



REDUCING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT & ADVANCEMENT

Why It's Important

Reducing employment barriers isn't just about finding jobs. It's about creating a more equitable, resilient community where everyone can thrive.

When we, as a community, focus on Reducing Barriers to Employment & Advancement, we address:

- **Individual well-being.** Having a good job provides financial stability, improves mental health, and enhances quality of life.
- **Long-term impact.** Collectively, we are addressing employment disparities, ensuring all community members have opportunities to succeed.
- **Economic growth.** A fully employed population contributes to increased consumer spending, higher tax revenues, and overall economic vitality.

Through Reducing Barriers to Employment & Advancement, we focus on the root causes of barriers to employment. These are the barriers that are preventing people from getting a good job and supporting their families.

What We're Doing Together

Our goal: 15,000 people will be ready to start stable careers having overcome key employment barriers by 2029.

Reducing Barriers to Employment & Advancement is guided by these strategies:



Education, training, & credentials. Supporting organizations that help adults learn to read, earn their GED/HSED, or other employment credentials that lead to a high-demand certification.



Transportation. Supporting organizations that provide innovative transportation solutions or assist with driver's license recovery.



Involvement in the justice system. Supporting programs with a focus on strengthening justice-impacted individuals in the workplace and advocating for policy changes that help these members of our community.

FOR MANY, FINDING A JOB IS NOT THE PROBLEM. THE CHALLENGE IS FINDING JOBS THAT PAY A WAGE THAT ALLOWS THEM TO HAVE A STABLE CAREER.



How We're Changing Lives

In 2023-24, United Way provided funding to 16 organizations focused on:

- Supporting people with disabilities.
- Empowering justice-impacted individuals.
- Addressing the need for skilled healthcare professionals.
- Moving members from “low-skill” positions to “mid-skill” positions that require more than a high school diploma, but less than a four-year degree.
- Offering opportunities to participate in English language learning, adult education, and GED preparation.
- Providing transportation to help someone get to well-paying jobs.

Our community saw the following results in 2023-24:

- Over 45 industry-recognized credentials were obtained, including high school equivalency diplomas, IT services, and construction certifications.
- Over 75 nonviolent arrest records were expunged, in addition to seven pardons.
- Over 120 driver's licenses were recovered.
- Over 540 individuals gained employment after being part of a Reducing Barriers to Employment & Advancement-funded program.

IMPACT IN ACTION



“When people consider barriers to employment, they don’t often think of people with disabilities,” said Rachel Reit of the United Way-funded Down Syndrome Association of Wisconsin (DSAW). “People with disabilities are some of the most marginalized among us.”

Lukas has been attending DSAW since he was a child. DSAW provided him classes, training, and opportunities for a job. “DSAW has helped me a lot,” said Lukas. “I learned life skills, I learned how to make new friends, and how to make connections.”

“We learn from the individuals themselves,” said Rachel. “What do they want their lives and careers to look like? We have programs that allow individuals with disabilities to test out different industries to see what fits their skills and their interests.”

2025-26 Grantees

Benedict Center
Down Syndrome Association
of Wisconsin
Employ Milwaukee
Forward Careers
Goodwill Industries
of Southeastern Wisconsin
JobsWork MKE
La Casa de Esperanza
Legal Action of Wisconsin
Literacy Services of Wisconsin
Milwaukee Christian Center
Milwaukee Community Services Corp
MobiliSE (MetroGO)
My Way Out
Neighborhood House of Milwaukee
Next Door Foundation
Project RETURN
Wisconsin Community Services (WCS)
WRTP | BIG STEP



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Greater Milwaukee
& Waukesha County