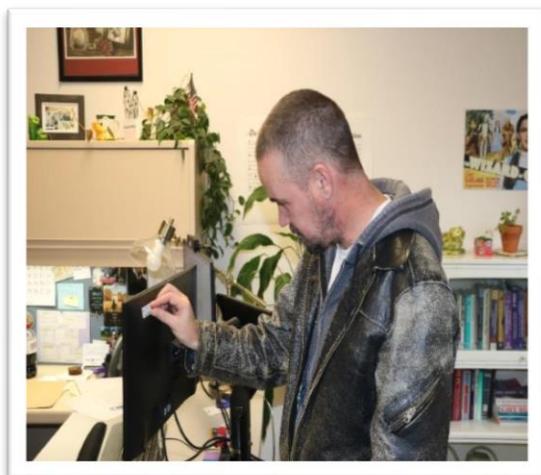


A WHITE CITY SUCCESS

NICHOLAS GUSTAFSON



MR. NICHOLAS GUSTAFSON

The White City CWT program partnered with Mr. Gary Moe, the President of ID Integration Inc, whose company is a Radio Frequency Identification Device, “RFID” and Barcode systems integrator. They have provided parts and asset tracking solutions to the Military and Government for over 20 years. ID Integration has been hiring Veterans for more than 15 years but had not worked with a VHA Vocational Rehabilitation’s CWT Transitional Work (TW) program. The TW program is a component of CWT which provides participants with work restoration services in actual work settings, where there is no employer-employee relationship. The program partners with business and federal agencies to place Veterans into the workplace with a goal for CWT-TW vocational staff to provide vocational supports and resources needed for a Veteran to successfully transition to competitive employment. In November 2018, a partnership was formed, and ID Integrations became a VHA Vendor.

Mr. Moe stated, “The Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) program fits exactly what we needed offering a program by which we can hire Veterans that are actively engaged in getting back to work. CWT program members are available to our company with various skill sets and are in various stages of the program.”

In December 2018, the vocational rehabilitation program (VRP) staff began screening Veterans enrolled in the CWT TW program and set up an interview schedule for Veterans who met the required skill set to work for ID Integration. Selected Veterans began work with ID Integration on April 15, 2019



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and John Guempel, Site Project Manager, provided training. New technology was introduced, and the results were positive based on the feedback from participants. Once trained, John assigned Veterans to different work teams. Those teams systematically walked building to building, floor by floor and office to office, tracking down approximately 6,490 pieces of equipment, all which needed to be inventoried and tagged. The process lasted approximately 90 days. When this phase was ending, the focus shifted to the next site. It was at this time, that two of our Veterans had shown exceptional skills and were asked to continue as full-time ID Integration employees. One of those Veterans, Nicholas Gustafson is recognized as the subject of this Success Story.

Michelle Beech Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist was assigned to Nick to complete the assessment and evaluation process. During the evaluation, the question of work history was asked. Nicholas stated that he had just been fired from two jobs, was having multiple panic attacks daily, and had very low self-confidence. Michelle and Nicholas both agreed that placing him in an on-station TW assignment where he had access to his entire VA Support Team as needed (which consisted of a Mental Health Counselor, Mental Health Psychiatrist, Primary Care Provider, Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist & the Transitional Work Assignment Supervisor) would be extremely beneficial. Nicholas attended the VRP Job Seekers Skills Classes which included resume building, interview practice, job coaching and encouragement at every step in the process of obtaining and maintaining competitive employment. Nicholas's initial TW assignment was for Nutrition and Food Services as a Kitchen Helper. Nick was successful during this assignment. I feel this was the catalyst for what was to come. His outlook, attitude, and demeanor began to change. Nick exuded self-confidence, which was noticed by his VRS, site supervisor as well as his peers. For this reason, Nicholas was selected as a candidate to represent this program as the first TW participant with ID Integration.

Nick interviewed and was selected for the assignment and excelled. He was known as the go-to guy by the other participants. Nick did so well that he was eventually offered a position with the company as a Site Supervisor.

Nicholas stated, "I appreciate Voc Rehab and what they did. When I first saw Michelle, I was in a bad place, the trajectory was perfect from starting with Voc Rehab to when I was finally in front of the employer knowing, I was now ready to go forward."

"Many times, walking through the White City OR campus Nicholas received many praises of "Keep it up!" with a high five to follow. It was apparent he was supported by his peers and VA staff with a lot of encouragement", stated John. "Nicholas changed before our eyes. His confidence and natural leadership came to the surface. As the project progressed and our processes were refined, I saw how other team members took to Nicholas' leadership. Being in CWT and helping show other CWT members was important and he was able to connect with them immediately. Similar backgrounds and stories created a strong work environment for our CWT team."

When the team was in the final phase at White City, John started focusing on the additional VA medical centers where ID Integration would begin work. The VACO VHA Vocational Rehabilitation office partnered with the ID Integration team to make the introductions necessary so that partnerships could develop with the CWT managers at each subsequent site. During this phase, I was notified that Nicholas would be offered to continue as an employee with ID Integration.

John explained, "Our program uses CWT at each VISN site and while there are challenges, they are all worth it. There are many successful examples of CWT stories with our project and Nicholas has stood out in so many ways. I'm very proud to have him as an employee and leading teams. I've come to rely on him day to day and can count on him to get the job done well."

So far, Nicholas has traveled to Roseburg, Portland, Eugene, and Alaska tagging assets for the company utilizing participants from VHA Vocational Rehabilitation's Compensated Work

Therapy (CWT) program. Nicholas continued to excel and was made a Team Leader for ID Integration in December 2019. Gary and John were so impressed with Nicholas hard work that they decided to bless him with a trip to the North Pole. Nicholas explained, "ID Integrations knew how much I liked Santa, so they flew me to the North Pole to see him and Mrs. Claus and all the things in the town. It was awesome!"

Nicholas continued, "All resources of the VA were brought to bear. From HUD/VASH for housing, to primary care from doctors and nurses, to mental health, employment, and even religious services. I often feel lucky and undeserving. While I still struggle with mental health issues, I would not be where I am without the VA. I worked very hard, and the VA worked very hard to make sure I received a whole team approach to my care. I would not be here without the VA, and I am grateful beyond words. I owe everyone who helped me a thank you from the bottom of my heart. Without you I wouldn't have reached the success I now enjoy." – Nicholas Gustafson

Chuck Hanger, Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist
Brett Feagan, White City CWT Manager