



Real-Life Stories

3M Works with AbilityOne to Help Empower People with Vision Loss

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Imagine a roll of tape as big as a car – that’s how 3M products arrive on the manufacturing floor at the *Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, or CABVI*, a nonprofit that employs people with vision loss. It’s here that the tape is converted down to individual-sized rolls that can be purchased by the government.

“Eighty-eight percent of our direct labor is visually impaired individuals or those with significant visual loss,” said Teri Shirk, president and CEO for CABVI.

As a leader in manufacturing, 3M is uniquely positioned to help individuals with disabilities and *has been doing so for decades thanks to the AbilityOne program*.

Shirk has recently teamed up with 3M to revitalize its AbilityOne program and expand their offerings. By early 2024, CABVI hopes to add 50% more kinds of tape, co-branded with 3M.

“That’s the thing about having a great partner,” Shirk added. “This allows us to reinvest back into our mission – our vision services get funded by the manufacturing operations where we partner with 3M.”

AbilityOne

Since 1938, AbilityOne has helped thousands of people who are blind or have significant disabilities learn skills and self-sufficiency by producing products for the government. By empowering these individuals, the AbilityOne program is changing lives, breaking down barriers and promoting a more inclusive society.

During its more than 30 years of participation in AbilityOne, 3M has worked with numerous nonprofit agencies, including the National Industries for the Blind, to create pathways to success for hundreds of people with disabilities.

3M was recently named 2023 Large Supplier of the Year by the *National Association for the Employment of People Who Are Blind*. The award recognizes 3M’s support and dedication to finding new and innovative ways to provide jobs for people who are blind.

"We have a long history of supporting the AbilityOne program," said Troy Gerry, vice president of 3M Government Markets. "We will continue to look at ways to grow that relationship to create more opportunities for individuals who are visually impaired."

With 36,000 employees, including over 2,500 veterans, AbilityOne operates nationwide through approximately 450 nonprofits at over 1,000 locations, serving 40 government agencies. These dedicated individuals work on various contracts, including an estimated 25,000 employees engaged in Department of Defense contracts.

In 2022, AbilityOne supplied the federal government with \$3.9 billion of products and services. Its partnership with the DOD is particularly noteworthy, as it provides more than \$2.1 billion in products and services yearly, making it AbilityOne's largest customer.

A relationship that continues to evolve

CABVI's mission is to build brighter futures for children and adults with vision loss. The organization offers vision services and employs individuals in its office supply company, base supply center, transportation company and manufacturing plant.

3M has sold products to CABVI for over 15 years – they currently convert 65 different kinds of tape, many of which utilize 3M products. The machinery in the plant is adapted with vocal prompts, buzzers, and other safety features.

"Not every industry is going to be prepared to do that," said Shirk. "Here, they're getting the tools, resources and respect as individual workers that they need to be successful. The AbilityOne program is the avenue, and partners like 3M make that program work."

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