

How HB Threads Is Creating Valuable Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities

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What began in 1998 as Harry's Buttons has since evolved into HB Threads. The innovative program started when Harry Sr. and Marilyn Engnell sought meaningful employment for their son, Harry Jr., who had autism. They soon found that they were faced with limited opportunities. Harry thrived on repetitive tasks and had a passion for making custom buttons. From that small beginning, they created a business and it grew. Since then, HB Threads has impacted hundreds of lives and expanded into what is now a full product line, including custom buttons, magnets, t-shirts, hoodies, hats, tote bags, and much more.

HB Threads Fills a Critical Need. People with disabilities face significant barriers to employment. The unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities is double that of workers without a disability. Those who are employed often earn less and have fewer opportunities for career advancement.

Yet what many employers don't realize is that individuals with disabilities are used to navigating challenges in daily life. Because of this, they develop exceptional problem-solving skills that translate well into workplaces like HB Threads:

- Since its inception, HB Threads has employed more than **150 individuals** with disabilities. Today, 75 percent of its associates have been working at HB Threads for nine years or more.
- HB Threads has served more than 400 businesses and created more than 300,000 products since it began. Last year alone, HB Threads produced over **59,000 items** for more than **350 customers**.
- Its list of customers includes, the **Chicago White Sox, BMO Harris, Huntington Bank** and **Pucks for Autism**, and continues to grow.

Beyond these numbers, what else makes HB Threads unique?

- **A meaningful first job experience.** HB Threads is often the first place of work for its associates who have the opportunity to take on a wide range of roles--graphic design, shipping and receiving, data entry, heat press, and button- and magnet-making, to name a few—which helps them build new skills and prepare for longer-term employment.

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An integrated work environment. Individuals of all abilities work at HB Threads, fostering an inclusive and neurodiverse workplace.

- **Competitive wages.** Associates earn competitive compensation above minimum wage, enabling them to lead increasingly independent adult lives.
- **A scalable social enterprise.** The HB Threads model can be expanded and replicated to create employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in communities nationwide.

The best way to get a glimpse into HB Threads is to see it firsthand by watching [our latest video](#).

You can also help support HB Threads in narrowing the employment gap for individuals with disabilities by [shopping online](#) or [donating](#).