

## **Frequently Asked Questions about the JWOD Program from a Community Perspective**

### **What is the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Program?**

Providing employment opportunities to more than 45,000 Americans who are blind or have other severe disabilities, the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Program is the single largest source of jobs for such individuals in the United States. The JWOD Program uses the purchasing power of the Federal Government to buy products and services from participating, community-based nonprofit agencies nationwide dedicated to training and employing individuals with disabilities.

The JWOD Act appears in Title 41 of the United States Code, Sections 46 through 48c (41 U.S.C. 46-48c). The Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled, an independent Federal agency, administers the JWOD Program. To carry out its mission, the Committee works closely with National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH—Creating Employment Opportunities for People with Severe Disabilities, to assist the more than 600 community-based nonprofit agencies that obtain Federal contracts through the Program. The JWOD Program is a cost-effective way to help people who are blind or have other severe disabilities to achieve greater independence, as it enables many individuals to reduce dependence on Government support and join the ranks of taxpayers. Through the JWOD Program, people with disabilities enjoy fuller participation in their community and can market their JWOD-learned skills into other public and private sector jobs.

### **What are the advantages of the JWOD Program?**

For JWOD employees who are blind or who have other disabilities, the benefits in terms of self-esteem, value to the community, increased independence and value to their employers are beyond measure.

The JWOD Program is a unique program that not only benefits people who are blind or have other severe disabilities, but also generates economic advantages for the American taxpaying public. Working through the JWOD Program, thousands of people who might otherwise be solely dependent upon public assistance instead are taxpaying citizens within their communities. For the Federal Government, the advantage is found in the great value and quality of products and services that are available at fair prices from JWOD producing nonprofit agencies across the country.

According to a 2003 study commissioned by NISH, the JWOD Program is saving Federal and state Governments more than \$46 million a year. The study, entitled "People with Disabilities Work: America Benefits," focused exclusively on JWOD commissary, food service and custodial programs, which collectively employ more than 10,000 people nationwide who are blind or have other severe disabilities. According to the study, the net savings to the Government come from the increase in income and payroll taxes and reduction of entitlements that result from the JWOD commissary, food service and custodial programs.

**Is the JWOD Program really necessary in light of the 1990 enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?**

Yes, the JWOD Program is necessary. While the landmark ADA legislation assures basic civil rights for people with disabilities, including the provision of reasonable accommodations by employers, it does not assure jobs for all people with disabilities who want to work. The JWOD Program was created for just this purpose—to help create employment opportunities for people with severe disabilities and reduce the staggering unemployment rate (70 percent) facing this population. According to the 2000 Census, of the 31 million United States residents between the ages of 21 and 64 who have disabilities, nearly 21 million are unemployed or underemployed.

Moreover, the vast majority of people with disabilities employed under the JWOD Program are currently not capable of competitive employment. Consequently, they are not currently in a position to benefit from the ADA's reasonable accommodations provision. It is expected, however, that many JWOD employees will obtain work skills as a result of their JWOD jobs and therefore, be able to take advantage of opportunities made available because of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

**What types of wages do JWOD employees earn?**

On JWOD product contracts, employees are paid based on the prevailing industry wage for a specific locality. On JWOD service contracts, employees are paid in accordance with the Service Contract Act (SCA). As of FY 2004, the average hourly wage for a JWOD employee was \$8.98 per hour (with some JWOD employees earning as much as \$10 to \$14 per hour), compared to the Federal minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour. JWOD wages allow for many people who are blind or have other severe disabilities to live more independent lives. Some JWOD participating nonprofit agencies hold special certificates issued by the Department of Labor to pay employees a commensurate wage (a percentage of the prevailing wage) based on employee productivity.

**What types of jobs are people with disabilities performing for the Federal Government?**

Nonprofit agencies around the country that employ people who are blind or who have other severe disabilities are supplying a wide array of high-quality products including office supplies using the SKILCRAFT® brand, military clothing, detergents, paints and surgical items to name just a few. In the services category, JWOD employees can be found working in such areas as landscaping, full facility maintenance, secure document destruction, fleet maintenance, food service, mail center operations, laundry services, order processing, administrative support, call centers, document imaging and a myriad of other services. In short, JWOD employees are meeting the needs of Government agencies for products and services as diverse as the agencies themselves.

**Sometimes I hear others in the disability community criticizing the JWOD Program, calling it “segregated employment.” What do you say to them?**

Most JWOD Program jobs, nearly 80 percent, are in “integrated settings” at Federal agencies, on military bases and in our communities—where people with disabilities work side by side with others who do not have disabilities. The JWOD law requires that at

least 75 percent of the direct labor in a participating nonprofit agency be performed by people who are blind or have other severe disabilities. Thousands of people choose JWOD jobs and are paid either prevailing wages or at rates commensurate with their productivity. Jobs that are in what some might call “factory settings,” are providing job opportunities that nonprofit agencies and the people they serve may not otherwise have. There are more than 600 qualified nonprofit agencies that provide JWOD job training and employment for people who are blind or who have other severe disabilities. There are hundreds more nonprofit agencies that look to the JWOD Program to support their local vocational mission but are not producing under the Program. In the final analysis, many thousands of people with disabilities depend on the Program for their livelihood and ability to live with dignity in their communities. Choice is the ultimate objective for all individuals. People deserve choice in everything from where to spend their money, to where they live, to where they work.

**Can't people with disabilities compete for jobs in private industry just like anybody else?**

They can and they do. An important aspect of the JWOD Program is that it provides real job training for people who are blind or who have other severe disabilities. This job training provides greater opportunity for people to transfer the skills they have acquired into private sector employment opportunities. However, competition for jobs grows every day and private industry is not effectively providing employment opportunities for people who are blind or who have other severe disabilities. If private industry had demonstrated its collective will to employ people with disabilities over the years, laws such as the JWOD Act and the ADA would not have been necessary and we would not be currently experiencing a staggering unemployment rate within this for people with severe disabilities.

**Can you cite some specific successes of the JWOD Program?**

Certainly. For example, in California more than 2,600 people are employed in nonprofit agencies participating in the JWOD Program. That figure alone would be attractive to any economic development official. Coupled with the fact that these employees earn in excess of \$30 million per year, you have a very real success story. In Texas, nearly 5,300 people who are blind or who have other severe disabilities work on JWOD contracts and earn nearly \$45 million annually. Even in a smaller state such as Maryland, nearly 3,000 people are working on JWOD projects earning nearly \$30 million a year. The real successes, however, are in the individual lives of the JWOD employees. Contact a JWOD qualified nonprofit agency in your community and go visit. There you will find out firsthand how the JWOD Program and community nonprofit agencies are changing lives right in your own neighborhood.

**Do agencies associated with the JWOD Program only service Federal agencies and departments?**

Not at all. In fact, community nonprofit agencies with JWOD contracts are encouraged to pursue contracts with state and local governments, as well as commercial contracts in the private sector. Community nonprofit agencies contract with major corporations such as 3M, Boeing, General Motors, American Honda, Northern Telecom, Toro and

Rockwell International, among others. For these and other private corporations, employees provide the full range of product and service offerings including technical services such as micrographics, sub-assembly, recycling and data entry. Remember, the mission of the JWOD Program is not to limit, but rather to expand the training and employment choices for people with severe disabilities.

**How do NIB and NISH assist nonprofits with the JWOD Program and the employment of persons with disabilities?**

NIB and NISH are committed to helping their associated agencies succeed in providing employment opportunities to individuals who are blind or have other severe disabilities. Among many other services, NIB and NISH offer their agencies assistance on product and service contract development and management, legislative and regulatory issues, communications and public relations, information technology, engineering and technical support, workforce development concerns and an extensive professional training program.