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Company/Organization: Goodwill Industries of Northern New England

The story:

Sustainability is at the heart of Goodwill Northern New England's mission. To us sustainability means helping move impoverished families into stability via good jobs and safe homes (therefore making our communities more sustainable) *and* helping make less of an impact on the Earth. This is a story about both.

Good Clean Property Services is a Goodwill NNE program that helps people with barriers to employment. Sometimes that means training and supporting a person with disabilities, other times it just means giving someone with a criminal record a second chance by hiring him under Good Clean, a nonprofit business that cleans business offices, stores and the like.

A few years ago, many of Good Clean's clients – the businesses that hire us to clean their spaces – demanded high-quality green cleaning products. For them, Good Clean used the best of the best to make sure there is no carbon footprint left by cleaning. Those clients loved the plant-based, biodegradable, neutral-PH cleansers.

Goodwill likes to practice what we preach, so we of course hire Good Clean to clean our own retail stores. But for a while, we juggled several cleaning products: planet-friendly cleansers for some of our clients, cheaper and harsher cleansers for other clients and for our own retail stores. It was a challenge to juggle multiple cleaners and we saw the opportunity to move toward sustainability. It was an LED lightbulb sort of moment: We were going to use up those Earth-harming chemical cleansers, recycle their bottles (of course) and start using the Earth-friendly cleansers for every one of our 40 or so clients plus our 30 retail stores, residences, offices and work spaces. As an added benefit, the green cleansers happened to be more effective at cleaning than the Earth-harming ones!

With one simple move, 86 buildings moved from harming to helping the environment while better serving our clients across Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. We also then got to market this to potential clients. For us, the benefit is two-fold: Using green cleaning products for 40 businesses benefits the Earth and gaining more Earth-conscious business clients by marketing our cleaning services this way means we get to hire more people with employment barriers who might otherwise not find jobs – all because of one small change.