

Community Haven overcomes budget cuts with a new plan



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SARASOTA COUNTY - We've all heard the advice that when you face cloudy skies look for a silver lining, or when life hands you a lemon you make lemonade -- advice that is not so easy to follow when you're in dire straits. But one Suncoast agency has done just that. Community Haven serves 110 adults with mental and physical disabilities. The recession hit them hard. "About 6 months ago, a lot of funding got cut from various places. So to make ourselves self-sufficient, we started these businesses," says Brad Jones, director of adult services.

They contacted local companies and started doing work for them. "What we do is we contract with area businesses to provide work for them, so we have different areas such chair caning, we work on contracts for Sun Hydraulics, Pac Tec, Uflex, and United Refrigerators," says Jones. They also have their own catering business. Scarlett Whaley and her group are doing assembly work. "Everybody is putting all the parts in plastic bags, and we all get monthly checks for it....it feels good, it feels very good."

They earn up to \$400 a month. For most, it's their first paying job. And they're very careful with their earnings. "Right now I like to save it, because it's so much money," says Whaley. "It means the world to them. It means they are able to provide for themselves, have extra spending money to go out in the community, do recreational activities. It makes them more independent," says Jones.

The companies they work for praise their work. "They should be very proud. They've done an excellent job with all the work that they've provided us," says Surry McFaul of Sun Hydraulics. And it's a great benefit to the businesses they're working for. "We have businesses in the community that have commented to us they would not be able to open their doors without the assistance of folks at Community Haven," says Community Haven president Marla Doss.

So Community Haven has found a way to overcome a bad situation -- a cut in funding -- and found a way overcome it and turn it into a winning situation for themselves, their clients, and local businesses.