



## Increasing disability employment, while improving the environment

[Blue Star Recyclers](#) is an award-winning social enterprise based in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The ten-year-old e-Steward recycler’s mission is to ethically recycle electronics to create local jobs for people with autism and other *disAbilities*. Blue Star Recyclers currently employs 50 people who recycle 3M lbs. of electronics annually, which reduces greenhouse gas emissions by 4.5M lbs. and diverts 94K lbs. of hazardous waste from landfills each year.

One of the biggest challenges in the recycling industry is recruiting and retaining reliable talent; however, Blue Star Recyclers bucks the trend with these metrics:

Occupational Metric	Industry Workforce	Blue Star Workforce
Employee turnover	500%	<10%
Absenteeism	2/month/worker	zero
Lost-time accidents	8.5/100 workers	.5/100 workers
On the clock task engagement	49% (U.S. worker avg.)	98.43%

Founder Bill Morris, attributes Blue Star’s success to its inclusion of people with autism and other disabilities, who comprise 80% of the company’s workforce. Employees are paid competitive wages with an opportunity for advancement. In fact, six employees with disabilities serve in leadership positions at Blue

Star, including on the executive management team. “Imagine a workforce that enjoys coming to work, shows up on time, with no absenteeism, and has a natural aptitude for the job,” says Morris, “this is Blue Star’s workforce.”

Having expanded from Colorado Springs to Denver and Boulder, Blue Star Recyclers approached [Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation](#) (MEAF) in 2017 with a desire to replicate its success in employing people with disabilities in locations outside Colorado. Joining the Dakota Foundation and Rotary International, MEAF provided funding to Blue Star in 2018 to create a replication [video](#) and conduct a market feasibility study, with a two-pronged approach to replication: 1) Sharing its electronics recycling employment model with other organizations, and 2) Assessing potential locations to establish a new Blue Star facility.

Two locations, [Electronic Recycling Solutions](#) in Nashville, Tennessee and [Motherboard Recycling](#) in Omaha, Nebraska, adopted Blue Star’s social mission and have successfully employed eight people with autism in their facilities, thanks to training provided by Blue Star Recyclers, with MEAF’s financial support.

After assessing markets across the country, Blue Star Recyclers received additional funding from MEAF to



set-up its first location outside Colorado in Buffalo Grove, Illinois, holding a ribbon cutting for its new facility on November 20, 2019, which aims to employ 10 people with disabilities. VISION Committee volunteers from near-by Mitsubishi Electric Automation, Inc. donated 1500 lbs. of electronic waste to support the start-up. Blue Star Recyclers-Buffalo Grove anticipates holding its grand opening on Earth Day 2020.



One key to Blue Star’s success is how it sources employees with disabilities. In Denver, Blue Star set-up an employment training site with the Cherry Creek School District. Using electronics donated by the district, students with autism and other disabilities have an opportunity to participate in electronics recycling vocational training at Overland High School in Aurora. Upon graduation, the students are prepared to work at Blue Star Recyclers or other area employers. To support its Buffalo Grove operations and help train students with disabilities for the general workforce, Blue Star

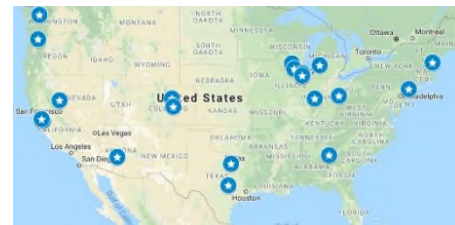
Recyclers is in the process of replicating its employment preparation program with Chicago-area school districts.

In 2019, Blue Star Recyclers presented its employment model within its industry association, e-Stewards, which strives to define and promote responsible electronics reuse and recycling best practices worldwide. Blue Star secured additional funding from MEAF to leverage funding from the May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust, to establish the [e-stewards ADVANCE+ initiative](#).

ADVANCE+ is focused on providing jobs for individuals with autism and other disabilities while creating bottom line benefits for Certified e-Stewards. Onsite disability inclusion, employee sourcing, and internal/external messaging training will be provided to e-Stewards recyclers by Blue Star and nationally recognized disability employment expert [James Emmett & Company](#).



Nine e-Stewards recyclers with operations in 15 states have been selected for the initial training with a goal to



successfully transition 50 youth with disabilities to employment by the end of 2020.

Learn more about MEAF’s support for Blue Star Recyclers and other **M>PWR** projects at [www.meaf.org](http://www.meaf.org).

Embodying its corporate mission to make *Changes for the Better*, the Mitsubishi Electric Group is committed to contributing to meeting the 17 U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By providing financial and volunteer support for Blue Star Recyclers and the e-Steward’s ADVANCE+ Initiative, MEAF is helping to advance the SDGs.

Sustainable Development Goals	MEAF support for Blue Star Recyclers and e-Steward’s ADVANCE+
	<p>By providing vocational training opportunities for youth with disabilities that lead to competitive employment, which reduces dependence on government assistance, MEAF is helping to reduce poverty, support quality education, and provide decent work, while reduce inequalities.</p>
	<p>By investing in an innovative approach to develop a reliable workforce for the e-waste industry to sustain and grow operations to ethically reuse and recycle electronics, which reduces community waste, diverts hazardous waste, and cuts greenhouse gas emissions, MEAF is supporting innovation, sustainable communities, responsible consumption, and climate action.</p>
	<p>By working in concert with other funders, schools, employers, consumers, and an industry association, MEAF is working in partnership to help achieve the SDGs and make <i>Changes for the Better</i>.</p>