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## A CONVERSATION WITH SUNNIE COTTON, WORKFORCE CONNECTIONS PROGRAM DIRECTOR

*Extended DISC: Today I spoke with Sunnie Cotton, Workforce Connections Program Director, at United Way of East Central Alabama. Hi Sunnie. Tell me a little bit about your organization.*

**Sunnie:** Sure. I started this position with United Way of East Central Alabama in September 2020. Our program is funded by a Grant. We receive both federal and state funding. Our program supports, mentors, and advocates for at-risk youth ages 16 – 24. These individuals experience a barrier which prevents them from reach their full potential.

*Extended DISC: What’s an example of “a barrier”?*

**Sunnie:** A barrier might be self-inflicted or something they were born into. For example, low income, depression, English as a second language, homeless, and/or being on probation. We help these students prepare for their next step; whether that be work, enlisting in the military, or entering a school or trade program.



### HEADQUARTERS

Alexandria, VA

### WEBSITE

[www.UnitedWay.org](http://www.UnitedWay.org)

### INDUSTRY

Advance the common good by focusing on education, income and health

### QUICK FACTS

Network of nearly 1,800 community-based United Way locations in 41 countries and territories

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Sunnie Cotton, Workforce Connections Program Director



## EXTENDED DISC

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Sunnie Cotton, Workforce Connections Program Director

It can be difficult getting the youth to open up. We can only help them as much as they let us. We have found DISC to be a bridge for us in starting conversations. DISC provides us with insights in how we can help them. Before we used Extended DISC<sup>®</sup>, we would be taking a stab in the dark. Now, with Extended DISC<sup>®</sup>, we have an accurate idea of starting points.

***Extended DISC: Tell me more about the program for these youth.***

**Sunnie:** Sure. Extended DISC<sup>®</sup> is one of the first things we do with them when they start the program. The first step is to help them discover how they are designed. Most of the youth have never been exposed to positive feedback and self-development. Extended DISC<sup>®</sup> provides them with feedback and self-awareness. Many of the youth have issues with trust. In the past, it has been difficult to build trust and have them believe the feedback we give them. Using Extended DISC<sup>®</sup> provides us with an opportunity to provide feedback they tend to believe because it's written right there in black and white. It's not us telling them. It's in writing for them to see themselves. I have personally seen youth grow exponentially in their self-confidence as a result of the Extended DISC<sup>®</sup> assessment.

***Extended DISC: Wow! That's so awesome. It gives me goosebumps to hear about the power of the tool. Tell me about the other aspects of the program. Do you refer back to Extended DISC<sup>®</sup>?***

**Sunnie:** Yes, we pull out the reports several different times as we work with the youth. We also work with them to develop skills. For example, we may focus on developing interview skills, financial literacy, writing résumés and becoming a self-sufficient adult. Extended DISC<sup>®</sup> is the foundational piece of the program. Extended DISC<sup>®</sup> provides us so much information. It gives us a way to know, understand, and communicate our strengths. It helps us understand what motivates us and demotivates us which can help in career pathing and determining next steps. DISC gives us a language to communicate. When writing a résumé, we always pull out our Extended DISC<sup>®</sup> reports. So much of the information for the résumé is right there in the Extended DISC<sup>®</sup> report.



EXTENDED DISC

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Sunnie Cotton, Workforce Connections Program Director

***Extended DISC: Thanks for sharing, Sunnie. Do you use Extended DISC® outside of the program you have created for youth?***

***Sunnie:*** Yes, we do. I have personally used when hiring a new associate and we have used it a board retreat.

***Extended DISC: Tell me how you leveraged the tool when hiring a new associate.***

***Sunnie:*** I had narrowed my candidate pool to a few serious candidates. I needed assurance in making the right hiring decision. I didn’t want to hire someone I would butt heads with. I wanted to hire someone who would help balance me and that I would be compatible with. I gave the DISC questionnaire to two potential candidates. The supporting information Extended DISC® provided gave me the confidence I was making the right decision.

***Extended DISC: Tell me about how you used DISC at the board retreat.***

***Sunnie:*** It was so eye-opening to use Extended DISC® at the board retreat. The board was newly created for a new program being offered. There were a few issues that needed to be addressed, so I was asked to lead an Extended DISC® session for the board. Using a team map for the board, we discovered the board was homogeneous. Everyone sat on one side of the graph. Using Extended DISC® allowed us to shape this group into an operating force of good. Without Extended DISC®, everyone would have been blind to the different strengths they each bring.

***Extended DISC: I wish we could keep talking; but unfortunately, our time is up. How would you summarize your experience with DISC?***

***Sunnie:*** I love Extended DISC®. I’m so thankful for the impact it has had on our youth. It’s been a bridge to building trust and confident self-awareness in our youth.