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# BOTTOM DOLLARS

**Discussion Guide**





[www.BottomDollarsMovie.com](http://www.BottomDollarsMovie.com)

## Bottom Dollars

### A Rooted in Rights Original Documentary

*Bottom Dollars* is an hour long documentary that exposes the segregated workplaces and low wages often paid to people with disabilities. Through personal stories and expert interviews, the film presents a vision for better alternatives that promote community inclusion, equal opportunity, and fair wages.

Rooted in Rights is a creative content production project of Disability Rights Washington, the protection and advocacy system for Washington State. Based in Seattle, Rooted in Rights produces videos, social media campaigns, and multimedia projects that advance advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities worldwide.

## Chapter Guide

### Chapter 1: “Excellent worker.”

The history of sheltered workshops and the sub-minimum wage.

### Chapter 2: “Even when you hustle.”

How productivity tests determine the sub-minimum wage.

### Chapter 3: “Pennies per hour.”

Stories and examples of extremely low wages.

### Chapter 4: “Been down there too long.”

School transition plans often direct students to sheltered work.

### Chapter 5: “My mother didn’t think I could do it.”

Proper supports, like job coaches, can open up opportunities.

### Chapter 6: “Yes, there were a lot.”

Creating a person-centered plan helps identify potential jobs.



### Chapter 7: “The Joe-Hawk.”

Creating customized employment options to fit a person’s strengths.

### Chapter 8: “I’ve got the jersey to prove it.”

People with disabilities have skills and talents that employers need.

### Chapter 9: “The chance to rise.”

We have the power to change policies to create equal opportunity for people with disabilities.


1938

# FAIR LABOR STANDARDS ACT

As part of the government response to the Great Depression, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) established for the first time a minimum wage. The FLSA was signed into law by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1938.

The first federal minimum wage was \$0.25 per hour, equivalent to about \$4.19 today.

In 2016, the federal minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour, and some states have established a higher wage.

A black and white photograph of President Franklin D. Roosevelt sitting in a wheelchair on a stone porch. He is wearing a suit and tie, and is smiling. A young girl in a dress stands next to him, looking at a large, dark, shaggy dog that is sitting on his lap. The background shows a stone wall and large windows.

“[The FLSA] is the most far-sighted program for the benefit of workers that has ever been adopted.”

**President Franklin D. Roosevelt**



“When I saw my first paycheck, I said, ‘I quit. I can go find me something else to do.’”

**Le’Ron Jackson | Jackson, MS**

FLSA

# 14(c)

Though revolutionary at the time, the FLSA doesn’t protect all workers. Section 14(c) establishes a special minimum wage for individuals “whose earning or productive capacity is impaired by age, physical or mental deficiency, or injury.”


If employers file for a 14(c) certificate from the U.S. Department of Labor, they can pay people with disabilities less than minimum wage.

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# SUB MINIMUM WAGE

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14(c) lays out a productivity test that determines the sub-minimum wage. The employer times three employees without disabilities doing a certain task. They then time an employee with a disability doing the same task. If the employee with a disability completes only a fraction of the work as compared to their co-workers, they are paid a fraction of the wage. The Department of Labor does not do consistent on-site inspections to ensure this test is fair.



"I was only making about \$3 an hour they figured out... I feel that I should be paid as an equal person."

**Pamela Steward | Tiffin, OH**

# 241,265

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES  
ARE PAID LESS THAN THE  
MINIMUM WAGE

Job Title	Average Earnings Per Hour
Assembly	0.30786
Assembly	0.32079
Assembly	0.32136
Assembly	0.33080
Assembly	0.35698
Assembly	0.40757
Assembly	0.42636
Assembly	0.42667
Assembly	0.42737
Assembly	0.44873
Assembly	0.45181
Assembly	0.47826
Assembly	0.47826
Assembly	0.51262
Assembly	0.53023
Assembly	0.53218
Assembly	0.53312
Assembly	0.54





Tillman worked in a sheltered workshop for fifteen years before finally moving to a job in his community earning minimum wage.

**Tillman Mitchell | Vicksburg, MS**

1950s/60s

# SHELTERED WORKSHOP

The use of the 14(c) certificates became widely used with the advent of sheltered workshops in the 1950s and 60s. The establishment of sheltered workshops coincided with the movement of people with disabilities out of segregated institutional settings. Originally, they were created largely by parents of people with disabilities to provide a safe place for their sons and daughters to go during the day.

Over time, they developed into sophisticated non-profit organizations that compete



"I don't know how our bosses could sleep at night when they'd say 'It's better than nothing!'"

**Charles Biebl | Baltimore, MD**

for contracts from government programs and private companies. These contracts are usually for manual labor tasks such as assembly and sorting, shredding paper, or performing janitorial duties.

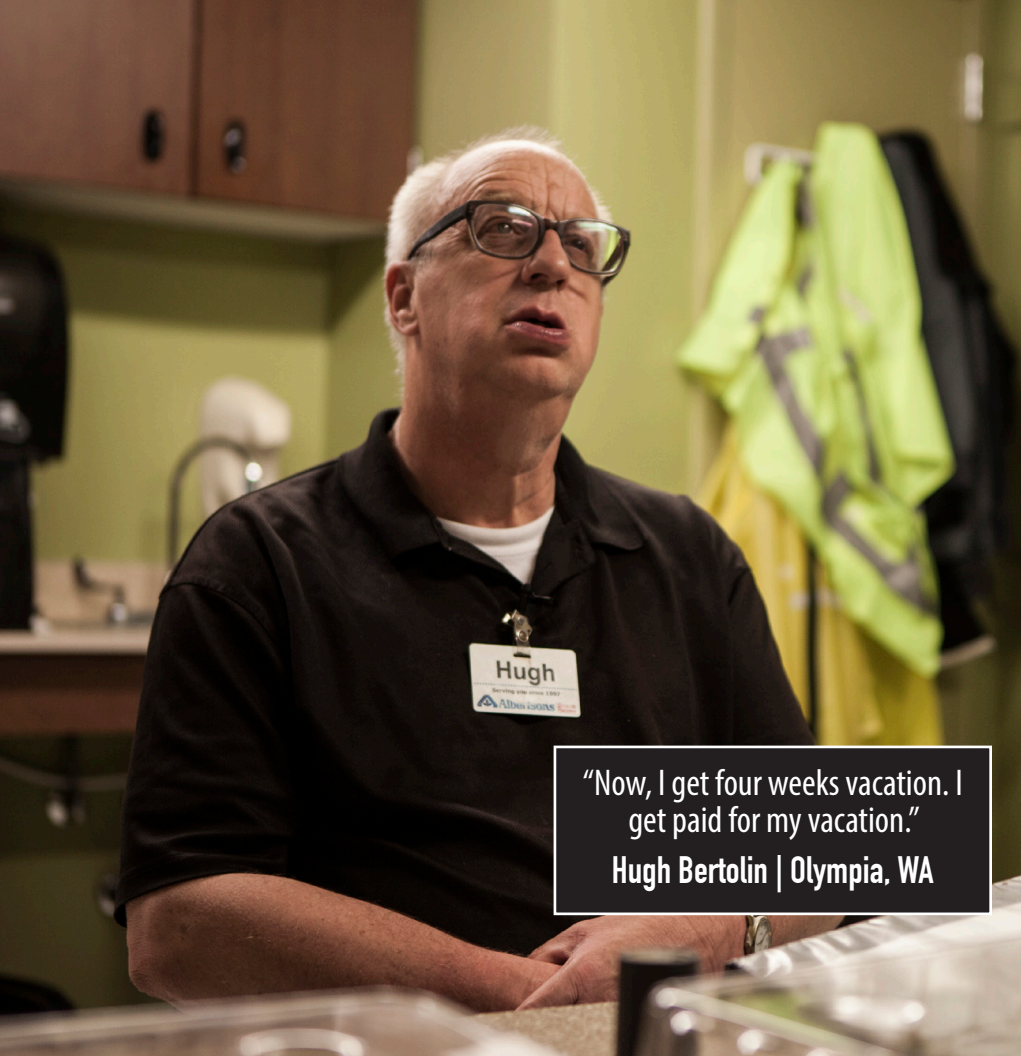
Contracts were intended as a way for people with disabilities to gain job skills in preparation for a job in the community. Instead, employers have an incentive to retain workers in the workshop to fulfill the contracts, sometimes for years, and to pay them sub-minimum wage. Section 14(c) does not establish a limit to how low the wages can go. In turn, workshops pay on average, less than \$2 an hour across the country.

## Transitioning to a New Model of Employment

Morningside Services in Olympia, WA used to run a sheltered workshop and held a 14(c) certificate to pay sub-minimum wage.

In 2004, they completed a five-year phase out of their sheltered workshop and in 2014, they did not renew their 14(c) certificate. This ended the practice of paying sub-minimum wage at Morningside. They now place people in community jobs after months, not years, of training.

Their story shows us how existing workshops can transition away from segregated workplaces and low wages.



"Now, I get four weeks vacation. I get paid for my vacation."

Hugh Bertolin | Olympia, WA

## Shutting Down the School-to-Workshop Pipeline

Although high schools are required to create transition plans for students with disabilities prior to graduation, not all schools and not all transition programs connect students with the same resources.

Too often, a school system will view the local sheltered workshop as the best and/or easiest post-high school employment opportunity. The result is that students are funneled into the workshop system, delaying opportunities for real jobs, or preventing them altogether.

On the other hand, some students, like Sara Frost (right), have access to a good transition program and internship opportunities immediately after high school.

Sara now works full time at the Boston Children's Hospital in the shipping and receiving department.

"If I didn't have access to those programs, I would just be sitting around doing nothing all day."

Sara Frost | South Hampton, NH



# PERSON CENTERED PLAN

Focusing on the strengths and talents of an individual with a disability, while acknowledging their challenges in a person-centered plan, can match people to jobs suited to their abilities.

Access to assistive technology expands possibilities. For example, Andy Owens (right) uses a loader and conveyor belt to process book orders, using switches controlled by his head.

"A lot of kids I went to school with went into sheltered workshops...I said no way for me...I started my job five days after school got out."

Andy Owens | Portland, OR





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# SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

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In supported employment, a person is placed in a job and is given training to learn the job. Sometimes a job coach assists with this training by working on site with an employee with a disability to help build skills and stay on task. Job coaches are also a resource for employers who have people with disabilities on staff.



Dexter with his job coach, Theresa.  
Dexter Smith | Gallup, NM

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# CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT

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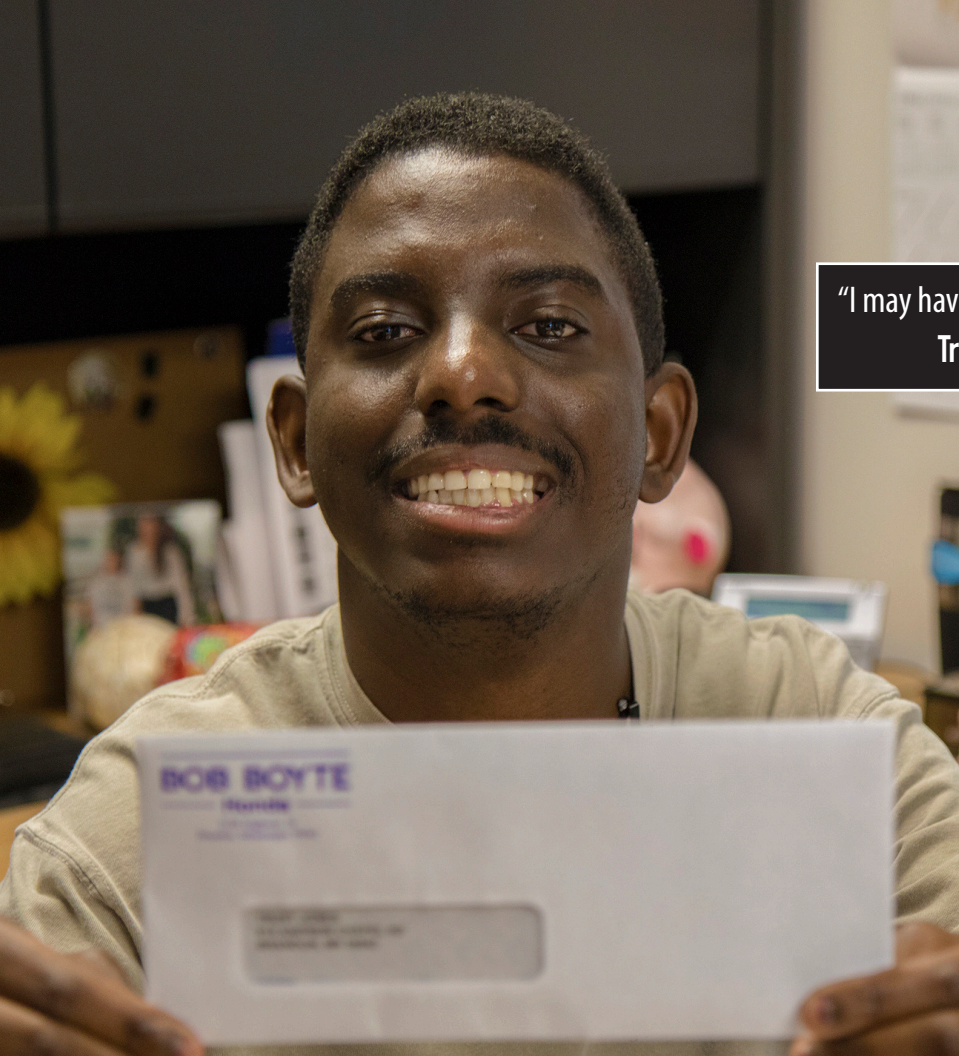
Creating a job that matches a person's skills and interests is the best option. Joe Steffy (left), together with his family, founded Poppin Joe's Kettle Corn. The business provides Joe with various activities suited to his interests in doing many different parts of the business. His earnings allow him to forgo public assistance, live where he wants to live, and choose his hobbies.

None of this is remarkable - it's what everyone does when they work a job and choose how to spend their earnings.

A man with glasses and a red t-shirt with a yellow and orange sunburst design is pouring liquid from a metal pitcher into a large metal kettle. The kettle is filled with popcorn. The background is a brick wall.

Joe became the sole proprietor of Poppin Joe's Kettle Corn in 2006.

**Joe Steffy | Louisburg, KS**



**"I may have a disability, but I can still work."**

**Trust Jones | Brandon, MS**

When people with disabilities find a job, it's not just good for them, it's good for the employer.

Trust Jones (left) manages the Bob Boyte Honda Facebook and Twitter pages, a skillset that matched the dealership's need to reach out to potential customers.

When employers commit to making their workplaces truly inclusive, they will benefit from the energy, talents, and skills of people with disabilities.



*"We have the power to make that change."*

**Jensen Caraballo | Rochester, NY**



## Discussion Questions

1. In what ways are segregated workplaces harmful?
2. How can we ensure better access to transition programs for students with disabilities?
3. What can you do in your state to end the sub-minimum wage?
4. What can the federal government do to end segregation and low wages for people with disabilities in the workplaces?
5. How could money be re-directed from segregated workplaces to more inclusive programs?
6. What can employers do if they discover that they currently use the services of a sheltered workshop or employ individuals at sub-minimum wage?
7. How can employers recruit more employees with disabilities?
8. What can employers do to build a more inclusive and integrated work environment?
9. How can employers using supported employment be sure that they are not inadvertently furthering the exploitation of people with disabilities?
10. How can access to assistive technology open up job opportunities?
11. How can states begin the process of closing sheltered workshops and connecting their participants to other programs?
12. What can people with disabilities do if they want to challenge their wages?
13. What are some organizations that provide resources to people with disabilities seeking employment?

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**The sub-minimum wage is  
allowed in 48 states.**

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