

MASWM

Dignified and meaningful employment for people with disabilities...Quality services for Missouri.

The Missouri Difference: Workshops Making an Impact

Disability employment in Missouri is **DIFFERENT – and BETTER** – than any other state in the country, thanks to our Missouri legislators providing more **CHOICES** than anywhere else.

Bullet points regarding workshops in Missouri are on the back page of this newsletter. When someone speaks to you about disability employment, make sure they:

- Are working with **MISSOURI data**
- Have the **current, correct data**
- And are speaking about **CHOICE**

Everyone in Missouri who is employed by private industry, supportive employment, or through the DESE Extended Employment program – workshops – are there by choice.

All people have a more fulfilling life if they are working. In Missouri, sheltered workshops provide **MOre** employment options for those otherwise who would not be working. Thanks for your support!



One of the 5,400 citizens working in Missouri workshops.

Creative Solutions, Hard Work Used to Combat COVID

Missouri workshops, serving 5,400 people with disabilities, have experienced both highs and lows during the coronavirus pandemic.

Like other small businesses, workshops have faced major challenges. Customers, suppliers and employees have been impacted, in many cases dramatically. But, through hard work and creativity, many have survived and, in some cases, thrived.

Rebecca Hedrick of Gateway Industries in Eldon is a good example. “We are currently open with all employees in attendance,” she recently reported. “Jobs are scarce, but we are surviving. Gateway is beginning to manufacture face shields. The hope is to at least keep jobs available for the employees.”

A recent survey, with 36 shops reporting, found 15 had experienced steady

business over the past nine months and five had seen increased customer traffic. Thirteen had experienced reduced business.

In the past 30 days, a majority (16 and 12) have seen steady or increasing business. Several shops that closed earlier in 2020 had reopened in the fall.

Each Shop Unique

As in normal times, the scenario varied significantly between individual workshops, with solutions differing depending on local business markets, rural and urban environments, and more.

Gina Tackett at Earthwise Industries in Troy said her workshop was focusing on their own retail outlet. “We are going to expand the thrift store to increase revenue,” she explained. “We will move the production line to another section of the

building so we can continue small-product assembly. It is uncertain as to the total impact if there is a statewide shut-down again of small businesses like us. We were closed for five months during the first shutdown, and it had a huge impact on our ability to generate revenue.”

Kit Brewer at Project CU St. Louis reported activity typical of several larger shops. “Both calendar and fiscal output have exceeded projections,” he said. “But supply-line issues continue to be problematic. We continue to hire, but attendance ebbs. Overall, we have a positive outlook.”

Several workshops faced serious issues when a major customer was severely impacted by the pandemic. “I think we have one major packaging customer who has

(please continue to next page)

Inside this Issue:

Workshops Collaborate on Big Project 3
State Treasurer Visits 3
DESE, Workshop Teamwork 4
Perryville Efforts for Safety Have Cost 4

Rockport Challenges 4
KC Shop Navigates Changes 5
MASWM Adjusts to COVID Drama 5
It's Really Been a Crazy Year 5
VSI Develops Creative Solutions 6

BCI Deals Delivers 6
Workshop Updates 7
Hidden Successes 7
The Missouri Difference 8
Shop Efforts Bring Victories 8

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Creative Solutions, Hard Work Used to Combat COVID

(continued from Page 1)

been hurt by the inability to obtain raw materials,” explained Susan Trump, United Services in Bethany. “I’m afraid that portion of our business will be down drastically next year.”

Homes and Grants

Two other factors impacted most shops. Many employees with disabilities live in group homes, which instituted rigid quarantines so workers could not leave their residences. At the same time, several shops were involved with production of protective equipment and were “essential.”

MASWM

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Mission

Sheltered Workshops in Missouri share a common mission of providing dignified and meaningful employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

If you have questions, please contact President Rob Libera, (636) 227-5666 or rlibera@lafayetteindustries.com; or Legislative Chair Kit Brewer, (314) 647-3300 or cbrewer@cuinc.org

Help also came from DESE and other sources. “We have been able to obtain some very helpful grants through DESE and MRCP to keep our workers safer,” noted Joe Bruno, Scenic Rivers Industries, Inc., Salem. “The only issues currently are funding splits from our SB40 board. Although, we expect to have a better outcome in 2021.”

Natalie Couch saw another trend at Lake Area Industries, Camdenton. “Our customers provide recreational products, therefore people being home more because of COVID-19 has caused their sales to decrease,” she said. “Once those buying patterns return to normal due to people vacationing again, I believe their sales will increase.”

Others remained in business, despite an economic domino effect. “We have remained open the entire time, but our paper-sorting room does not have enough work to support all the employees,” Geoff Shackelford, Boonslick Industries, Boonville, said, noting school closures as a major cause.

Creative Solutions

Shackelford noted recent changes, however. “We’re using the new efficiencies we’ve gained with a reduced workforce to be able to expand our recycling services to other markets,” he said. “We are developing strategies to improve our resale store profits by focusing on labor costs and defining new ways to be efficient.”

Others were pursuing similar tactics, dealing with quarantined employees and lower business traffic while seeking creative expansion or new markets. Another variable, state and federal legislation, concerns many.

“A lot depends on legislative issues, especially at the federal level,” said Linda



Using dividers between employees was one relatively simple adjustment Missouri workshops made to deal with the pandemic. Other challenges were more complex.

Kimrey, Laclede Industries, Lebanon.

One thing many depend on unequivocally involves workshop staffs and employees with disabilities. Brenda Stuppy, Ste. Genevieve Industries, Ste. Genevieve was typical. “We’ve been really happy with how cooperative our employees are with the current pandemic and how well we are doing at keeping everyone safe,” she said.

A major priority for all workshops involves safety for those employees, noted Ginger Williams at MCII in Farmington. “Right now, we are focused on keeping our employees and staff safe and healthy and meeting our customer’s deadlines,” she said. “For 2021, we hope to get everyone back to work and we expect to hire some new employees.”

Employees May Require Vaccine But Must Allow Options

December guidelines issued by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission said that employers can require workers to get a Covid-19 vaccine and bar them from the workplace if they refuse. However, if employees make a written request to opt out for reasons of disability or religion, it must be granted.

The commission determined that giving a COVID-19 vaccine to an employee by an employer does not fit the definition of discrimination.

More information is available on this page of the EEOC website, <https://bit.ly/2M4ZyIV>.

Workshops Team Up to Help Business, Fight COVID

Four Missouri workshops played a critical role helping a Lebanon, Mo. furniture manufacturer produce 150,000



Employees at Laclede Industries in Lebanon were among those at four workshops helping a furniture manufacturer fulfill an emergency request for COVID-related PPE.

hospital gowns by Dec. 1.

Angie Jackson, vice president of Justice Furniture, said the story actually began with a call from Missouri Gov. Mike Parson. “The governor had called us and asked if we’d ever thought of producing PPE,” she recalled. “The next day Steve Edwards at Cox Health presented a gown and asked, ‘Can you make this?’ Suddenly we were in the disposable isolation gown business!”

Tight Timetable

The challenge involved producing a large number in a short time – and packaging them. “One of the things is that after all the cutting, you have to fold them,” Jackson explained. “We needed a lot of reliable people, and we needed them fast.”

Angie recalled Laclede Industries in Lebanon and contacted manager Linda Kimrey. The rest, as they say, is history. “They just took the ball and ran,” Jackson added. “The next thing I know, four workshops were on the job.”

Kimrey had realized immediately the job was too large for one shop, so she called on Lake Area Industries in Cam-

denton, Opportunity Sheltered Industries in Houston and Pulaski County Workshop in Richland.

“That was a Friday, and we got started Monday,” Kimrey recalled. “We all just jumped in and got it done.”

Teamwork

Natalie Couch at Lake Area Industries said this type of collaboration is not unusual. “Two years ago Laclede (Industries) helped us immensely,” she recalled. “It was our chance to pay them back. That’s important for us. We all run into times when we have too much. It gives us opportunities to take on bigger projects.”

In Pulaski County, manager Lacy Karr noted employees with disabilities were excited to work on a project that combated coronavirus. “They loved it,” she noted. “They all jump at the chance to help, so this was great for them.”

At Justice Furniture, Jackson said the workshops were integral to completing the project on time, and she’ll be looking for workshop help in the future. “We’d do it again!” she concluded. “People sometimes forget about workshops, but they are so talented.”

Missouri Treasurer Visits Workshops, Promotes ABE

Missouri Treasurer Scott Fitzpatrick toured several Missouri workshops this fall, combining a fact-finding tour with promotion of Missouri ABE Accounts for people with disabilities.

During October, Treasurer Fitzpatrick visited Central Missouri Subcontracting Enterprises in Columbia, Project CU in St. Louis, Lafayette Industries in Manchester and other locations. During the tours, he met with staff members to discuss several issues, including the special savings program that helps people with disabilities. He also met with employees with disabilities and watched as they worked on everything from packaging and recycling to working in a greenhouse.

DESE Workshop Division Director Dan Gier, MASWM Legislative Consultant Lynne Schlosser and others were on hand during several visits.

An ABE Account is an investment account available to eligible individuals with disabilities, providing an opportu-



Missouri Treasurer Scott Fitzpatrick visited several workshops this fall to visit with staff and employees, including shown here at Lafayette Industries in Manchester.

nity to save and invest money without losing eligibility for certain public benefits programs, like Medicaid or SSI. Earnings in an ABE Account are not

subject to federal income tax, as long as they are spent on qualified disability expenses.

DESE, Workshops Cooperate To Keep Employees Connected

The links between Missouri workshops and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education have never been stronger than during the pandemic.

Since the crisis began, DESE has allowed rule changes, administered critical grant funds and more to help shops keep people with disabilities employed, connected and healthy.

A major step occurred early in the crisis when DESE removed the 20 percent training maximum and other limitations for workers with disabilities. This allowed workshops to continue training employees even if they were quarantined in a group home. This also allowed employees to stay involved and, especially, retain a level of workplace skills often critical to

their long-term successes.

“They remained part of the working community,” MASWM President Rob Libera noted. “Many times, that is the only activity they have been able to participate in.”

MASWM Secretary Natalie Couch agreed. “This was very helpful to keep our employees busy during the stay-at-home orders, lack of transportation due to limited group size restrictions and DMH recommendations keeping our employees at home,” she said. “We had a lot of employees taking advantage of the at-home training. Once they were able to come back to work, they did! It was a nice effort from DESE to help us keep everyone going during this crazy time!”



Jordan Boyd was one of hundreds of Missouri workshop employees who trained at home during quarantine thanks to changes allowed by DESE during the pandemic.

Perryville Sees Safety Measures, Expenses Increase

Like workshops throughout Missouri, United Enterprises, Inc., in Perryville, experienced an up-and-down 2020 due to the pandemic.

Executive Director Janet Squibb reported that the workshop first closed on March 20 and reopened May 4. Prior to that shutdown, all 60 employees had been working Monday through Friday.

Upon reopening, United Enterprises returned with only about 20, most necessary, employees. Several customers were

also dealing with COVID outbreaks, causing a financial impact on United Enterprises. The workshop received a PPP loan to help meet payroll during these extreme months.

In July, United Enterprises began to experience more work from customers, which allowed the shop to increase the number of employees to 28 daily. In September, one of the two group homes where several employees resided released them to work. This allowed United En-

terprises to add eight additional employees. The second group home returned six employees in October, bringing the workforce up to 42. This number was capped for a while to keep employees safe and healthy. Approximately 18 employees were kept at their homes to keep family members safe.

As fall began, COVID numbers increased in Perry County. On Dec. 4, 2020, United Enterprises, Inc. received notification that an employee had tested positive with COVID, contracted in the community. This affected three other employees since all resided at the same location. With this news, the group homes decided to take their employees out of work with the holidays approaching. United Enterprises, Inc also re-evaluated the job demands, decreased the number of attendees daily and is currently operating with 30 daily employees.

United Enterprises has made every effort possible to keep the facility and vehicles sanitized, as well as practicing safe hygiene and mask wearing at work. These efforts brought additional expenses. Some grants have assisted with these costs, but more is likely in 2021.

Perryville staff urged Missouri leaders to remember the additional costs that workshops have incurred throughout 2020 and consider providing additional assistance.

Rockport Workshop Faces Challenges

Northwest Missouri Industries in Rockport has faced the kind of up and down challenges many workshops saw in 2020.

Thanks to the CARES grant, the shop was able to do some much-needed upgrades to their building. They were able to install two touchless doors for the main entrance and remodel the bathrooms with touchless sinks and toilets. They were also able to make the women's bathroom ADA compliant.

Northwest did have to shut down a total of four weeks due to the pandemic. They were closed at the beginning for just a few days. Then in September, Manager Glennette Christian contracted COVID. Because she was close to her

supervisors, the shop had to be closed for two weeks. This closure was covered in the CARES grant and enabled Northwest to pay certified employees and staff for their normal hours of work. Then recently, Northwest was once again closed down as several of certified staff tested positive. They are now open and functioning well.

Fortunately, the shop is staying busy during a time when they usually have to cut back employees to two days a week. They had stocked up on computers to be recycled and the donation of aluminum cans has increased, as well as the work detailing cars. One of the biggest factors keeping them open is the assembling of respiratory masks.

KC Workshop Navigates Changes

Like workshops throughout Missouri, Southeast Enterprises in Kansas City faced a series of dramatic changes that began in March and continue to the present.

The first wave included local government requirements that reduced the shop's workforce to only the front office and leadership staff, with associates asked to shelter-in-place and stay healthy. Southeast's leadership team prepared training programs that would be mailed to the homes of the associates to review and complete, so that they would not lose abilities during this stay-at-home period.

Later, Southeast appointed a summer intern who worked with the associate services manager to create a Southeast Enterprises Family Facebook page, training blog and a robocall network. These offered associates a convenient method to stay updated.

As stay-at-home orders were lifted, associates returned to work in small

groups. Each was required to wear a mask, record his or her temperature, go through proper handwashing exercises and learn about social distancing to prevent the spread of the virus.

Early into the pandemic, a local company, Thermo Fisher Scientific, became a part of Project Patriot, a federal program to design and manufacture COVID testing supplies. Their large government contract required a very quick build of a new plant, and they needed to hire hundreds of people to work the assembly line. Southeast Enterprises got a call, and soon three teams of associates and supervisory staff began inspecting and packaging COVID testing equipment. In August, federal, state and local officials arrived for a grand opening and recognition of workers helping to be a part of the solution.

Southeast Enterprises continues to prospect new clients. The opportunities included making, inspecting and reworking packaging materials, assembly and



Employees at Southeast Enterprises were part of an intense effort to design and manufacture COVID testing supplies

kitting of personal electronic wearable devices, and a new janitorial service team was established.

Southeast remains committed to keeping associates safe and healthy with new protocols and PPE requirements, which has resulted in a healthy and safe workplace.

MASWM Adjusts to Dramatic Change Brought by Coronavirus

Although individual workshops, their staff and employees have faced major challenge from COVID, MASWM has also faced challenges that required significant change to successfully adapt to new circumstances.

One of the biggest changes involves the use of Zoom videoconferencing for bi-monthly meetings of the MASWM Board of Directors and the annual fall conference. The shift has been so successful that several suggest Zoom meetings will continue after the virus is not a threat, especially for board meetings.

That change has brought increased em-

phasis on several efforts that began earlier. For several years, MASWM's January, April and October conferences have included an increased focus on training programs. This emphasis included a growing array of topics for managers and staff that more recently have been recorded and made available in the MASWM website's resource library. Increased development of this resource is planned.

Other efforts are more short term but have a major impact on workshop operations. The largest example involves MASWM's extensive efforts working

with DESE on everything from training requirements to CARES Act grants. Even some managers may not have seen the layers of effort, from board members working to secure funds to area directors helping individual workshops with applications.

None of this is new – these types of services are key reasons MASWM was formed. But just as workshops have adapted to radical change from coronavirus, so has the organization. It's almost certain these changes will continue for some time.

2020 Really Has Been A Crazy Year

JSI in Arnold really looks differently than it did just 10 months ago.

The workshop went from about 100 employees to about half that number working at the shop and the other half working and training at four residence facilities or their homes.

The on-site employees have been pro-

ducing work, and over 14 jobs have been addressed offsite.

Sales were negatively impacted by the economic slowdown initially, but they have rebounded to pre-pandemic levels since then. In November, JSI had one of their top four sales months ever – and it was a short month with the Thanksgiv-

ing holidays. JSI even called on another shop to help meet customer demands, which JSI has not done in years.

As of this writing, JSI has not had a positive COVID-19 case among their active employees or staff. That's a tribute to the healthy practices of everyone when at work and when not at work.

Vocational Services Develops Creative Communications

Vocational Services, Inc. operates three workshops in Liberty and North Kansas City. Not surprisingly, communication between shops is important, especially delivering consistent and timely communications to employees with disabilities.

Executive Director Randy Hylton has sought solutions for over five years, but now has an answer: VSI TV!

“Basically it’s a television station that goes between all of our shops,” Hylton explained. “We can share people getting awards, important messages, you name it.”

Assistant Executive Director Kimbal Mothershead and IT Director Derrick Griffel worked to implement the network-based system. Although it was operational earlier, it hit full stride two years ago and became invaluable during 2020.

“We’ve had programs on everything from what it means for employees to get their temperatures taken to wearing masks,” Mothershead explained. “With 13 screens at all three locations, we can send a message to all of our employees almost simultaneously – break rooms, entry points, you name it.”

This year that became critical as employees came back from quarantines with



Employees at Vocational Services, Inc., in Liberty and North Kansas City can learn about everything from properly wearing a mask to recently honored coworkers with VSI TV, a network of screens that “broadcast” information at all three locations.

anxiety about wearing masks and other COVID-related procedures. “It helped break that apprehension down, and they saw other shops were doing the same things, too,” Mothershead said. “We had a program on what it means to social distance. We could show it to everyone.”

The messages are often delivered in graphical format. Before Christmas, social distancing was illustrated with “a reindeer’s space” between other people. Awards and other events showing employees are also popular.

Staff have messages, too, including praise from parents and guardians. Sometimes staff even get in on the act.

“Randy (Hylton) demonstrated how to put on gloves while he was wearing his cowboy hat,” Mothershead said. “That was a big hit.”

In “normal” times, the system plays other roles. When customers visit, the sets can be programmed to show extended presentations on the customer’s work. During a tour by the North Kansas City Business Council, VSI TV broadcast a special welcome message geared to the organization. Similar messages were broadcast for Clay and Platte County SB40 board members during their visits.

Some results are surprising.

Mothershead and Program Services Manager Sherry Summers noticed a foreign-born employee was paying an unusual amount of attention to text messages. Then they realized she was learning to read English.

“That was something we hadn’t expected,” Mothershead concluded. “Sherry and I were watching and realized that when she saw a word she didn’t know, she would ask other employees. It was remarkable.”

BCI Deals with Challenges to Provide Employment, Help Community

The COVID-19 pandemic began affecting BCI (St. Charles County) on March 16, 2020, when employees with disabilities were requested to stay home. In the effort to keep them engaged and socially connected, BCI initiated a schedule of daily online trainings and paid them for their time away.

Without the adults with disabilities at work, BCI Packaging operated at 25 percent capacity from March through May to meet a fraction of the demand. BCI works with critical infrastructure manufacturers like Reckitt Benckiser and Henkel to provide essential household products.

From May 4 to June 15, employees

with disabilities were welcomed back to work in waves, restoring productivity to fulfill strong customer product demand. By June 30, BCI had 364 of its total employees back, of which 256 were adults with disabilities. In the last several months, BCI has reached some of its highest production totals in the last 12 months due to overwhelming customer demand and teamwork: dishwashing tablets, 74.8 million; jet dry bottles, 2.7 million; body soap, 3.12 million; and bait pieces, 18.5 million.

Although the organization incurred significantly increased operational costs to create a safe return-to-work environment, BCI was able to secure much-

needed payroll protection program funding. Changes were made at all facilities to meet CDC guidelines. Production lines were spaced farther apart, and additional break and lunch times were added to allow proper social distancing. BCI added plexiglass shields on the lunchroom and production tables, increased cleaning schedules and supplies, checked temperatures and required masks.

Every measure was worth taking to ensure a safe and meaningful place of employment for everyone at BCI – a place that not only provides innovative employment for people with disabilities, but is also an asset to the economy.

Workshop Updates

Crowder Industries in Neosho rang bells for the Salvation Army red kettle campaign in early December. Ten employees from Crowder rang in one-hour shifts throughout the day. Denise Moore, Crowder Industries office manager, said “We had great weather to be outside. It was a good opportunity for us to serve the community.” Pictured are Crowder employees Calvin Henslee and Don Depung.

In a scenario typical of many workshops, **Callaway County Extended Employment in Fulton** reported 14 of the workshop’s employees who live in residential care facilities have been off work since March, due to the pandemic, while others have been out part of the time.

“We take employee temperatures daily, wear masks, wash hands and sanitize multiple times per day, and we practice social distancing,” noted manager Rodney Shivers. “Employees who call in sick are required to have a COVID screening before returning.”

Pulaski County Sheltered Workshop in Richland has been operating with four staff members and 25 employees. General Manager Lacie Karr has positioned employees in pods in order to minimize exposure. So far, this has worked well. They have had only one staff member and one employee contract the virus, and with contact tracing, they were able to determine that it did not come from within the workshop.

As far as business contracts, they are busier than ever. The amount of work that 3M is requesting has increased significantly, as well as the amount that Radians (ear plugs) is requesting.

Jenifer Clark at Tantone Industries in Branson reports that the shop has launched a new community-based enclave to prepare employees for competitive employment.

The workshop has partnered with other community organizations to give back to the community. They also redesigned their product, Firestarters, for easier assembly and quicker distribution, while increasing safety awareness and implementation.



Employees at Crowder Industries in Neosho rang bells for the Salvation Army red kettle campaign in December.

Hidden Successes at Missouri Workshops

Connie Thurman at Monroe City Sheltered Workshop recently visited a local Wal-Mart. She recognized the person carrying out her groceries, a former client who had recently landed his first competitive position in the community.

The individual had faced many challenges. He had arrived at the workshop through WIOA career counseling and had never worked competitively. He also had been homeschooled, though not through high school or with any workplace training.

“I was a bit nervous because I know those jobs at Wal-Mart can be pretty involved,” Thurman noted. “But tonight, he brought me my groceries! It was so wonderful to see him thriving in his job. He really liked the job and was even

training another worker!”

Thurman stressed that the workshop was just a factor in the story. “We were just a small part in his accomplishment,” she said. “But it’s a wonderful success – all because he worked hard to get to where he is now. I just wanted to share because it’s these stories that remind us why we do what we do!”

Missouri Director of Extended Employment Sheltered Workshops Dan Gier reported this story as a good example of the unseen victories involving the state’s shops. “Yes, Missouri workshops have a purpose and a mission for everyone,” Gier noted. “Whether it’s a job for a lifetime or that stepping stone in becoming a success, Missouri workshops work.”

January Meeting Set for Zoom

The January MASWM meeting originally scheduled Jan. 24, 25 and 26 in Jefferson City will now be held via Zoom videoconference, similar to the October meeting.

Key factors are the continued spread of COVID and possible lack of access to

the state capital building for the annual Legislative Breakfast.

The April meeting, traditionally held at Lake Ozark, may be virtual as well, depending on developments in early 2021. Further details will be shared as soon as they are available.

The Missouri Difference: Workshops Making an Impact

Missouri's Sheltered Workshops are the service providers for DESE's Extended Employment Sheltered Workshop Program (EESWP). As the New Year begins, MASWM wants to recognize the importance of the program which provides employment and skills training to 5,400 Missourians with disabilities.

- An individual has to first go through a rigorous process overseen by the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to see if there is any possibility that they can work "competitively." Only when VR determines that the individual cannot sustain employment in the private sector, can an **individual choose** to apply for employment in a Missouri workshop.
- In 2017, the Missouri Legislature overwhelmingly passed a bipartisan resolution (HCR 28) in support of the state's Extended Employment Sheltered Workshop Program with more than

100 co-sponsors and unanimous approval in both House and Senate.

- In Missouri, Sheltered Employment is a valid and valued option for employment, skills training and an integral component of each communities' business and employment vitality. No one is ever limited to the idea that a single solution is his or her only option. It is up to each person and his or her support systems to consider all options.
- Funding for the Extended Employment Sheltered Workshop Program comes from the **STATE BUDGET and IS NOT a federally funded program relying on Medicaid dollars.**
- The Extended Employment Program is administered through the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. It is DESE who certifies the eligibility of employees and reimburses providers for staffing and supervision of employees.

- More than 5,400 employees currently work in the Extended Employment Program, often making more than minimum wage.
- The Extended Employment Program includes 86 separate and independent businesses around the state.
- The majority of funding for these social endeavor businesses is generated privately through contract work they create with businesses and product sales.
- **During the last five years, Extended Employers generated \$4.77 in sales for every \$1.00 of state aid.**
 - The impact of COVID-19 on Missouri workshops is as real as it has been for nearly all of Missouri's businesses. However, since the pandemic began, workshops have provided more than **three million hours of employment and added additional training opportunities for those choosing to stay at home.**

Lafayette County Works Hard to Grow Business

Like all workshops, Lafayette County Enterprises staff and employees have been wearing masks all day, every day.

Located in Higginsville, the shop has been following its county health department guidelines, plus testing after six days, even if the person who had a positive contact is exhibiting no symptoms. The shop has also continued its mask

mandate, despite occasional challenges from customers or vendors.

Lafayette County Enterprises has also been approved for a Solid Waste Grant, which allows them to purchase a badly needed truck for their cardboard recycling program. This grant will enable them to continue their recycling program, helping the environment, as well

as providing jobs and finances for employees.

Manager Gary Littrell said the shop benefited significantly from the PPP program and the state grants enabling purchase of PPE, cleaning supplies and technology upgrades.

RISE Celebrates Victories in a Challenging Year

RISE Community Services in Warrensburg partnered with 3M Science to help manufacture respirator masks.

This partnership allows RISE employees to take part in essential work that helps combat COVID-19. This new job also promotes the development of fine motor skills, counting and multi-step tasks. RISE employees take away knowledge that will benefit them on their journey towards community-based employment.

Another development saw RISE Crafts & Curiosities move to a new location, a nearby up-and-coming shopping center. The new facility offers more space that

allows RISE to host crafting and community events. With support from the Johnson County community, RISE purchased a kiln, which enables the painting and firing of seasonal bisqueware. Customers now have workspace to create their own home décor, candles, pottery, jewelry and more. RISE hosted a ribbon-cutting event in which a store associate, Holly, was able to highlight her new public speaking skills. Most importantly, the new storefront allows employees to take their vocational experiences to the next level.

RISE Community Services is a family-first agency, so safety is their top priority.

The organization's environmental services team developed plexiglass workstations that allow employees to socially distance. Masks are required for job coaches and supporting staff at all times, and employees are also asked to wear a mask when they leave their workstations.

RISE will continue to improve safety processes as changes occur. Special thanks goes to job coaches, vocational employees and their families for their compliance and support. To stay up to date on all things RISE, follow them on social media or visit their new website at watchusrise.org