



# Community Voice for Change: Employment



April 2019

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Coming Together to Get Ahead  
Community Voice for Change

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

St. Vincent de Paul  
Waukesha County



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## Section 1: A Note from CTGA

Coming Together to Get Ahead (CTGA), a St. Vincent De Paul program, has been working on individual financial stability and community change in Waukesha County for the last 5 years. Our mission is to transform lives and end poverty through systemic change one person, one neighborhood, one community at a time. We use the Bridges Out of Poverty model in our work. Bridges is a community engagement model which reduces barriers to success posed by economic class differences among people and groups.

CTGA is dedicated to making a difference. In addition to hosting Getting Ahead Workshops for individuals and Poverty Seminars for community members, we are now hosting Community Voice for Change (CVC) events once a month. CVC is an opportunity for everyone to come to the table and share their experiences, with an eye for change. We polled the community to identify the key topics for discussion to advance Waukesha County so that everyone can thrive. These topics rose to the top of the list: Employment, Mental Health, Housing and Transportation.

In 2019 CTGA is dedicating 3 months to each of these topics. We invite everyone to come to the table to share dinner and have a discussion on these topics. To read more about the structure of CVC, we invite you to view the CVC overview attachment sent with this report.

With our first section on Employment done, we are filled with gratitude, excitement and hope. The evenings spent with members of our community from different economic situations brought new information, challenging questions and a confirmation that the work is important. These shared ideas and experiences have been combined into the following report. Our hope is that this report can support and inform community work and change, with a variety of insights highlighting successes and exploring improvements.

Thank you for being a part of the change,  
The CTGA team.

## Section 2: Why are We at the Table

We discuss why it is important to look at employment in Waukesha County and what it means for everyone in this community to thrive. In order for a community to prosper, everyone must have basic resources to live a stable life. What does that mean in Waukesha County?

One of the first places you may look is our poverty rate. **At 4.8%, you may think our community is thriving.**

But we know that there is a gap between the federal poverty level and meeting a basic cost of living.

### So, let's ask ALICE

The United Way ALICE Project is a collaboration of United Ways in 17 states including Wisconsin. The terms defined here are key to the ALICE Project and its lens on what it means to thrive in Waukesha County.

**In Waukesha, 31% of households fall below the ALICE Threshold.**

United Way. *ALICE: A Study About Financial Hardship in Wisconsin*. 2018, <https://unitedwaywi.site-ym.com/page/2018ALICE>.

### ALICE

- **ALICE** is an acronym that stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed – households with income above the Federal Poverty Level but below the basic cost of living. A household consists of all people who occupy a housing unit. In this report, households do not include those living in group quarters such as a dorm, nursing home or jail.
- **The Household Survival Budget** calculates the actual costs of basic necessities (housing, child care, food, transportation, health care and a smartphone) in Wisconsin, adjusted for different counties and household types.
- **The ALICE Threshold** is the average income that a household needs to afford the basic necessities defined by the Household Survival Budget for each county in Wisconsin. **(Unless otherwise noted in this Report, households earning below the ALICE Threshold include both ALICE and poverty level households.)**
- **The Household Stability Budget** is greater than the basic Household Survival Budget and reflects the cost for household necessities at a modest but sustainable level. It adds a savings category and an expanded technology category (smartphone and basic home internet) and is adjusted for different counties and household types.
- **The ALICE Income Assessment** is the calculation of all sources of income, resources and assistance for ALICE and poverty-level households. Even with assistance, the Assessment reveals a shortfall or Unfilled Gap, between what these households bring in and what is needed for them to reach the ALICE Threshold.

US Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/waukeshacountywisconsin/BZA110216#BZA110216>

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## Why are We at the Table (Continued...)

On one hand, employment can be a key way of guaranteeing needed resources. On the other hand, our Community Voice for Change conversations have shown that employment doesn't always work and doesn't always bring financial stability. Employers, employees and those looking for work each face unique barriers.

When we together have actual conversations on employment, barriers can be addressed. It is sharing our experiences of work that make employment challenges real. Coming Together to Get Ahead, using the Bridges Out of Poverty model, sets the table with all of our experiences and we begin to see solutions.



**CVC Night 2/27/2019**

## Section 3: How is Our Table Unique

We explore how the Bridges model provides a unique lens for change in the community.

We engage those in poverty, the middle and wealth class to share their employment experiences over dinner. We do this knowing that many people in poverty are problem solvers and people in the middle and wealth class help set up structures and are decision makers.

“The Bridges model is not a program. Bridges concepts are used to help prevent poverty, support people in transition and create communities where everyone can live well” (Bridges Out of Poverty). We use the Bridges model to look at four different causes: individual behaviors and circumstances, community conditions, exploitation, and political and economic structures.



The four causes of poverty are important to understand the lack of individual employment, underemployment or sporadic employment. Often, when looking at the causes of poverty, people identify either side of the spectrum as the cause. For employment, that can look like *“the individual needs to work*

*harder”* to the other end of the spectrum *“the system is set up for people to fail.”*

To explore this deeper, we set up an activity at CVC night, that we call the Poverty Post-It Activity. During this activity, we gave groups different scenarios around employment and asked each group to assign it to the “correct” cause of poverty category. Most groups struggled to decide the best fit for their scenario highlighting the fact that all four causes of poverty can also contribute to lack of employment (and financial instability). The other important realization was that all four causes need to be addressed in looking for employment solutions.

Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D., Philip E. DeVol, Terie Dreussi Smith. Training Supplement for Bridges Out of Poverty.

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## Section 4: Who's at the Table

At the beginning of each CVC discussion each person completed a survey.  
This is a summary of who/what was represented.

- 39** people who are or have been a full-time employee
- 35** people who are or have been a part-time employee
- 20** people who work two Jobs
- 21** people who are currently working
- 12** people who have or have had their own business
- 15** people who work or have worked from home
- 4** People who are unemployed and looking for work
- 13** people who are unemployed and not in need of employment
- 7** people who are or have previously been self-employed
- 18** people who work or volunteer with people struggling with employment
- 18** people who are or have been a stay at home parent
- 23** people who are or have been in a management position
- 32** people who feel their education prepared them for the workforce
- 33** people have had success in the workforce
- 6** people who feel they are or have been stuck in a position because of a lack of training or education
- 9** People who feel they have been discriminated against in the workplace because of their: Gender – **4** Race – **2** Criminal Background – **3**

## Section 5: Sharing Our Experiences

Community Voice for Change participants shared their experiences of working in Waukesha County, of getting a job and keeping a job. They shared their experiences when earning enough money to survive or to be stable and expressed their feelings when this was not the case.

### ***“What makes work work for you?”***

**Education** – *“I was able to use skills I learned from prior jobs.” “Going back to school made work easier.” “My college studies made me versatile enough to change and learn new things.” “Taking training classes for free.”*

**Motivation** – *“My work ethic first worked in my favor.” “I worked to make money/a living, I worked to improve also.” “Family (parent pressure/guidance) to earn money for school, later on fear of failure, needed to pay for the cost of educating children.” “Everything I learned from my Mom.”*

**Attitude** – *“I was lucky; I think positive and thank God.” “I was raised in a hard working family – my positive attitude.” “I loved what I did.” “Working made life more interesting.” “I had no choice. I was on my own with no financial safety net.” “Work has helped me a lot and has brought me some stability.”* (Translated from Spanish)

**Supports to Work** – *“I had transportation (car), child care arrangements, stable housing, family support, health.” “I had transportation to get to and from my job.” “I had transportation and a supportive network of family and friends to help with day care.” “Had help with child care.” “I was strong and healthy.” “I had a spouse, education and a variety of options for my job type.” “I was relatively healthy physically and emotionally.” “What works in my favor is having a staffing agency that has offered me a morning job. I have been able to save money to be able to pay for everything that life requires and to be able to maintain myself day to day.”*

(Translated from Spanish)

**Work Environment** – *“caring employers, co-workers that seemed like a second family”, “good management”, “and courtesy for employees”, “structured environment but room for creativity.”*

## Sharing Our Experiences (Continued...)

**Pluses in the Work Place** - "Hours of work", "benefits, salary", "I had technology that supported work requirements, collaborative tools and capabilities. The pay was equal to the work." "I was given freedom to make decisions on my own." "I was able to work from home." "Flexibility to work all kinds of hours as well as increase in pay." "It was a challenging environment with healthy competition."

### **"What makes work hard for you?"**

**Work and Family** – "family issues", "juggling 3 jobs, 3 active children", "being a single Mom IN SO MANY WAYS", "the days were long: 7 am – 9 pm", "raising a family while working, staying home when children were sick, exhaustion", "poor family situation, tired a lot of the time", "no third shift child care", "difficulty with any child care."

Observation: "There is very little weekend child care or formal sick child care." "It is hard to find child care on a part time rotating schedule." "It is so hard to find a job that is accommodating to having children, but I have to work."

**Transportation** – "no car, jobs not on a bus line", "extremely busy-long drive", "travel...at first good but then it gets tough."

Observation: "And gas is very expensive."

**Work Environment** – "lousy bosses or company policies", "limits on women", "too much work productivity", "wrong tools, outdated tools", "my boss, co-workers being lazy, not doing things the way they should", "unprofessional and incompetent bosses, there was a surprising amount of politics in the job", "sales team oversold capabilities", "difficult co-workers", "changing technology", "Lack of respect for coworkers/ common courtesy such as saying hello, lack of offering assistance or communicating well." "employee, co-worker not being there", "mean boss", "schedules, on-call", "sexual harassment", "stress of always being 'on' or there long hours." "Unhealthy working hours rewarded."

Observations: "Wow, if the work environment takes all of your energy, you have none left over to work." "Reading this makes me sad."

## Sharing Our Experiences (Continued...)

**More** – “unfair pay”, “weekend and holiday work required”, “rules and regulations changing over the years”, “wage”, “when pay did not equal work”, “cost of living in my area compared to wage”, “never felt it was hard; it just needed to be done”. “The hardship that I have experience and what has not worked for me is not being able to obtain a job with higher pay because of the language barrier. Also, not being able to get health care because my position is considered temporary, no child care, transportation because I didn’t have a car and schedules in public transportation vary.” (translated from Spanish)

(Quotes collected by CTGA on CVC night - March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

(Observation collected by CTGA on CVC report review night – April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

### Conclusion

There were many shared and different experiences from the group (employees, employers, retired individuals, unemployed individuals) on what works and what doesn’t work with employment in Waukesha County. But when we looked a little deeper, it all boiled down to resources. Those who had access to them (education, transportation, family support, childcare, training etc.) seemed to thrive more in the workplace. **Which leaves us wondering, what can we, as a community, do to make sure everyone has access to these resources?**



**CVC Night 3/27/2019**

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## Section 6: Stats That Make Us Think

During one of the CVC nights, we explored statistics from the 2016 US Census that relate to employment in Waukesha County. One of the things the group agreed on is that the statistics don't tell the whole story. Here is more of that discussion.

### **Stat 1: The unemployment rate in Waukesha County is 2.9%.**

There were a variety of reactions to this stat. One was that the percentage was low and that means we are doing a good job. But when we dug a bit deeper, we saw there was more to it. As one person put it *"Waukesha workforce is working, but are the wages working for families?"* Another said, *"just because you are employed, doesn't mean you can support yourself."* A lot of people shared the thought that just because you are employed, doesn't mean you are making a living wage or have benefits or the hours needed for you to thrive.

We asked a follow-up question of *"do people who are unemployed want to work?"* and we got a lot of different responses. To summarize them, the group said some yes, some no. Factors that contributed to this were the idea of losing benefits if they worked, health or mental health issues that inhibit employment, lack of transportation and childcare, and the feeling that life is *"better"* on unemployment.

### **Stat 2: The median household income in Waukesha County is \$81,140.**

Given this number is higher than many other areas, we asked what was keeping people from getting ahead - *"over extending themselves, healthcare costs"*, *"people with a lot of money offset those who struggle and the well-off seem to vote to keep it that way"*, *"opportunities, transportation, housing, education, motivation"*, *"the cost of housing and rent."*

The group discussed the wide ranges of income that would fall under \$81,140. That it ranges from very high to very low. One person shared *"We have very rich and very poor, so it matters where you look."* These higher salaries were noted as driving up the cost of housing, which makes it very difficult for those making less to live and thrive in this area.

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## Stats That Make Us Think (Continued...)

During this discussion, one individual said the biggest barrier to employment is “finding employment with an income I can live on”.

ALICE reports that “employment and wages vary by location; firms generally pay higher wages in areas with a higher cost of living, although these wages still do not always cover basic needs. Employment and wages also vary by firm size: Large firms tend to offer higher wages and more job stability; small businesses can account for more jobs overall, especially in rural areas, but may pay less and offer less stability. Medium size firms pay more but typically employ the fewest workers.”

In addition, many households struggle because the cost of living continues to increase. ALICE findings report that “*The **Household Survival Budget** reflects the bare minimum that a household needs to live and work today. It does not include savings for emergencies or future goals like college. In 2016, costs were well above the Federal Poverty Level of \$11,880 for a single adult and \$24,300 for a family of four.*” A **Household Survival Budget** for a single adult in Waukesha County requires an hourly wage of \$10.85 and a family of 2 adults, 1 infant and 1 preschooler requires an hourly wage of \$36.82.

### ALICE REVIEW

- **ALICE** is an acronym that stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed – households with income above the Federal Poverty Level but below the basic cost of living. A household consists of all people who occupy a housing unit. In this report, households do not include those living in group quarters such as a dorm, nursing home or jail.

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## Section 7: Stories of Working

We asked people from the community to share their own personal stories of working.

### **An Older Woman's Story of Work and Resilience**

*I do not think of myself as typical. I am so blessed! I graduated from college and had two internships while in college in my field but was not hired after graduation. (Women were not hired in my field in 1962!) Instead I planned on getting married, like so many women of my time did.*

*I quickly had three children and my husband was unable to get good paying jobs. I went back to school to get certified to teach school and then taught for 16 years in Oconomowoc. After teaching, I worked in construction companies for over 10 years. When my children were educated and married, I divorced. I started a business which became very successful. I sold it in 2004 and work until this day.*

### **A Story of a New Beginning**

*I started working when I was 14. I was excited about my first job at a grocery store. At 15 I had issues with hours. I had side jobs and moved on to work at a landscaping company. A lot were not good paying jobs. In 2006-2010 it didn't feel like I was paid well and I was frequently getting laid off. Legal troubles came after that. I got out (of jail) and had a stint of time I couldn't find work. I was trying to get a bus pass, working with Jerald Martinez (at Workforce Development).*

*I started as a dock worker and joined CTGA which gave routine and a step ahead. I got a supervisor position and got promoted. The pay is better now. I feel in this economy now anyone can get a job now, if they want it. Especially being a driver now, I see help wanted or needed signs in so many businesses.*

*My work did not initially allow me to live the way I wanted to live, but now I am comfortable, now established with a decent house, employment and family structure.*

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## Stories of Working (Continued...)

### A Story of Making a Difference

*My dad had me working at a factory where he worked as soon as I turned 16. There were 20 – 25 people working and many machines whizzing all day. I worked with people who were illiterate, who carried guns, who used second shift for all kinds of personal activities. My job was tedious, all day the same thing. Our hours passed slowly – 8 to 12 in the morning with no break, a quick break for lunch and a 10 minute break in the afternoon. Many of the workers were from the South, so I was seeing a completely different culture. I talked to them all day. I was meeting people from all walks of life.*

*They were very accepting of me and I made some good friends. My dad worked very hard, 12 hours a day Monday through Friday and many times a half day on Saturday. We didn't have any extra money at home. He was a typical blue-collar worker, the salt of the earth. I always got the message that I had to go college to rise up to the next tier if I was ever going to have a chance to get ahead. So, I did go to college, became a CPA, moved to Chicago and had a different lifestyle. But I learned that wasn't me. I missed the relationships from my blue-collar world. These were the people I felt comfortable with and felt I could always count on. My dad continued to inspire my later working life. Looking back later at his working life, my dad would say 'It just wasn't fair'.*

*He wasn't angry, he was hurt. He gave everything he had to the job, but there was always the challenge of making ends meet. The company he worked for would do nice things like giving us a window air conditioner in the heat of summer or take my dad on a golf outing or fishing trip. Those things were nice and appreciated, but "it just wasn't fair, if only I had gotten a little more money instead." So, because of my dad, when I had the chance with my company I decided to create the best possible jobs and conditions for working people. And that has happened. We have an Employee Stock Ownership Plan so employees have the chance to have a vested interest in the company. We have a Prison Release Program. People are so smart and there is so much wasted talent – when people succeed in our company we are happy. I am financially stable and am living the life I am comfortable with as I was in my earlier years, blue collar at heart and proud of it.*

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## Stories of Working (Continued...)

### **A Retired Professional's Story Full of Change**

*After graduating with an MBA in Marketing, I returned to one last summer working at a Theme park for one last spin as a member of the Clown Band. This caused me to miss the hiring window and I came home and worked as a helper in a custom cabinet shop (woodworking), cleaning out the bins, stacking raw wood, sanding and staining custom built furniture and industrial cabinets. I did this for almost a year, while still interviewing for professional jobs.*

*Working for the owners was a challenge and sometimes belittling when told 'all that schooling and I could not do some of my required tasks well – what did I learn'. This helped me realize that educational alone was not enough to succeed – we must also be able to adjust to other personalities in the workplace....*

*My summers working in the Clown Band was a terrific experience that taught me to be in front of large groups. Performing helped me down the road when giving sales pitches and other technical presentations as a consultant and briefing center specialist. I was hired by NCR (National Cash Register). It was eye opening to discover the 'real' business world. I eventually felt opposed to the style of 'selling', used in common practice, at upper management levels and left the company.*

*Nothing prepared me for the emotional upheaval and legal battle that resulted in my ex-wife removing our three children from the State of Wisconsin and settling down in Scottsdale, AZ. Thank goodness for my faith and support structure. By this time, I also moved on – with employment at IBM and was earning enough money to withstand the financial hit of child support and the cost of flying to Phoenix to see my children. Although financially secure, it was difficult to be separated by 1000 miles and two time zones for most of the year.*

*My wife and I started our marriage journey in June of 2000 so we are now 18 years down the path. The pilgrimage we're taking in 2020 will mark 20 years of togetherness. We'll be performing a renewal ceremony in Cana on the trip.*

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## Stories of Working (Continued...)

### **A Story About Understanding Pay and Opportunity**

*In my early working days I was a receptionist for a non-profit. I was a single mom at the time and the position didn't pay much. I requested a raise, and the director explained that I was at the top pay rate for the position I had. I then explained to him that the pay was not enough to allow me to support my daughter and myself.*

*At the time I felt that if I was doing a good job, I should be entitled to more money. I didn't realize that businesses have budgets and many factors go into deciding on a pay range. This info may be taught in high school, but if it's not, it should be. Eventually I got promoted to another position within the organization that paid more.*

*Eventually I obtained a part time position in a library. I was now married and was fortunate to work only part-time. It is an unusual story. I was blessed with a director that saw potential in me and promoted me to manager of a department. I will be forever grateful for the opportunity I received and the array of skills and partnerships I enjoyed.*

*Most of the jobs I had allowed me to live a modest life and I was able to provide for my daughter and myself. If I had had more children, it would have been extremely difficult. The manager position did allow me to live comfortably. I should mention that at this time I was married, and we were a two income family, but my income alone would have been sufficient.*

### **A Mom's Story of Getting Back to Work**

*When I finished my Administrative Assistant program at WCTC in June of 1996 it was much easier acquiring a job. I took some time to raise a family. Job gaps are very negative. Because I didn't keep up with my job skills a lot of companies don't want to hire me. I am "rusty" and they don't have the time and/or patience to train me. On the job training is stressful and comes with high expectations. After working briefly at two jobs, once again I am looking.*

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## Section 8: Program Spotlight

There are many different individuals and organizations working on Employment in Waukesha County. Here a few that came up during the CVC nights...

### Workforce Development Center

We spoke to Jerald Martinez, a Talent Development Specialist with WDC...

- 1. What do you see, regarding employment, with people coming to your program?** Employment is abundant in all areas including Manufacturing, Office Administrative, Healthcare and Skilled Trades. Normally finding employment or job openings is not the problem. Barriers to employment: housing, transportation, and willingness to work. These barriers must be addressed up front so the client can go to work every day.
- 2. What services do you offer (regarding employment assistance)? What do people need to know/do if they want to receive these services?** Enrollment into the Food Share Employment Training Program is strongly encouraged but not required. Anyone seeking assistance I would be willing to meet with. Services include, but not limited to, education workshops for Computer Basics, online job applications, interviewing techniques, LinkedIn, and retention. Additional Community Resources are available.
- 3. Best contact information for those who want help or to learn more:** I welcome any and all referrals. Additional programs at the Workforce Development Center include WIOA, DVR, and WCTC Workshops. (262)-695-6210  
[jmartinez39@wctc.edu](mailto:jmartinez39@wctc.edu)

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## Section 8: Program Spotlight (Continued...)

### James Place

We spoke to Shannon Garretson, MSW, LCSW and the leadership team at James Place...

#### **1. What do you see, regarding employment, with people coming to your program?**

- 1) transportation: no vehicle or unreliable vehicle, no money for bus tickets, no ride
- 2) gaps in employment, especially due to incarceration
- 3) little or no computer skills
- 4) physical and/or mental health issues
- 5) lack of supportive personal and professional networks
- 6) homeless, temporary housing, unstable housing
- 7) no phone or have a phone with no minutes

#### **2. What services do you offer (regarding employment assistance)? What do people need to know/do if they want to receive these services?**

- 1) assistance with resume writing and interviewing
- 2) assistance using computer to obtain email account, government phone and apply for jobs on line
- 3) 3 cell phones that can be used at James Place
- 4) 6 computers, printer, copier and fax machine
- 5) counseling interns, who can provide vocational counseling as well as personal counseling
- 6) Registered Nurse and volunteers with medical backgrounds
- 7) trained volunteer who can work with sex offenders (appointment necessary)
- 8) job board listing job openings, training, classes, job fairs
- 9) 2-ride Waukesha County Transit bus ticket for an employment interview (only one ticket per month per client)
- 10) ride to employment interview (must be scheduled at least a week in advance)
- 11) opportunity to develop relationships during drop in hours and planned events
- 12) referral to other local resources
- 13) Immigration Services offers employment help by assisting people who do not have the necessary immigration documents to obtain them, if they are eligible. We also assist in determining their eligibility via several possible routes. Some are, indeed, not eligible so we will tell them the truth about their status. Others may be, but don't know how to avail themselves of the eligibility. All such conversations are of course, confidential.

#### **3. Best contact information for those who want help or to learn more:**

To receive our services, people need to come to 129 W. Broadway on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday from 9 to 3. New clients must meet with a volunteer for an intake interview so that we can get to know each other and discuss services that would meet the needs and interests of the client. All services are free. 262.544.9472

jpwaukesha@elmbrook.org <http://www.elmbrook.org/james-place-waukesha/>

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## Section 9: What's next

### What topic is up next for CVC: Mental Health

Wednesday, April 24<sup>th</sup>

Wednesday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>

Wednesday, June 26<sup>th</sup>

**These events are located at First United Methodist Church,  
121 Wisconsin Ave in Waukesha,  
from 6-8pm**

To join us for any/all of these evenings, or if you have any questions, please contact our office at 262-547-0654 or [ctga@svdpwaukesha.com](mailto:ctga@svdpwaukesha.com)