




# Breaking New Ground

A stunningly bold vision for 2028  
and the plan that will take us there.

Our vision is a world where people with disabilities are fully included.

The reality is disabilities have never been the problem. The challenge has always been the world that formed around them. A world designed to work for most, but not for all.

We're Melwood. We're here to help lead conversations, expand opportunities, and build people up.

We are breaking down those barriers, and the following pages describe exactly how we intend to do so. 

On seven acres of unimproved land—donated by Andrews Air Force Base—our founders pitched an Army surplus tent. Their goal was nearly unheard of: jobs for people with disabilities, who had been told all their lives that they would never be trainable or employable. It was a bold vision—a world where people with disabilities would be fully included.

### BREAKING GROUND



### GROUNDBREAKING

Today, Melwood celebrates 60 years of creating opportunities for jobs and services to people with disabilities. We continue to utilize the innovative and effective social-entrepreneurial model upon which we were founded to offer more people with disabilities the training they need to become proud and valuable members of the workforce in their communities. And our vision is only growing bolder.



Let's get to work.

Who  
We Are

04

What  
We Do

06

Where  
We're Going

12


Why We're  
Doing It

13

How We  
Get There

14

# Our Guiding Principles

Melwood is proud of our past and emboldened for the future. Our dedication to our community is steadfast, and our confidence in our workforce unwavering. From this solid foundation, we seek to achieve a world where people with disabilities are fully included. 



**All people should have opportunities to enrich their own lives and the lives of others.**

All persons should have access to meaningful opportunities so they can discover their strengths and abilities and reach their full potential. With understanding and forethought, all activities (work, play, education, and therapy) can be accessible. Melwood has a legacy of hearing people’s goals, working with them to achieve success and, most importantly, helping them empower themselves to reach their full potential.

**All people should have opportunities to choose their own path.**

All persons deserve an opportunity to explore their interests, to set their own goals, and to strive to achieve those goals. For more than 60 years, Melwood has been proving that, given the chance, those with disabilities are perfect for the job. The challenge is no longer getting an opportunity; it is ensuring that those opportunities match the desires, skills, and needs of people with disabilities as they pursue the career they desire.



**All people should have opportunities for meaningful inclusion in the community.**

Every person deserves to be included in their community, and every community is better when we live up to this promise. For people with disabilities, “inclusion” is more than a buzzword. True inclusion comes from more than physical accessibility—it comes from intentional efforts to break down barriers, both physical and social. Inclusion is having full access, being accepted, being supported, and having an environment in which people can explore their interests, exercise their abilities, and reach their full potential.

### 2010s

Eliminated the use of Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act, no longer paying subminimum wages

Awarded first Total Facility Management (TFM) contract at Fort Meade, a 5-year, \$100 million contract

**Over 2,150 people served annually**

### 1990s

Worked with U.S. Congressman Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) to champion historic passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act

Awarded first \$1 million contract at Andrews Air Force Base Commissary

Founded Camp Accomplish, an inclusive summer camp for kids with and without disabilities

**Over 900 people served annually**

### 1970s

Acquired 108-acre property in Charles County, Maryland, and operated a fully functioning farm teaching agriculture, farming, landscaping, and horticulture

Awarded first federal grounds maintenance contract with the U.S. Army Reserve

**100 people served annually**

### TODAY

Over \$95 million annually in contracts performed at 60+ sites

1,600 employees annually, including nearly 800 people with disabilities

**Over 3,000 people served annually**

### 2000s

Awarded first \$30 million custodial contract with U.S. Naval Academy

Received first accreditation at the highest level of a 3-year term by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF International)

**Over 1,400 people served annually**

### 1980s

The Melwood Farm became the Melwood Recreation Center and launched first programming aimed at retreats and camp-themed activities

Awarded first of many AbilityOne grounds and custodial contracts in D.C.

**Over 800 people served annually**


### 1960s

Founded by a group of parents in 1963

Acquired first service contract—\$100 lawn care of a local home; cultivated 15,000 plants and operated two greenhouse

**12 people served annually**

# We Help People Live

Our homes are a refuge. Places filled with what speaks to us and brings us joy. We recognize that for too many people with disabilities, the promise of living independently and in spaces designed for success has long been out of reach. We are challenging the status quo, recognizing that independence and a place of one's own makes participating in daily life easier for people with disabilities. 



## The Challenges We Face

People with disabilities face housing insecurity at greater rates than the general population. Safe, affordable housing is fundamental to everyone's social, emotional, and financial well-being. Yet in the disability community, housing options and the ability to support oneself are even more constrained, leading to increased risks of institutionalization, isolation, or homelessness.

## We help facilitate independent living.

### Teach Skills for Independence

Melwood provides learning-assisted daily living skills in areas including personal care, household management, and budgeting. Our caring and dedicated direct support professionals provide quality, meaningful services that empower people with the skills to live independently.





### **Provide Quality Day Activities**

Melwood provides high-quality day supports, community activities, and volunteer opportunities, while ensuring choice and personal growth for participants. Our work erases isolation and provides enriching experiences, as we seek to not only set the standard, but elevate it and empower people with disabilities to live independent lives.

## **We help create community.**

### **Breaking Ground in Arlington: The Arlington Redevelopment Project**

Melwood plans to redevelop its Arlington Property into a mixed-use building that supports not only Melwood programs and office space but also affordable housing inclusive of people with disabilities. The project will also support day services, as well as employment training and readiness programs for approximately 250 people with disabilities annually.




**24%**

#### **Homelessness**

On any given day, 24% of people experiencing homelessness have a disability.

# We Help People Work

Work is so much more than a title and a paystub. It can help establish a sense of identity. A purpose. A value. Our jobs are a significant part of our lives and key to achieving independence. Leading by example, we're expanding the labor pool by bringing an army of eager, willing, and capable workers to the table. 



## The Challenges We Face

People with disabilities are twice as likely to be unemployed as people without disabilities. In 2020, workers with disabilities were earning \$0.74 for every dollar paid to their nondisabled peers, and people with disabilities are more than twice as likely to live in poverty. Economic security is foundational to a sense of safety, and access to meaningful work is one path to economic security that has been denied or delayed for the disability community.

## We help prepare for work.



2024-2028

Strategic Plan

## **Career Exploration & Workforce Development.**

Melwood professionals help individuals determine preferred fields of work, and then assist them in acquiring the skills, certifications and work related behaviors necessary to succeed in that field of work. This area includes our signature programs — abilIT and Building Paths. We've proven that people with disabilities are incredible candidates for jobs in any field, when given the support and training needed to succeed.

## **Job Development and Placement**

Once preferred fields of work are determined and participants feel trained and ready, Melwood professionals help individuals create and execute actionable plans for finding and starting their career. This includes working with the individual to overcome barriers like transportation, to build the confidence they need to convince an employer they are perfect for the job.



## We help people launch careers.

### Direct Employment

Melwood employs hundreds of people with disabilities on its service contracts with federal, state, and local governments, as well as private companies. For many of our employees, this is their first job and a pathway to success in the workforce. Our on-the-job training and dedicated vocational support staff create a stable environment to build skills and gain experience that serves our employees for their careers ahead.



## We help create success.

### Employer Readiness

No matter how prepared a worker may be, there must be a willing and prepared employer at the other end of the pipeline. Melwood works with employers, from small businesses to major corporations, to prepare them to live out promises of providing an inclusive workforce. From identifying and recruiting candidates, to interviews and on-boarding, to management and senior-leadership engagement, Melwood helps create environments for success.



### Employment Supports


Via on-site work visits, home visits, phone calls, and planning meetings, Melwood professionals help participants identify potential barriers to success and develop a plan for overcoming those barriers while being employed in the broader community. Each person's individualized plan includes their strengths, abilities, and personal goals, and addresses possible ways to navigate obstacles through improved skills, self-advocacy, or navigation of community resources.

### Unemployment Rate

6.8%

The unemployment rate for people with disabilities is 6.8%, compared to 3.7% for people without disabilities.

# We Help People Thrive

Melwood believes a community begins when everyone has the safety and support to thrive. People with disabilities must be intentionally included in every aspect of our community, enabling them to achieve a dignified, engaging, and full life. Simply put, everyone needs community. 



## The Challenges We Face

People with disabilities routinely miss out on access to activities many of us take for granted. That includes equal access to services designed for their inclusion in recreational activities, civic engagement, and basic necessities like healthcare and food. Our health systems, transit systems, and recreational activities are not all universally designed or accessible.



## We help to raise voices.

### Advocacy

Melwood is working each and every day to advocate for policies that advance the status and inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace, with the goal of ultimately creating more economically sustainable and independent communities. Through Melwood Voices, we equip self-advocates and elevate their voices to demand the changes they need, from the halls of Congress to the local county government.

### Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

22%

22% of participating households include a non-elderly disabled person in need of greater access to quality food.



## We help create experiences.

### **Promise Landing Farm**

In partnership with Promise Landing Farm (PLF), Melwood offers therapeutic riding and other equestrian services at the Melwood Recreation Center in a fully inclusive environment for riders of all ages, including riders with disabilities. PLF's unique approach gives every participant hands-on opportunities to work alongside the horses and each other through interactive and educational learning spaces designed to be fully inclusive and accommodate all learning styles.

### **Camp Accomplish**


Melwood's inclusive summer camp provides a 10-week inclusive summer program for children ages 5-18. Camp Accomplish welcomes kids with and without disabilities to share the joy and fun of summer camp. From climbing walls to nature trails to therapeutic riding activities, every child gets the same experience for the same price. The inclusive nature of Camp Accomplish also facilitates generational change, as kids learn and play with one another.

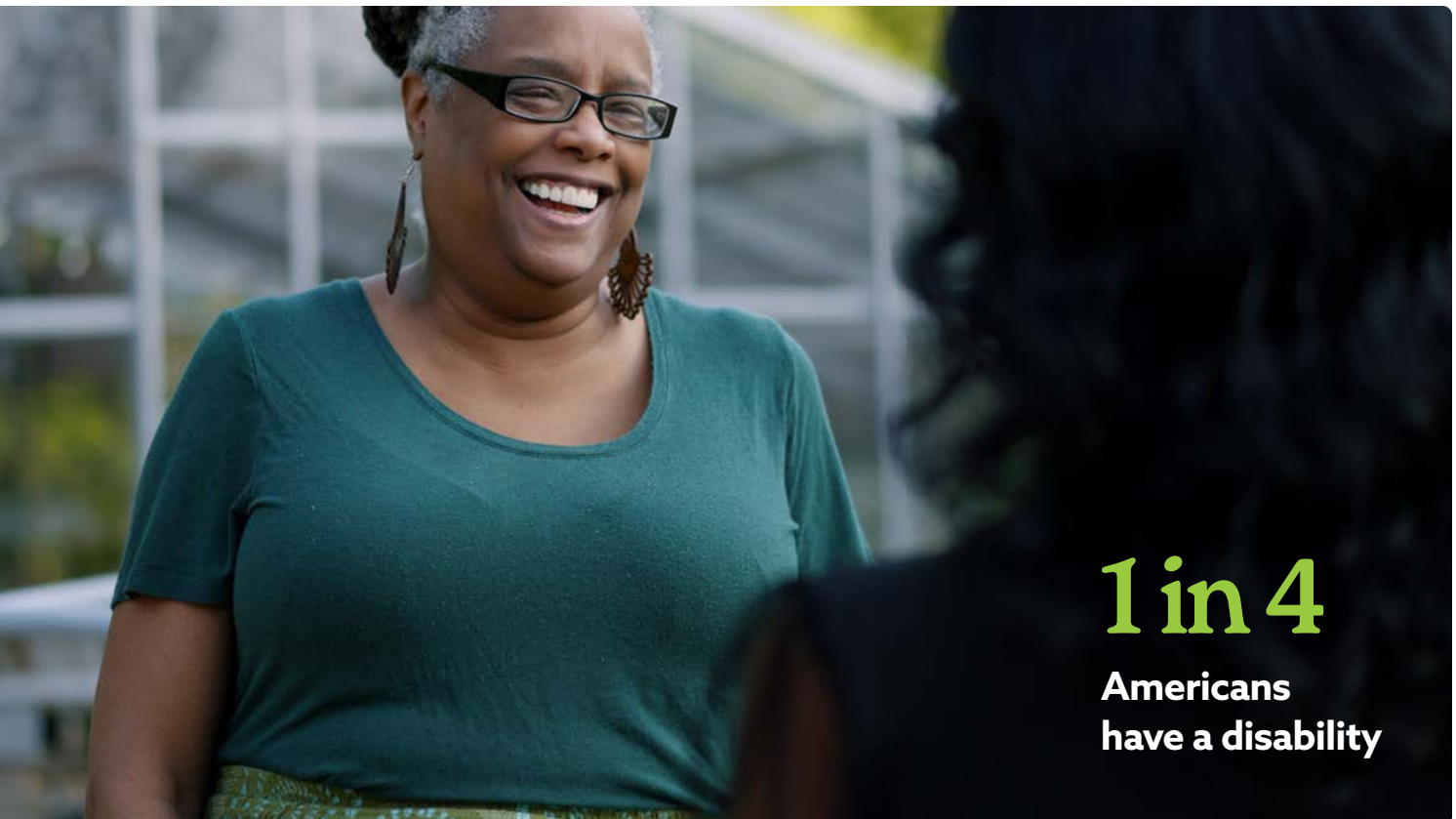
### **Seed-to-Table**

Melwood proudly operates a seed-to-table program to serve kids with and without disabilities facing food insecurity in our community. Beginning as part of our Camp programming, Melwood teaches local kids and their families about plant and vegetable care. As each child leaves with fresh produce, we offer additional experiences throughout the year to continue engagement and do our part to address broader challenges facing our community in an inclusive way.



# The Road Ahead


As we stand on a solid foundation, we recognize the challenges ahead are daunting. Melwood is ready to move into the future, boldly leading the way by facing these challenges head on. Our vision to achieve a world where people with disabilities are fully included is not yet fully realized, but we are eager to make it happen. We've grown from a small nonprofit to a large organization by never backing down from a challenge or obstacle. We are willing to take a chance. 



**1 in 4**

**Americans  
have a disability**

# Why We're Doing It

Change can only begin when we recognize it is imperative. Melwood is deeply aware of the barriers faced by the disability community, and sees the complex and often intersecting factors that leave people with disabilities disengaged or forgotten. We recognize our power and our role in breaking down those barriers, and know we can lead the way to achieving our vision. 

## The Key Challenges We Face

Amidst a rapidly changing landscape, we see opportunity. Over the next 5 years, our organization will seek to transform, to lead, to shape policy, and to move deliberately forward. There are risks ahead, but Melwood is committed to setting an example, serving our community with excellence, and meeting those risks head-on to achieve progress.



75%

### Living Situation

Currently, about 75% of adults with I/DD\* live with their parents or other family members, the majority of whom are not receiving formal services or supports.

Older Parents as Caregivers | Grantmakers in Aging ([giaging.org](http://giaging.org))



26¢

### Pay Disparity

In 2020, workers with disabilities (ages 18–64) were paid, on average, 74 cents for every dollar paid to their nondisabled peers.

7 Facts About the Economic Crisis Facing People with Disabilities in the United States ([tcf.org](http://tcf.org))



2x


### Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is twice as prevalent in households with a family member who has a disability.

USDA ERS | Disability Is an Important Risk Factor for Food Insecurity

\*intellectual/developmental disability

# How We Get There

To be groundbreaking requires a bold vision. Melwood has identified five strategic priorities that leverage our organizational strengths, build on our operational capacity, and invest in our most critical resource—our people. Over the next five years, we'll explore big ideas, build on success, and set new standards for excellence at all levels. Here's our plan. 

1



## Elevate inclusivity.

Continue elevating inclusive, accessible places to live, work, and thrive.

2



### Use data in bold new ways.

Capturing and using relevant data to drive innovation, excellence, and inclusion.

3



### Be innovative in how we think and act.

Being at the forefront of innovation, setting an example that others are inspired to follow.

4



### Lead the conversation.

Leading the national conversation about disability policy concerning work and economic empowerment.

5



### Deliver results.

Securing the people, processes, technology, and other resources to support our mission and this Strategic Plan.

# Elevate

Continue elevating inclusive, accessible places to live, work, and thrive. 

## Why this matters.

While a lot of progress has been made over the last 60 years, substantial barriers to inclusion still remain. People with disabilities are less likely to be employed, more likely to experience isolation, and are often housing insecure. We need to keep closing these gaps.

## How will this advance the mission?

- We'll move beyond launching careers to growing them.
- We'll expand and elevate programming to keep up with an evolving society.
- We'll start interventions earlier, easing the transition from school to work.





# Big Ideas We'll Explore

We will continue the vital work that Melwood has done for decades, delivering ever-evolving programming with excellence and daring to dream about what is next.



## Participant Satisfaction and Engagement

We will seek out more ways to be inclusive of participant feedback as we ensure our programming reflects their interests and goals and has sustainable impact.



## Expand and Evolve Youth Services

Study after study shows that early intervention is key to setting children with disabilities on a path to long-term success. We'll expand our Camp programming to help children build confidence and explore interests and launch after-school programming.



## Career Growth and Upskilling

Melwood's efforts have always focused on getting people with disabilities into the workforce. That's no longer enough. We will be working to train and upskill disabled workers so they can take the next step and grow their careers.

### Melwood at the Forefront

Melwood strategically partners with organizations, employers, and government leaders to tackle complex challenges that pose significant barriers to the success of people with disabilities. We lead by example and are always willing to confront barriers. We show up, whether it's the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1993 or establishing an innovative workforce pipeline program like abil/T.

### MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



### Deonte Bennett

has worked for Melwood since 2014 and currently works at the Washington Navy Yard. Over the past several years, Deonte has devoted himself to achieving new goals, and further increasing his independence and self-sufficiency. In October 2019, Deonte moved from his family's home into a one-bedroom apartment, where he now lives on his own and fully supports his own needs. Most recently, he's been studying to obtain his learner's permit so that he can drive.

# Inform

Capturing and using relevant data to drive innovation, excellence, and inclusion at Melwood and beyond. 

## Why this matters.

For too long the field of disability supports has focused on measuring outputs and not outcomes, resulting in missed opportunities and a lack of impact data. It's time to change that. Intelligent expansion, analysis, and application of data will support every area of our operations more effectively and advance the field.

## How will this advance the mission?

- We will use data more effectively to yield stronger cases for support.
- We will offer improved insights for resource allocation and funding sources.
- This will inform our growth and innovation, and hopefully that of others sharing our mission.
- We will facilitate sharing lessons learned with peer nonprofits.





## Big Ideas We'll Explore

We will seek to expand our understanding of our impact, while also effectively working to inform broader community activities by providing insight into what is effective.



### Digital Transformation

We will create a secure, integrated, and compliant data infrastructure to improve information gathering and analysis, and organizational performance.



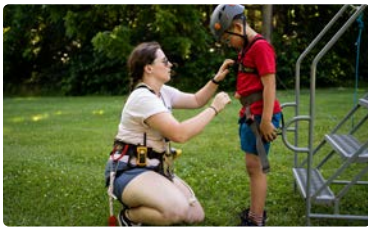
### Build

We will build a business intelligence system to better understand our wins and losses, as well as identify the best opportunities for Melwood.



### Accountability

We will audit our programmatic data, exploring how we can use it, how it will inform our work in the future, and what questions are left unanswered.



### Collaboration

We will collaborate with universities, think tanks, and other partners to aggregate and analyze data around impact—both Melwood's and that of our mission-aligned partners.

## Did You Know?

# 40%

of people with disabilities who weren't working reported that they would like to be working for pay.\*

# 23%

of those who were working reported that they would like to be working more.

# 1/5

Only one in five (22%) people with disabilities said they were confident they were on track to meet their long-term goals.\*

### Melwood at the Forefront

Melwood is a leader in providing actionable and thought-provoking data and analysis. In 2022, the Virginia Tech Center for Economic and Community Engagement (CECE) and the Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance (VTIPG) conducted a study utilizing Melwood's employee data to provide analysis and recommendations on the value of the U.S. AbilityOne Program, demonstrating significant savings to the federal government, as well as improved mental, emotional, and financial wellness for the population we serve.

\* The Financial Health of People With Disabilities — Financial Health Network ([finhealthnetwork.org](http://finhealthnetwork.org))

# Innovate

Being at the forefront of innovation, setting an example that others are inspired to follow. 

## Why this matters.

Historically the model for serving people with disabilities has often been rooted in deficit thinking and focused on segregated settings. We're changing that, taking a community- and strengths-based approach that expands options and truly leverages each person's talents, skills, and interests.

## How will this advance the mission?

- We will expand the type and variety of careers people with disabilities are exposed to and prepared for.
- We will lift up more nonprofits in new ways.
- We will offer dynamic new tools and bring more employers into the mission.
- We will build robust networks of collaborative nonprofits to be more effective and successful.



# Big Ideas We'll Explore

Innovation is about producing and replicating results, making it easier for others to lean in by offering them the tools needed. The best way to have a wider impact is by leveraging and combining resources with public/private partners.



## Growth Through Partnership

Licensing programs to other nonprofits using a train-the-trainer method and enforcing consistent quality standards to reach more people and create an attractive talent pipeline for employers with a nationwide presence.



## Mentor Small Nonprofits

The disability community is best served when there are capable quality nonprofits in each neighborhood. We'll leverage opportunities like the AbilityOne mentor-protégé program to lift up and mentor smaller nonprofits.



## Train Employers

More and more employers are saying they want to foster inclusion but don't know how. We'll answer the call by producing more training resources to teach employers how to be accessible and inclusive.



## Model Through Teaming

Perhaps the best way to teach employers how to be accessible is to show them. We'll pursue teaming agreements with for-profit contractors so they can learn from our experience, while at the same time leveraging that opportunity to create career opportunities for people with disabilities.

### Melwood at the Forefront

Melwood has long pursued innovative programs that have successfully bridged openings in hard-to-fill positions with trained and certified talent from the disability community.


### COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT



### The Leen Family

is grateful to Melwood for the quality respite care provided to their daughter, Alex. At Camp Accomplish, Alex enjoyed sitting around the campfire, dining in the mess hall, and creating artwork! Craig Leen says, "It is very moving and even overwhelming in some ways for me to think about this wonderful opportunity my daughter received to attend overnight camp."

# Lead

Leading the national conversation about disability policy concerning work and economic empowerment. 

## Why this matters.

The passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act set forth a baseline expectation. It protected the rights of people with disabilities, but it did not erase the social barriers that have persisted through the years. Raising our voice, and elevating the voices of our employees and the people we serve, enhances the national conversation and challenges policy makers to do more to create an inclusive world.

## How will this advance the mission?

- We will ensure workers with disabilities are seen as full members of the workforce.
- We will end antiquated policies that allow people with disabilities to be paid less than the minimum wage.
- We will seek changes to policy barriers to employment such as the benefits cliff, which unnecessarily complicates the lives of people with disabilities by coupling public benefits to earnings.
- We will leverage the purchasing power of the government to create more self-sustaining jobs for people with disabilities.





## Big Ideas We'll Explore

Melwood will leverage its influence to lead conversations, challenge the status quo, and chart the path forward.



### Train Advocates

We will train and empower self-advocates to speak for themselves and others to policymakers at the local, state, and federal level.



### Build Alliances

Grow a coalition focused on expanding federal workforce opportunities for workers with disabilities.



### Call for the End of Subminimum Wages

Across the country, people with disabilities continue to face barriers like being paid subminimum wages for their work. We'll seek federal legislation to end that practice.



### Support Our Workforce

Low reimbursement rates and other challenges have led to a staffing crisis for direct support professionals. We'll call for policy changes that support the DSP workforce and recognize their contributions to the field.

## Melwood at the Forefront

Melwood has a history of being a part of significant changes in disability policy. We were there when the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed. We were one of the first social enterprises to win an AbilityOne contract serving people with disabilities. We not only eliminated subminimum wages for people with disabilities at Melwood, but we've led the conversation at the state and federal levels to end it once for all.

## Did You Know?

# 10%

One tenth of working-age people with disabilities are financially healthy, compared with 30% of working-age people without disabilities.\*

# 1/2


Half (51%) of working-age people with disabilities said they were able to pay all of their bills on time, while close to half (46%) said they have unmanageable levels of debt.

# 80%

More than 80% of school personnel respondents in one study said unified interactions between those with and without disabilities identified an increased sense of community and increased student confidence.\*\*

\* *The Financial Health of People With Disabilities — Financial Health Network (finhealthnetwork.org)*  
\*\* *Dec. 2021 study—Social Inclusion of Students With Intellectual Disabilities: Global Evidence From Special Olympics Unified Schools*

# Deliver

Having the people, processes, technology, and other resources to support our mission and plan. 

## Why this matters.

People are Melwood's most critical resource, and our processes, technology, and other resources must be strategically and thoughtfully leveraged to ensure Melwood's operations are supporting and launching the organization into a future that achieves our mission with excellence.

## What exactly will delivering do for us?

- Recruit, develop, and retain a dedicated, results-driven, and high-performing workforce.
- Foster an inclusive, values-driven corporate culture at all levels of the organization.
- Diversify our revenue through robust, data-driven, and goal-oriented business development and fund development.
- Ensure we invest in our operational success in smart and practical ways.





# Big Ideas We'll Explore

Melwood will invest in and elevate our workforce and organization in new ways.



## Reorganize

We'll restructure Melwood's operations to optimize our work and ensure each entity is giving the people we serve its best.



## Nurture Culture

Foster a culture that embraces accountability, respect, healthy conflict resolution, commitment, collaboration, and honesty.



## Partner

Establish joint ventures with other organizations through merger, acquisition, or affiliation to start new lines of business or services, or expand existing lines.



## Grow

Build new social enterprise, employment, or training centers on Melwood properties to diversify career pathways and opportunities.

### COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT




## Jason Carr

is a dedicated Technology Coordinator at NFP where he plays a pivotal role in enhancing accessibility and inclusion. Jason graduated from Melwood's esteemed abil/T program and brings a unique blend of technical expertise and a strong commitment to disability advocacy to his position.

## Melwood at the Forefront

Since our humble beginnings, Melwood has always believed in untapped and overlooked potential. Our dedication to on-the-job training, person-centered employment planning, and investment in our organization has made Melwood one of the top in the field.

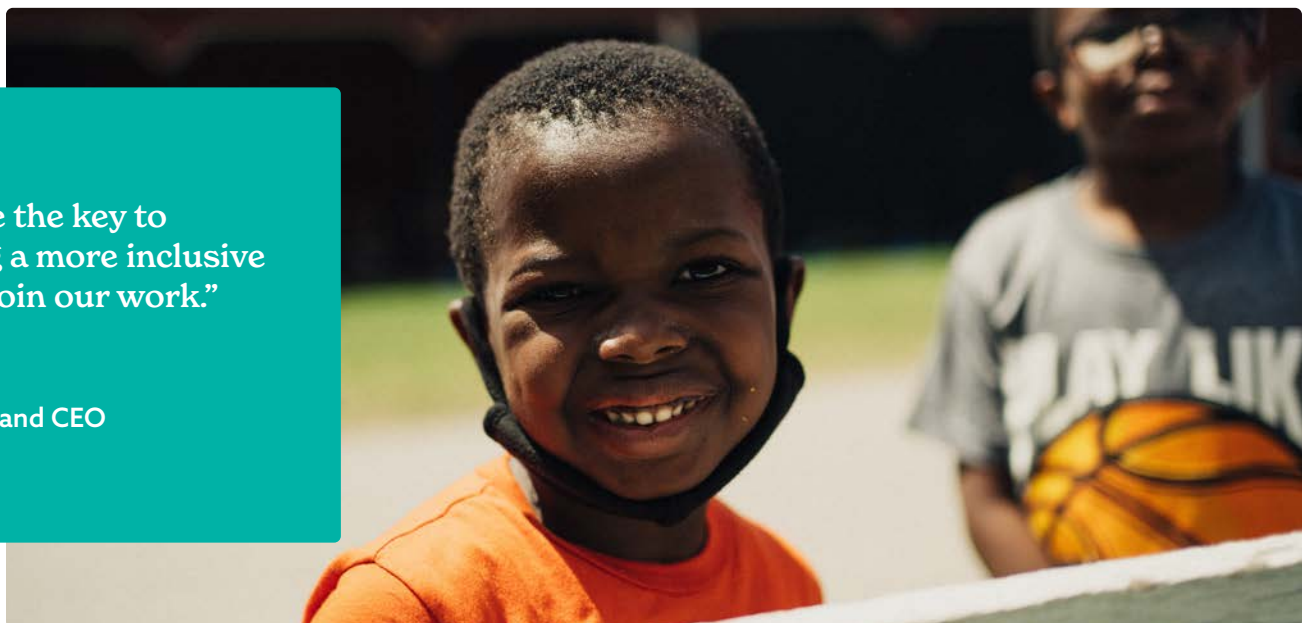
# Your Role

What we do cannot be done without our Melwood community and the value brought by each person who touches our mission through participation, partnership, or sponsorship. Together, we can achieve so much more. There are many ways to take part in achieving our vision. 



“You are the key to building a more inclusive world. Join our work.”

—  
**LARYSA**  
President and CEO





## Participant

Melwood's greatest strength is our people. The passion and energy from each of our participants as they are empowered to write their own story inspires us. We invite you to join our workforce, participate in one of our programs, or encourage your child to join us at Camp Accomplish!

---



## Donor

Through the power of a donation, we can take on big challenges—and break down the biggest barriers—to ensure every person who comes to Melwood can achieve their dream. An investment in Melwood doesn't simply go to keeping the lights on, it becomes the seed capital to take chances. And our track record is, if you invest in our ideas, we're going to make them a success. We invite you to invest in our work.

---



## Corporate Partner

Our work is about more than just empowering people with disabilities. We're creating viable workforce solutions. We've partnered with organizations both as a social enterprise offering excellent services to our customers and by connecting employers with a pool of talented candidates. Partners who have worked with Melwood have gotten more than they bargained for. We invite you to join that work.

---



## Advocate

Change begins when we know that change needs to happen. Advocates have long been the force that changes the world. From the Capitol steps to state houses to the White House lawn, we champion the voices of our community. We invite you to raise your voice and join our work to change policies, practices, and minds to build a more inclusive world.

---



## Volunteer

Behind every success story is a person who has made it their goal, sometimes without pay or accolades, to be a part of the mission. From staffing our community events, to offering mock interviews, to building activities at the Melwood Recreation Center, our community is enriched by the generous support of our volunteers. We invite you to join our network and be a part of our community by volunteering your time.

# Let's get to work.

Our Strategic Plan lays out a bold and unwavering vision.  
We invite you to join our work in the future, because we know  
our vision of a more inclusive world can become reality.  
Let's be bold. Let's get to work.

[melwood.org](https://melwood.org)

melwood