

OVERCOMING BARRIERS T O G E T H E R



Table Of Contents

Remembering Cassidy Petit -----	Page 2
Introduction -----	Page 3
Our Community in 2023: Employers -----	Page 4
Our Community in 2023: Jobseekers -----	Page 5
Our Community in 2023: Partners -----	Page 6
Scaling Our Impact -----	Page 7-8
Measuring Our Impact -----	Page 9
Overview of 2023 Goals -----	Page 10
Looking Ahead: 2024 Goals -----	Page 11
Benefit Director Statement -----	Page 12



Remembering Cassidy Petit

We dedicate this report to the cherished memory of Working Fields board member, benefit director, and friend, Cassidy Petit, who passed away on January 14, 2024. Cassidy led the creation of our first two benefit reports, and we kept her spirit close as we worked on this publication.

The impact Cassidy made on Working Fields is a true testament to the passion and human-centered approach brought to all she accomplished in her life.

Cassidy was an energetic networker and thrived on the connective energy between investors and entrepreneurs. We were thrilled when Cassidy agreed to join the board as our first benefit director. She didn't shy away from asking hard questions because she believed deeply in our mission and business model.

Cassidy was full of life, love, and light, and it is impossible to process her passing. Our deepest condolences extend to her family, friends, and the broader community, where she made an outsized impact in her far-too-brief time with us.



Introduction

As a mission-driven staffing agency, Working Fields aims to strengthen communities by increasing access to employment and connecting local employers with dedicated jobseekers. Founded in 2017, Working Fields became a benefit corporation in 2021. Headquartered in Vermont, operating and actively expanding across New England, Working Fields promotes economic opportunities for the communities it serves beyond the creation of jobs in the normal course of business.

Our employment model combines recruitment with peer coaching, empowering individuals to maintain good jobs by matching them with local employers. Our system helps people overcome challenges faced from justice system involvement, being a New American, substance use disorders and associated stigmas, discrimination, mental health, generational poverty, and access to resources such as transportation and housing.



Since inception, Working Fields has helped over 3,000 people with employment opportunities at more than 100 companies. This report shares the social impact and public benefit of our work in 2023.

Working Fields made a goal in 2022 to cultivate a greater connection with our mission, vision, and values. In 2023, all operational Working Fields staff gathered to reflect on and refresh these statements:



Mission

Overcoming workforce barriers together with resilient jobseekers and engaged employers to foster a thriving community.



Vision

Inclusive and just employment systems that recognize and celebrate the inherent worth of every jobseeker.



Values

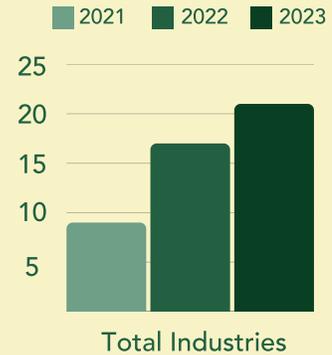
At Working Fields, we believe in the potential of all people. We support individuals with integrity and resilience in the face of life's challenges and provide genuine opportunities to succeed.

Our Community in 2023

Employers



72 ACTIVE EMPLOYERS
28 NEW EMPLOYERS
21 TOTAL INDUSTRIES



Working Fields' services help quickly fill open positions with qualified jobseekers and reduce turnover through peer coaching support. With our employers, we aim to develop inclusive workplaces built from a diverse, untapped talent pool.

“Our relationship with Working Fields is essential to our successful operation. This program helps with reentry for the participants and aids in our production/shipping needs. It is a win/win situation for which we are grateful.”
 - Willian, Working Fields Employer, Deerfield Packaging

Highlights

With 28 new employers in 2023, we now offer jobs across 21 different industries. In the last two years, Working Fields increased the number of industries we work in by 43%, which gives our jobseekers more options for finding the right fit for their skills and interests. In 2023, we increased the average and lowest wages offered to our associates which, in light of this past year's inflation rates, highlights Working Fields' dedication to contracting with employers who offer well paid work opportunities.

In the News



WORKING FIELDS RECOGNIZED AS LEADING FAIR CHANCE EMPLOYER

Working Fields was recognized as a leading resource for fair chance employment by Jails to Jobs, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping those in reentry. Jails to Jobs also spotlighted the Working Fields staffing model in a Second Chance Employer Profile.

Challenges

Nationwide revenue in the staffing industry sector was down by 10% in 2023 compared to a record-breaking year in 2022. This is in part a result of employers who paused hiring over potential recession concerns and employers who turned to direct hire due to an increase in individuals eager to work after pandemic-related disruptions. Working Fields is at its best when employers are too. In Vermont, catastrophic flooding displaced many businesses and individuals, and employers struggled with an ongoing housing crisis making it hard for potential employees to find housing in the area.



Our Community in 2023

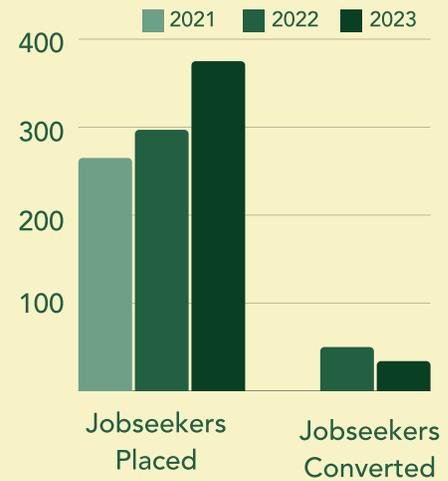
Jobseekers



375 JOBSEEKERS PLACED IN JOBS



34 CONVERTED TO PERMANENT HIRE



Working Fields supports jobseekers from all walks of life in overcoming barriers and succeeding in the workplace by providing employment opportunities as well as peer coaching and community resource connections.

Highlights

The number of jobseekers placed through Working Fields continued to grow with 375 jobseekers placed in 2023. We had fewer conversions to permanent hires compared to 2022 and are taking steps to increase job retention. An internal task force created actionable next steps from ideas generated through a collective brainstorming session with our peer coaches. So far we have implemented two automations to facilitate regular check-ins and foster proactive rather than reactive communication, and we have introduced an associate gift card incentive program.

"A couple years ago, life was very different. I'm looking at life totally differently and a lot of it is because of Working Fields, and Turning Point, and people in my past who have showed me consideration."

- Rick, Working Fields Associate

In the News

More employers looking beyond criminal records to make up for labor shortage



Photo by: Scripps News

Denver 7 ABC highlighted Working Fields' impact on individuals who found

employment and rebuilt their lives with the support of employers willing to give them a chance.

Challenges

In 2023, our jobseekers struggled to meet their basic needs and show up to work due in part to overwhelmed external support systems that were at max capacity. This past year the unhoused population increased significantly, parts of Vermont experienced major flooding, and many lost health insurance with the end of pandemic Medicaid coverage. Access to transportation, as well as ongoing systemic oppression and injustice, continued to pose barriers for the people we serve highlighting the growing need for our innovative staffing approach. Internally, we found our account managers were stretched too thin and over the past 9 months restructured by hiring two business development managers to focus on employer and partner relationships thereby freeing up account managers to focus more on jobseeker support.

* A collective term for people of Indigenous, African, Asian, and Latin American descent.

Our Community in 2023

Community Partners



401 TOTAL PARTNERS SINCE 2017

82 NEW PARTNERS

729 REFERRALS RECEIVED



Working Fields actively collaborates with community partners across a variety of industries, including service providers, nonprofits, and government agencies.

Highlights

We connected with 82 new partners and the number of jobseekers referred to us continued to grow for a total of 729 referrals in 2023. Our community partners make it possible for us to do our job of connecting jobseekers with employment. In collaboration with our partners, we organized 6 community outreach events, participated in more than 15 job fairs, and spoke at more than 5 conferences, panels, and webinars to bring awareness to the community-wide benefits of equitable and inclusive employment solutions.



Challenges

In 2023, many of our community partners faced increased demand for their services which made it impossible for them to meet the needs of everyone who qualified for their services. This in turn posed challenges for our jobseekers who had a harder time accessing services, such as stable housing, that as a staffing agency we're unable to directly provide.

In the News

An Abandoned Burlington Laundromat Rumbles Back to Life by Embracing Its Neighborhood

By DEREK BROUWER
Published October 4, 2023 at 10:00 a.m.



Our partner, King Street Laundry in Burlington, Vermont, has transformed to become a vibrant community hub. In addition to offering free laundry services for those experiencing homelessness, they have created a place to access other resources, including pop-up job fair events with Working Fields.

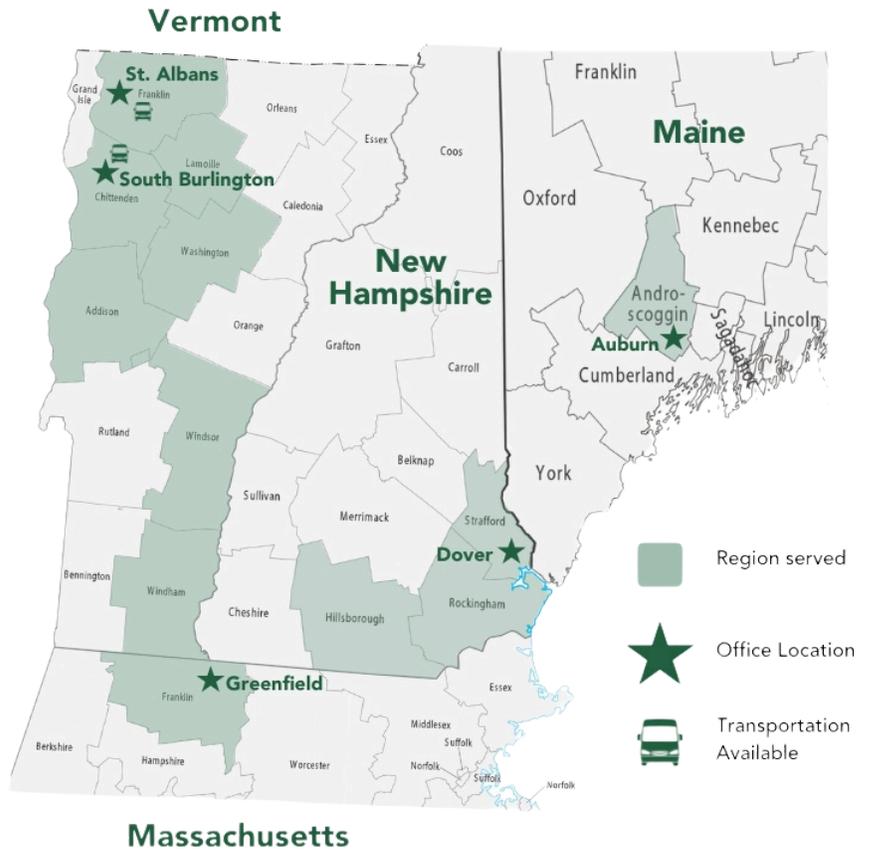


Scaling Our Impact

Entering New Regions

Highlights

In 2023, we expanded our services to more communities across New England. Working Fields' regional expansion started in January with the acquisition of Harmon Personnel Services located in Massachusetts' Pioneer Valley. Harmon is a small, mission-aligned staffing agency with similar goals to Working Fields who had established community connections and resources that were inherited by the Working Fields team, making it a perfect fit. In December, we announced the opening of a New Hampshire office located in Dover and serving the Seacoast region. We are expecting further growth in this region and have laid the foundation to expand into Lewiston-Auburn, Maine and Springfield, Massachusetts in 2024.



Challenges

We're always learning from the past and adjusting our approach to better our social impact. This past year, we decided to move away from our more rural markets in Rutland and Springfield, Vermont, after finding that there were not enough existing community services or large employers in those areas to support our recruitment model. With our new and prospective locations, we're moving Working Fields into metro regions with a denser network of employers and community partners.

JOBSEEKERS REFERRED



Scaling Our Impact

Growing Programs & Support



Partnership with the VT Department of Corrections

At the end of 2023, Working Fields signed a contract with the Vermont Department of Corrections (DOC). The primary focus of this collaboration is to create new avenues of employment support for individuals coming out of incarceration, and to integrate our staffing model into existing systems that could benefit from our support. This program will operate in Vermont's four largest prisons, enabling Working Fields to connect with referred individuals during their last 90 days of incarceration and start them with peer coaching and a plan for employment upon their release.



Return to Work Program

We piloted the Return to Work program with a few employers in 2023 to offer them an avenue of support for employees struggling at work with anything from substance use to punctuality. After an employer makes a referral, Working Fields provides a rapid response plan, payrolls the referred employee, and sets them up with peer coaching. After a set period, employees can transition to direct hire with their employer. Working Fields plans to make this program fully available in 2024 to reduce employer costs by helping retain trained employees.

Staff Stability & Internal Training

As our model and leadership matures, Working Fields has less staff turnover contributing to greater organizational stability. In addition to increased staff retention, training opportunities also bolstered organizational cohesion and stability. In 2023, we expanded internal staff training sessions to cover topics that improve our understanding and support mechanisms for our team and the individuals we serve. Sessions included a Medication-Assisted Treatment training, a Mental Health First Aid course tailored to our Account Managers, and a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training with the organization "Love at the Roots" to better understand the impacts of systemic trauma.

Legislative Support for Social Change

Working Fields CEO & Founder, Mickey Wiles, uses his experience and platform in the business community to advocate for positive social and environmental change. He has been an active member of Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility's Public Policy Committee and has served as its chair for the last two years. With the committee, Mickey supported Let's Grow Kids' work on a first-of-its-kind Vermont Child Care Bill.

The bill was successfully passed in 2023, granting thousands of Vermont families access to affordable child care and enabling more adults to enter the workforce.



Measuring Our Impact

B Impact Assessment

The B Impact Assessment (BIA) serves as a third-party tool to measure and track our stakeholder impact. Scoring within the B Impact Assessment is designed to allow comparability and to identify and track opportunities for improvement over time. In 2023, our overall score continued to rise along with scores in four key impact areas. These results indicate that the 2023 program growth, regional expansion, and increased support highlighted in this report were effective in increasing Working Fields' benefit purposes for the communities we serve.

Update on B Corp Certification

At Working Fields, we believe in the power of business for social good. That is why we are incorporated as a Benefit Corporation and were eager to become a Certified B Corp.

At the beginning of 2023, we underwent the verification process to become a Certified B Corp and were deemed ineligible due to a moratorium on prison labor. Working Fields is strongly opposed to prison labor, as it goes counter to our values and business model. We do support current inmates who voluntarily choose to participate in employment opportunities, paid at market rate, which was conflated with "prison labor." We encourage B Lab Global to invest the time to build expertise around this topic area and update their standard to reflect an informed position that empowers incarcerated individuals. We have offered ourselves as experts but to date this offer has not been accepted.

Impactable X

We used Impactable X as another third party tool to demonstrate our social impact. Made available to us through the De-Carceration Fund, we used the platform to measure our financial impact on reduced recidivism and unemployment. The total impact value represents the estimated monetary value Working Fields saved the communities we serve by employing and supporting 213 formerly incarcerated individuals in 2023. We expect to see this number grow through our contract work with the Vermont DOC.

BIA Overall Scores



Key Impact Area Scores

	2021	2022	2023
 Governance	16.3	21.3	21.9
 Workers	40.8	41.9	43.8
 Community	23.4	20.4	23.1
 Environment	2.2	3.5	3.8
 Customers	44.3	58.6	58.2



Overview of 2023 Goals

COMPANY GOALS

- Deliver consistent messaging for the populations served.
- Cultivate our culture to reflect values and mission.
- Establish non-profit related entity.

REPORTING GOALS

- Gather robust and inclusive jobseeker data.
- Formalize processes and channels for jobseeker feedback.

Company Goals

We believe that every individual, whether an employer, community partner, or jobseeker, should have access to and an understanding of our services through approachable messaging. In 2023, we thoroughly updated our website and marketing materials to ensure anyone looking to work with us can easily understand the services we offer.

Our team collectively updated our mission, vision, and values statements with contributions from every staff member, ensuring they reflect our culture and future goals. We also encourage staff reflection on our values through a monthly sharing opportunity via our internal staff communication platform.

We considered establishing a non-profit entity at Working Fields to expand our supportive employment model to those with greater barriers who might not be ready yet for a placement with our employers. However, after further analysis, decided it would be more effective to begin this process by partnering with existing non-profits who are already meaningfully engaged with the community we want to connect with and better support. To start, we are focused on further developing and growing our relationship with King Street Laundry in Burlington, Vermont who we've partnered with to host pop-up jobs fairs and collaborative community events.

Reporting Goals

Our internal reporting efforts have been updated to gather additional data with a goal to learn about jobseekers and the communities they identify with. In 2023, we began collecting data to track those we serve who identify with having a disability, and found that 51 jobseekers identify as such. To learn about jobseeker experiences with housing, we collected data from peer coaching reports and found that 49% of our jobseekers experienced some form of housing insecurity.



In 2023, we began building out automated check-ins from account managers with requests for feedback from jobseekers and employers.

Looking Ahead

2024 Goals

- Increase jobseeker retention and conversion rates.
- Continue to develop our employment social enterprise capacity through partnerships while beginning formation of our own non-profit affiliate.
- Conduct a smooth leadership transition.
- Expand regionally: Grow our operations in the Seacoast region of New Hampshire and begin operations in Springfield, Massachusetts and Lewiston-Auburn, Maine.
- Expand ways in which we operate and integrate with existing systems that could benefit from our support.
 - Partnering with the Vermont DOC.
 - Working with the State of Vermont on funding to serve SNAP recipients.
 - Growing our Return to Work program.



Benefit Director Statement

Working Fields is organized as a Vermont Benefit Corporation, with bylaws that make clear our commitment to using the power of our business to advance people, planet and profit.

The people part is clear. Working Fields was founded to strengthen communities by increasing access to employment for folks who faced barriers to finding and keeping work. This social venture has placed over 2,000 people into jobs – offering the hope, self-worth, socialization, and financial stability that many of us take for granted but can be life-changing for those who've been excluded. The fabric of families and communities depends on gainful employment, and Working Fields is doing our bit through an innovative business approach.

The planet part is less obvious. Working Fields has a dozen direct employees managing this work out of a few small offices. Our environment footprint is small and so our focus has been on the people side. Yet the climate crisis demands attention from all of us, at whatever scale we're contributing to it. Over the coming years, Working Fields will attend to doing our bit to protect the habitats that sustain our very lives.

Profit is equally important. Not for the typical corporate goal of enriching a few, but to provide more fuel to accomplish the broader good. Some money in the saddlebags is useful to weather inevitable business storms, to invest in program expansion or to reward committed talent. Working Fields seeks to operating sustainably, generating more revenue than expenses – again for the purpose of doing good.

This Benefit Report documents how we're doing, celebrating our achievements but also identifying where we've come up short. If betterment is the goal, we must be honest about what's working and what we need to improve yet. We welcome your reactions, suggestions and questions.

Our business still is young, and we continue perfecting this innovative business model. But we've shown that it works, not in spite of but because of this Benefit Corporation approach. And so we'll continue trying to use the power of business for good here at Working Fields.

Duane Peterson

Founding Board Member & designated Benefit Director