill required that this transition would need to be fully implemented by September of 2022.

In order to assist CRPs with this task, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) asked WorkQuest to identify CRPs utilizing those special wages and work alongside them to develop transition and retention plans that would outline strategies that the CRPs would employ to increase those wages to at or above the federal minimum, with the simultaneous goal of retaining the employees' positions within the CRP.

Once those CRPs were identified, WorkQuest and the CRPs developed the strategies that CRPs might incorporate in order to successfully complete that transition. Some strategies considered were evaluating existing lines of business for price and value adjustment in order to increase prices to simultaneously encourage wage increases, developing new lines of business to provide new employment opportunities to workers receiving special wages and pursuing partnerships to expand lines of business and increase the wages paid to workers that were currently receiving special wages.

As the purpose of SB753 was to enhance the wage value to employees receiving special wages, the employees themselves were also assessed on the following criteria in order to better understand which types of strategies would best serve them as they made the transition: lines of business on which they were currently working, current skill sets, the difference between their current pay and the federal minimum wage, opportunities to transfer skills to other state use contracts within the CRP, and a review and analysis of their person-centered plan and the disability benefit impact based on a wage increase.

WorkQuest will continue to dedicate itself to the development of better opportunities for Texas workers with disabilities as the employment landscape continues to evolve.



WorkQuest outlines how to develop and implement transition and retention plans in various compliance and training seminars offered to *WorksWonders* Program community rehabilitation programs.

Upcoming *WorksWonders* Program Submission and Deadline Dates

- May 8th – WorkQuest monthly report on CRP direct labor ratios due to TWC
- May 10th – WorkQuest submission of Products, Services and Certification Booklet
- June 8th – WorkQuest monthly report on CRP direct labor ratios due to TWC
- June 21st – WorkQuest submission of Products, Services and Certification Booklet
- June 30th – CRP Quarterly State Use Wage Reports due to WorkQuest



WorkQuest

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15th annual Artie Lee Hinds Award Dinner

Monday, September 19, 2022
Doubletree Hotel Austin
6505 N IH-35
Austin, Texas 78752

34th annual Products and Services Expo

Tuesday, September 20, 2022
Doubletree Hotel Austin
6505 N IH-35
Austin, Texas 78752

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