It’s an exciting period for laundry services operations at NISH-affiliate nonprofit agencies (NPAs; also known as community rehabilitation programs or CRPs). Recent developments point toward a boom in productivity, cost savings that can be passed onto the Government customer, and the ability to place a vast, new segment of people with severe disabilities in laundry services jobs.

About AbilityOne Laundry Services
For more than a quarter century, AbilityOne Program laundry service operations have provided Federal Government customers with clean, pressed, folded and sorted laundry that is picked up and delivered on schedule. Today, two dozen NPAs in 23 states process more than 48 million pounds of laundry per year for more than 60 Federal hospitals and military installations nationwide. This line of service supports jobs for hundreds of people with disabilities.

The benefits Government customers receive by contracting laundry services through the AbilityOne Program include:

- Quality services at a fair market price and the assurance of quality of service as needs change through direct and frequent communication between customer staff and AbilityOne project managers
- A dedicated, nationwide workforce
- The elimination of re-procurement costs, repeated start-up costs and learning curves
Invention has been the mother necessity for expanding laundry services at Pioneer Adult Rehabilitation Center (PARC), a Clearfield, Utah-based NPA, and the results have been phenomenal.

PARC launders the uniforms of its 170 janitorial services employees who clean some 160 buildings at Hill Air Force Base under an AbilityOne Program contract. A few years ago, PARC brought the laundry services of those uniforms in-house with the expectation that individuals with disabilities who participate in the organization’s day program would be employed to run it. However, the cleaned uniforms must be sorted into 15 different stacks for return to PARC’s 15 separate janitorial service teams, and that requirement proved too difficult for the majority of day program participants.

**Thinking “Outside of the Box”**

Paul Nishman, who leads the NISH productivity enhancement effort, and his colleague, NISH Rehabilitation Engineer Kevin Ryan, went to work on the problem. Together, they assist NPAs nationwide to improve access to jobs for people with the most severe and profound disabilities and to improve productivity for those already employed. They offer special expertise in reengineering jobs for improved universal access. Their unique work experience and creativity enabled them to develop a hugely successful solution. Furthermore, it has opened the door to new employment opportunities in laundry services for a large segment of individuals with cognitive disabilities previously unable to perform laundry services.

The key to Nishman and Ryan’s solution was “outside of the box” thinking in the use of Radio Frequency Identification Technology (RFID) chips. Before joining NISH, Ryan worked in the semi-conductor industry at a plant that used RFID technology to track work in process.
electromagnetic spectrum is used to transmit signals. Most RFID tags contain at least two parts. One is an integrated circuit for storing and processing information, modulating and demodulating a radio frequency (RF) signal. The second is an antenna for receiving and transmitting the signal.
His productivity gains enabled PARC to convert his compensation from a piece rate to a higher earning hourly wage.

Looking ahead, PARC is eager to expand laundry services job opportunities by securing commercial and Federal Government contracts to clean uniforms. “We would love a laundry services contract to clean 400-500 lbs of laundry, more than doubling the load we are cleaning today,” Crosby said. “That would bring us up to full capacity with the equipment we currently own and allow us to expand the number of employees with disabilities from the three that work there now to as many as eight people.”

Other benefits realized by the RFID sorting process include the ability to generate a variety of reports that support new efficiencies. The cost savings from all the improvements also will be passed along to the benefit of future Federal Government customers.

**Inventive Software and Modern Equipment Support Long-Term Expansion at CSS**

In the state of Virginia, Chesapeake Service Systems (CSS) is on a three-phased journey (that began in 2004) to greatly expand the NPA’s laundry services. The goals are to better serve the Federal Government customer as well as a broad segment of people with severe disabilities. So far, it is achieving both.

Phase one of the CSS expansion saw the NPA increase its laundry services business and production capabilities by adding new equipment and moving to a much more spacious, 35,000 sq. ft. space within two buildings. The changes boosted productivity from 540 to 1,400 lbs of laundry processed per hour—a total of some two million pounds annually.
Achieving this will further compliment their recognized experience with hospitality laundry and provide even more jobs for people with disabilities.”

Today, CSS performs laundry services for the lodging facilities at the Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, N.C. and the Northwest Security Activity in Chesapeake, Va. CSS Laundry Manager C.J. McCauley realized the added productivity created a new urgency to improve how CSS tracked laundry going out and coming into its facility. CSS had to evolve from a manual to an automated reporting system. The improvement also would make CSS more competitive by ensuring its capability to manage healthcare laundry operations, a more challenging business currently comprising 80 percent of Federal Government and nearly half of all commercial laundry services contract opportunities.

Selecting the Right Laundry Tracking Software & Hardware

After some research, McCauley chose the Laundry-Trak® software and hardware system to track all laundry shipments going in & out of CSS. The system is specifically designed for central laundries that serve multiple locations.

“Laundry-Trak® had the necessary features that allowed us to do away with the handwritten figures we had been using in the past,” McCauley said. “By using the weights coming directly from the scale indicators and letting the software prepare all of the shipping manifests and reports, we were able to be more precise on our weights while providing immediate tracking information.” CSS then had the ability to plan more efficiently and increase productivity.

Since installing Laundry-Trak®, CSS also has been able to implement additional efficiencies such as shifting from bulk chemical