

Workforce, Innovation, Skills Hub (WISH)

Connecting the community to innovative employment resources and opportunities

In 2022, Fairfax County selected Melwood and its partner Building Momentum to establish the Workforce, Innovation, Skills Hub (WISH) to provide services designed to activate the community to develop its workforce, support business, and cultivate a thriving economy. The initiative is a unique, first of its kind workforce and innovation center that builds on Melwood's extensive experience in breaking down barriers to employment and equipping job candidates for success.

Fairfax County is home to a diverse population, ripe with talent and enthusiasm to build a thriving community. However, there are parts of the county that have been historically underserved and under-resourced, struggling to build a sustainable economy.

- **Woodlawn, VA**

- Population: 6,409
 - 36% of residents are Black
 - 46% of residents are Hispanic
 - Median income: \$42,000, 45% less than state of Virginia and 67% less than Fairfax County

- **Hybla Valley, VA**

- Population: 7,103
 - 25% of residents are Black
 - 54% of residents are Hispanic
 - Median income: \$56,000, 26% less than the state of Virginia and 57% less than Fairfax County

No matter the reason an individual comes to the WISH, Melwood will leverage our skills in case management and community resources to build individualized plans for job training, placement, retention, and upskilling. Services will include youth programming (explore), community demonstrations and outreach (expose), skills development and educational supports (engage), job placement and retention services (employ), and case management and referrals. With barrier-free access to services, Melwood will serve the full community in an inclusive and integrated manner, ensuring no one is left behind.



AREAS OF FOCUS:

Established in the heart of one of the most underserved communities in Fairfax County, we intend to create a space in which community members feel safe and comfortable exploring technology, design-thinking, skill-building, and workforce development resources in order to create a pathway to new, high-paying employment opportunities, education opportunities including higher-education enrollment, or expanding success in their current fields and/or with their current employer.

WISH will contain classroom and workshop space that will be utilized to upskill and train residents for employment in the trades and emerging industries and technologies. Through partnerships with unions and companies like Amazon, Dominion, and INOVA, these trainings will be directly linked to employment opportunities that will be available in the area over the next two years and beyond. The center will also include educational spaces for partner-led trainings, soft skills development and job readiness workshops, and private offices for personalized, one-on-one coaching and supports as identified through the ongoing assessment process.

Among the opportunities, Melwood will also bring its successful *abilIT* and *Building Paths* workforce development programs to Fairfax County, Virginia.



Melwood is a leading employer, advocate, and preferred provider for people with disabilities. Devoted to creating a world in which people with disabilities are fully included since 1963, Melwood's innovative strategies and programs empower people with disabilities to live, work and thrive in the community.

Interested in learning more?

Contact Donna Seering, Director of Workforce Solutions & Individual Employment Services for Melwood at dseering@melwood.org.