



## 50 BEST NONPROFITS TO WORK FOR IN 2012

*It's more than money when it comes to recruitment and retention*

BY DON McNAMARA

**D**arlene Kiyon, executive director of Playworks Los Angeles, believes she knows what doesn't attract would-be employees.

"They don't come here for the pay or the benefits," said Kiyon, whose organization was number 14 in the Small Organizations category and 33 overall in *The NonProfit Times'* 50 Best Nonprofits to Work For in 2012. It's all about mission.

For the second year in a row, Wounded Warrior Project was selected the best nonprofit for which to work, as well as being at the top of the Medium Organization list.

This is the third annual *NPT* best places to work survey. Most 501(c)(3) organizations can apply to be considered. For example, management support organizations were not eligible to participate. Emails were sent to subscribers to *The NonProfit Times'* print and electronic editions. An-

nouncements were also placed in *The NonProfit Times* inviting organizations to compete. Best Companies Group of Harrisburg, Pa., conducted the interviews and compiled the score sheets. Those with the overall best scores made the Top 50. Those winners were then subdivided into three categories, small, medium and large.

So if potential employees are not anywhere near a salary level that would put them in America's famed 1 percent, what draws employees to nonprofit organizations and, more important, what keeps them so happy?



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Playworks  
Los Angeles

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That isn't really much of a surprise.

"I got to thinking, and in particular we see a high level of engagement from employees of nonprofits" compared to other industries, said Susan Springer, director of workplace assessments for Best Companies Group. "This particular group (nonprofit employees) is very dedicated to the mission: helping people, making a difference, whether locally, nationally or internationally. There's something that's intrinsically satisfying about it."

As in previous years, the 2012 survey included a questionnaire sent to employers to glean information about policies and practices, followed by an employee survey that consisted of approximately 72 statements to which employees responded using a five-point agreement scale.



Grand Rapids Community Foundation

Statements/responses were broken down into subject headings, such as Leadership and Planning, Corporate Culture and Communications, Role Satisfaction, Work Environment, Relationship with Supervisor, Training and Development, Pay and Benefits, and Overall Employee Engagement.

Regarding questions included under Leadership and Planning, 92 percent of all Small Organization survey participants had positive responses, compared to 93 percent of those that made the Top 50. In the Medium Organization category, 85 percent of all respondents gave positive responses, compared to 88 percent of Top 50 winners. In the Large Organization category, 81 percent of all respondents gave positive responses, compared to 85 percent of the eventual Top 50 respondents.

Regardless of size, 84 percent of respondents gave positive reactions under Leadership and Planning, compared to 87 percent for organizations making the top 50. One statement under this heading, for example, was "I understand the long-term strategy of this organization."

Under Corporate Culture and Communications, 83 percent of all respondents gave positive responses, compared to 87 percent of organizations in the Top 50. This category included the statement: "Changes that may affect me are commu-

NPT's BEST NONPROFITS TO WORK FOR 2012 Top 50		
Rank	Organization Listing	U.S. Employees
1	Wounded Warrior Project	209
2	Brighton Center	93
3	DoSomething.org	31
4	SightLife	80
5	Alzheimer's Association	307
6	Grand Rapids Community Foundation	22
7	New Jersey Society of Certified Public Accountants	40
8	Animal Legal Defense Fund	23
9	Natural Resources Defense Council	400
10	Make-A-Wish Foundation of Metro New York and Western New York Inc.	38
11	NOLS	158
12	Parents as Teachers National Center, Inc.	43
13	IREX	96
14	Make-A-Wish Foundation of America	119
15	Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona	119
16	Early Learning Coalition of Pasco and Hernando Counties, Inc.	36
17	Home Start, Inc.	73
18	Community Legal Services of Mid-Florida	95
19	PRS, Inc.	65
20	AHC Inc	62
21	Solar Energy Industries Association	39
22	Arts Midwest	21
23	Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Midlands	22
24	Mayo Clinic Health System - Chippewa Valley	301
25	Year Up	255
26	LiveStrong	90
27	The National Society of Collegiate Scholars	23
28	San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind	492
29	Cross Cultral	50
30	Bayaud Enterprises, Inc.	42
31	Masonic Homes of Kentucky, Inc.	543
32	Keep America Beautiful, Inc	32
33	Playworks Los Angeles	30
34	National Institute of Aerospace	91
35	Mayo Clinic Health System - Northland in Barron	383
36	Child Guidance & Family Solutions	187
37	Better Business Bureau serving Central, Coastal, Southwest Texas and the Permian Basin	57
38	Global Kids, Inc.	44
39	American Heart Association	2,694
40	Emerge! Center Against Domestic Abuse	73
41	Caring Voice Coalition, Inc	57
42	Palm Beach Habilitation Center, Inc.	83
43	Silicon Valley Community Foundation	92
44	Hammer Residences, Inc.	428
45	Pathway Homes, Inc.	95
46	The Mission Continues	27
47	PENCIL Foundation	21
48	Mayo Clinic Health System - Eau Claire Clinic, Inc.	1,512
49	Century Housing	58
50	The Children's Home of Cincinnati	256



Make-A-Wish Foundation

nicated to me prior to implementation."

Under Role Satisfaction, 87 percent of all responding organizations gave positive responses, compared to 89 percent for organizations in the Top 50. This category included the statement: "I like the type of work that I do."

Under Work Environment, 91 percent of all respondents gave positive responses, compared to 92 percent of organizations in the Top 50. This category

included the statement "I feel physically safe in my work environment."

Under Relationship with Supervisor, 88 percent of all respondents gave positive responses, compared to 92 percent of organizations in the Top 50. An example of a statement from this category is: "My supervisor treats me fairly."

Under Training and Development, 73 percent of all respondents gave positive responses, compared to 76 percent in the Top 50. This category included questions such as: "I trust that if I do good work, my company may consider me for a promotion."

Under Pay and Benefits, 80 percent of all respondents gave positive responses, and 83 percent of organizations in the Top 50 gave positive responses. A typical question in the category is: "My pay is fair for the work I perform."

Under Overall Employee Engagement, 88 percent of all respondents and 91 percent of organizations in the Top 50 gave positive responses. This cate-

gory included the statement: "I am willing to give extra effort to help my company succeed."

Altogether, 84 percent of all the organizations that participated had positive responses to the statements, compared to 87 percent of the organizations that made the Top 50 list.

There were also two open-ended questions. "The open-ended questions are meant to give us more insight into the numbers," Springer said. "We're just looking to see if they validate those scores and see if there was any funny business



Masonic Homes of Kentucky, Inc.

going on. So if the numerical surveys indicated satisfaction with, just for example, the 401(k) plan but the open-ended questions indicated something different, we would look further into that."

But, it isn't a 401(k) that inspires nonprofit employees. "The mission is amazing, bringing play to inner-city schools, as well as conflict resolution and leadership, and for me that's extraordinary, the difference we make on a daily basis," said Kiyon. "That really resonates with our staff, seeing the impact they make every day."

According to Steven Nardizzi, executive director of Wounded Warrior Project in Jacksonville, Fla., which led the overall survey and the Medium Size Organization category for the second straight year, "It's the culture here: mission, then values."

Nardizzi said that being selected Number One last year was a source of joy as well as satisfaction for the organization. "It really validated what we're doing," he said.

Validation is encouraging, but once again it goes back to the source. "We have staff on board who are committed to what we're doing," Nardizzi said. "We make a huge effort to keep employees across the organization engaged in the mission."

Still, Springer said, employees are not going to be completely happy if their efforts are not appreciated.

"Employers on this list have been very much active with having employees in the forefront of the focus of their operations," Springer said. "Even with budget cuts and the bad economy, they still have that employee focus on less tangible things. They see value in taking the extra time, the extra step, to say they really appreciate what their employees are doing." *NPT*

# Create Funtime

## Tailgating, brown bag lunches help build team

By DON McNAMARA

Listen. That's what Diana Sieger, president of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation in Michigan does, and it's probably why the foundation ranked second on the list of Small Organizations and sixth overall in *The NonProfit Times'* 50 Best Nonprofits to Work For in 2012.

"We're not a huge organization. One of the keys is that we're very intentional in listening to what people are telling us," Sieger said. "For example, I make it a point once a day of walking around the building and talking to people. I think that has helped us in creating an environment in which our staff feel as though, regardless of what their position is, their opinion has value," said Sieger. "All ideas are welcome, and not immediately dismissed as 'That will never work.' Everyone is essential."

The foundation has weathered economic troubles in a state hit especially hard, even before the recession. Sieger was proud to note that her organization did not lay off any employees when the recession hit and, although professional development funds were very tight in 2008-09, medical benefits, for example, stayed intact.

The personal touch is important to Trina Owens, an accountant for the Parents as Teachers National Center in St. Louis, which finished sixth in the Small Organizations category and number 12 overall.

"The organization is very supportive as far as my goals and getting where I want to be," Owens said, adding the organization is able to mesh her aims with its own. Helping her hone her abilities might make her more marketable elsewhere, but Owens said, "I love it here. I don't see myself going anywhere else."

Owens has a 6-year-old child and the organization has been flexible when she has scheduling conflicts, she said. That flexibility is open to all employees, said Cheryl Dyle-Palmer, executive vice president/COO of Parents as Teachers.

Small Employers (15 – 49 Employees)		
Rank	Organization Listing	U.S. Employees
1	DoSomething.org	31
2	Grand Rapids Community Foundation	22
3	New Jersey Society of Certified Public Accountants	40
4	Animal Legal Defense Fund	23
5	Make-A-Wish Foundation of Metro New York and Western New York Inc.	38
6	Parents as Teachers National Center, Inc.	43
7	Early Learning Coalition of Pasco and Hernando Counties, Inc.	36
8	Solar Energy Industries Association	39
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11	The National Society of Collegiate Scholars	23
12	Bayaud Enterprises, Inc.	42
13	Keep America Beautiful, Inc	32
14	Playworks Los Angeles	30
15	Global Kids, Inc.	44
16	The Mission Continues	27
17	PENCIL Foundation	21



Above: Grand Rapids Community Foundation. Below: Playworks Los Angeles

"We have flexible work hours depending on the work they do," Dyle-Palmer said. "We help them make plans so they can work around their personal schedules. We strive to have a work-home, work-life balance."

Parents as Teachers has a staff development committee, she added.

"It's a very important group in this organization because they plan for all kinds of things that are over and above, but related to the work that goes on here," she added. She cited, for example, professional development sessions with brown bag lunches, at which any topic from the personal to the professional can be aired.

In addition to the serious stuff, the organization schedules fun activities, such as tailgate parties in the parking lot to which community neighbors are invited. Employees get a chance to relax, dress down and even wear sports paraphernalia, Dyle-Palmer said.

Having fun, balancing play and accountability helped Playworks Los Angeles, a local office of a national operation, reach 14 in the Small Organization category and 33 overall.

Coaches go to at-risk schools to gather children in out-of-classroom activities. "They get to play, and who doesn't like to play?" said Darlene Kiyani, executive director of the Los Angeles office.

According to Kiyani, the organization's current retention rate is 77 percent. Of those who left, 60 percent left to accept full-time teaching jobs at the schools at which they had been working, and 20 percent left to pursue advanced degrees.

Kiyani said applicants commonly ask why staffers love their positions.

As for the work itself, "Coaches, when they are at the schools, have a lot of flexibility, but they also have accountability and are responsible for results," Kiyani said. "That contributes to staff morale."

Kiyani said that play is built into staff meetings, and there is recess, for staff, every day. *NPT*

