

Toyota's Indiana Plant Creates Job Pathways for People Living With Disabilities

January 19, 2021

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Mr. Reliable (photo above) — John Hardiman hasn't missed a day of work at TMMI in five years.

Ted Brown has accomplished a lot over his 21-year career at Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Indiana (TMMI). But as far as he's concerned, none of it measures up to the achievements of people like Dakota Moore.

"He's got a cool story," says the vice president of Administration at the Princeton, Indiana, facility. "Dakota is a Special Olympics athlete. He's competed on the national stage and has won silver and bronze medals. His girlfriend has competed on the world stage and medaled, too. They bought a house together and are getting married. And Dakota bought a new Corolla. His parents didn't do that for him. He did it. On his own."

Moore is just one of more than 30 remarkable people who have overcome physical, mental and emotional challenges to make the journey from complete dependence on others to a high level of independence as full-time team members at TMMI.

For Brown, it's a dynamic that hits close to home. Twenty-three years ago, his son Zach was born with spina bifida. His hope? By helping others gain a measure of control over their lives, perhaps he and his wife Michelle can do the same for their son, too.



On a Roll — Thanks in part to the confidence gained in working at TMMI, Dakota Moore has competed on the national stage in the Special Olympics, recently bought a Corolla, got engaged and with his fiancé bought a house.

Success Six Years in the Making

So, in 2014, Brown and other like-minded colleagues established an enclave — or workspace set apart from the mainstream flow of other employees — within TMMI’s East Plant. There, workers living with disabilities were given such tasks as assembling jack packages and window switches for the Sienna. The success of that model led

to the creation of a second enclave in the West Plant about a year later.

Then in 2017, TMMI formed a partnership with ARC of Gibson County, a public agency that has been helping people living with disabilities since 1963. Its New Frontiers training focuses on such fundamentals as interviewing and job seeking skills, resume writing and onsite job coaching. Through this alliance, the plant was able to create a framework within which some of the workers could develop the skills and experience needed to transition from their enclave to full-time employment and fuller autonomy on the facility's sprawling campus.

More recently, TMMI transformed its East Plant enclave into an in-house training center to provide additional support to workers who aspire to achieve more. Brandon Wilson is among the many who've benefitted from that change.

"He had been working in the training center for about six months and had seen some of his friends make the transition," says Brown. "So he took it upon himself to apply for a job. He didn't tell anyone. And he got it. It's so great to see that initiative."



Happy Camper — *Katlin Slough started in an enclave, worked in the training center and is now a full-time employee of one of TMMI's on-site suppliers. "She has been very successful," says Brown. "Smiling every day with a great attitude to keep improving herself."*

Another beneficiary has been Corey Wilkerson. After getting his start in an enclave, he found his niche on one of the plant's janitorial teams. Earlier this year, he was promoted to team leader.

And then there's John Hardiman, who's also made the transition from the training center.

“He’s never missed a day in nearly five years,” says Brown. “He picks seatbelts. That might sound like trivial work. But part accuracy is an important step in the production process. Delivering the right parts to the line, at the right time and in the right sequence helps to maximize production efficiency. Everyone here does important work.”

Brown loves to share these stories. Not only is he proud of people like his son who’ve risen above their challenges to succeed, he’s also grateful for the contributions they make to TMMI every day. Absenteeism among this group is extremely low. Productivity is very high. And the passion they bring to their work is infectious, inspiring everyone who comes into contact with them to dig deep and do more.

“Between TMMI and our suppliers, there are 10,000 jobs within a 2.5-mile radius of where I sit,” says Brown. “Every single one of them is important to our objective of making high quality vehicles. You need the right parts to show up at the right time and these people are delivering on that. If they work in a cafeteria, it’s important that they get the food out on time. They are doing that. Same for the janitorial service. Everyone who works with these folks raves about their work ethic.”



Pride and Joy — Zach Brown, son of TMMI's Ted Brown, was born with spina bifida. But that hasn't prevented the 23-year-old from finding a place of productivity at the plant.

The Power of TMMI's Example

TMMI has made a lot of progress on this front over the years. But it's not Toyota's only North American plant that recognizes the benefits of creating work opportunities for people with disabilities. For instance:

- **Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Kentucky** established its first enclave in 2010. It continues to this day, though Dave Orrender, general manager of Line 2, says COVID-19 has imposed some limitations.
- **Toyota Motor Manufacturing, West Virginia** followed suit in 2018 and is readying an expansion to what it refers to as Phase 2 in 2021. According to Mike Bush, manager of Assembly, that will allow some of its enclave workers to take on more complex tasks — such as assembling head covers to be attached on 4- and 6-cylinder engines — adjacent to the assembly line.
- **Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Texas** is also moving down this path. Todd Williams, group manager of Press/Weld, says the pandemic put its plans to pilot a Summer Earn and Learn program this year on hold. But he's confident it will shift back into gear just as soon as it's safe.

Meanwhile, Brown is committed to creating additional pathways for people with disabilities at TMMI. That includes a new internship program that sponsored two workers this year and is poised to double to four in 2021. Growth of that initiative will depend on grant funding the plant is vying to secure through the Administration for Community Living, a federal government agency.

“We know one size does not fit all, so we're trying to create a broad spectrum of opportunities,” says Brown. “Working with people living with disabilities makes Toyota a stronger company. This is what Respect for People is really all about.”