

GOODWILL CELEBRATES 100 YEARS OF SERVICE

Believing in the Power of Work since 1919

Goodwill Industries began in Boston at the turn of the 19th century as an idea by the Rev. Edgar J. Helms. The idea was simple, fight poverty not with charity, but with trade skills – and provide a chance for the poor and the unemployed to do productive work.

In the 1890s there were limited government programs to aid those in need. Determined to provide a hand up, not a hand out, Helms put a burlap bag over his shoulder and went door-to-door, appealing to well-to-do people of Boston to contribute shoes, clothing, furniture, anything. Poor men and women were put to work restoring collected goods while learning trades and sharpening skills at the same time. Income from the resale of the goods paid their wages and eventually an industrial school developed.

With Helms as the driving force, Goodwill Industries spread throughout the United States and by 1919, that movement began in Chicago and Milwaukee. The work opportunities provided in those early years gave dignity, independence and hope to the people with disabilities that we served.

In the last 100 years, Goodwill's services have changed to respond to the needs of the times. The Goodwill movement began by helping people with disabilities and disadvantages repair donated items. They helped connect our neighbors with basic services during the Great Depression and were proud to provide training and jobs to wounded soldiers coming back from World War II. Investing in the future, Goodwill trained people on computers when technology became part of the American workforce, and during recessions have been instrumental in connecting people to jobs.

It is easy to become passionate about Goodwill's mission when you witness the transformation in the lives of individuals every day. Over these 100 years thousands of people with disadvantages and disabilities have found their hope through job training, employment, and creating a successful life for themselves and their families.

What is remarkable is that while Goodwill embraces the future and all its promise they have remained steadfast to a century-old mission of believing in the Power of Work.