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Transcript of NCSET Conference Call Presentation

Employer Champions: Success Stories on Engaging Youth with Disabilities in the Workplace

presented by:

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MS. MACK: Welcome to the July National Center on Secondary Education and Transition national conference call.

Mark Donovan from the Marriott Foundation was not able to be on the line today, so we will have two speakers representing employers and discussing how their organizations are engaging youth with disabilities in the work place. These are employer champions of youth involvement in the workplace and their success stories demonstrate the benefits of such activities for youth, employers, and the community at large.

First, Cassandra Black is going to share with us what NASA is doing to engage youth., She will take about 20 minutes, and then Jerry Brown will discuss how his company, Musco Sports Lighting in Iowa, is supporting youth. Now let me briefly introduce Cassandra Black. Ms. Black is a program management specialist at NASA Kennedy Space Center, and in that capacity her duties include external relations and business development. She is the primary contact within NASA working with High Schools/High Tech, a national network of state and locally operates programs designed to provide young people with all types of disability opportunities to explore jobs and further education, leading to technology related careers. In addition to her work with High Schools/High Tech, Cassandra manages a summer -internship program within NASA for youth with disabilities. Now Cassandra, would you like to tell us a little bit more about yourself, and the exciting things that you are doing at NASA. When you are finished just turn it back

to me and I will introduce Jerry Brown

MS. BLACK: Thank you Mary, for that introduction. First of all I would like to say I work for NASA Kennedy Space Center. Agency wide, NASA has ten centers. NASA's mission is to understand and protect the planet, to explore the universe in search of life, and to inspire the next generation of explorers as only NASA can.

And that's where my division comes into play. We are strongly committed to that mission to inspire the next generation of explorers as only NASA can. It lies on 140 acres of land located on a wildlife refuge. More than 11,000 people work at Kennedy Space Center. The work force consists of but is not limited to, civil scientist and engineers, administrative, technical, and clerical personnel. In addition, more than 11,000 contractors work at Kennedy Space Center. Kennedy Space Center is managed by a system of directories. Individuals have their own functions, and together they make a productive, effective, and efficient center.

I work in the external relations and business development directory. The directory is responsible for education programs, internal and external public communications, guest services and special events, government relations, customer assurance, joint business planning, and space port technology business development. Within most directories, there are divisions. I work in the education, programs, and university research divisions. The University research office consists of 18 to 20 people. My title is program management specialist. I manage education programs, including work with

academia and state and local agencies. I entered NASA agency as a summer student. I've worked in the area of human resources and mission assurance and procurement.

At the program management session, I'm responsible for managing a number of programs such as Penny's graduate student program, Southgate Fellowship program, Volunteer Service Program and programs for students with disabilities. I credit my experience in human resources as one our major stepping stones to my current position.

While in human resources, I supported the management and implementation of education programs, specifically, programs designed for minority students and students with disabilities. I'm a member of the Kennedy Space Center Disability Awareness and Action Working Group (DAAWG), pronounced "dog". The group is an advisory group to the Center director on matters relating to employees with disabilities as well a resource to the equal opportunity program office work force and diversity management office and other directories.

Today I manage two programs for the Centers for Disabilities. Project ACCESS is a program of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, offering internship opportunities for students with disabilities in science, engineering, mathematics and computer science. ACCESS stands for Achieving Competence in Computing, Engineering, and Space Science. The goal of the program is to provide work experiences at a NASA center to undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities who are studying engineering, mathematics, physical sciences, or computer science. Kennedy sponsors one to two students for this program each summer.

The internships are for 10 weeks, and the student works at the Center. I also manage the Space Coast Center for independent, high school and high tech project—the program for the Space Coast Center for independent living for high school level students with learning, sensory, or physical disabilities.

A community based student, parent, and employers program that encourages students with a learning, sensory, or physical disability to pursue their interest in science, engineering, and technol-

ogy. Students are given the opportunity to participate in this six-week internship at Kennedy Space Center.

Kennedy sponsors five to eight students from this program during the summer. The student also works at the Center. For both these programs, I place students within directories at Kennedy Space Center. Accommodations for these students are worked in coordination with our disability program coordinator. Students are placed in a directory that matches their interest, goals, and academic progress.

The student is also assigned a mentor. My goal is to make the best effort to match the student and mentor to have a win-win situation for the both. Students with disabilities that work as summer interns and employers who hire these students will reap many benefits. The student will gain valuable work experience and will not have to wonder what it is like to work in their area of interest. The students will also develop personal and professional skills.

Employers will have the opportunity to learn what students are being taught in the classroom and match that with their needs. Employers can help develop the interns, for example, offer training and seek information such as expected graduation dates, and plans the student has to pursue higher learning. Further, employers will be able to match the data learned from students with the skills that are needed by the companies now and in the future.

To provide more details, the students apply directly to the agency and are recruited by the agency or by the university. And I receive a resume or an application package on the student and coordinate with the program administrator either at the agency or at the university in matching the student's interest, academic progress, and also the need of Kennedy Space Center in placing the student in their internship roles at Kennedy. The students are placed in areas such as our Space Life Sciences area, our action out crew quarters, any place that there is a need for a student and the Center can be used as resource for the summer months.

In my role as member of the disability awareness and action-working group, I attend monthly meetings with other members from across the Center. Each directorate has a representative on the

disability awareness and action-working group. At that time, I have the liberty to discuss if there is a need for mentors. We also discuss accommodations needs, housing, and help with accommodations. I also work very closely with our work force and diversity management directorate in efforts to use the students that are here on summer internships as a possibility for a permanent hire as they progress along in their education endeavors.

MS. MACK: Our next presenter is Jerry Brown. He is the Senior International Manager for Musco Sports Lighting. Jerry is going to talk to us from the corporate headquarters for Musco in Oskaloosa, Iowa. He is going to give us a perspective of an international company, based in a rural area, and how he's involved in promoting business education partnerships for all youth including youth with disabilities. Jerry, do you want to start?

MR. BROWN: Certainly. Thanks Mary. Well it's nice to be part of the conference call, and we are relatively new to the E-mentoring and assisting, although I think through the years we have done many things but not necessarily in the E-mentoring and raising some help from within for that, but I'll go through that here in a minute.

Just to give you a brief overview of whom Musco is. We are a 25-year-old company. Based in Iowa, here both in Oskaloosa and Muscatine is where we do our manufacturing on the river, the Mississippi. We have our corporate office here in Oskaloosa, which employs a couple hundred people, and we have 400 to 500 other people around the company, so we are a small company of 600 to 700 people across the states. We have seven offices here nationally, and six global offices. And that number of 500 to 700 includes those people internationally as well for us. We are a private company and the owners Joe Crookham and Myron Gordon are our day-to-day hands-on owners. So they are an integral part of our ongoing success and our future.

We are in a town of about 10,000 people. What we do here in Oskaloosa and what we do in Muscatine are very similar in the sense of assisting schools and churches in many different avenues of helping them raise money, having kids of all ages from probably six grade up actually attend days at work where they do job shadowing. It gets a little

bit more intense with a high school student, so they can really see what they may want to do, whether it's business or sales or marketing related. So they can actually come in and spend a day or two days with us and they really do our jobs with us, so they can see if they like it or not.

Crisis intervention center, homes for battered men and women and children, we were a leader in actually purchasing and getting that center in place here in town (there are only two centers here in a very rural area of Iowa). We are involved in many things, Habitat for humanity as well.

Junior achievement has been a very good success for us, where we become the teachers for one or two classes a week in the Junior High and Senior High School. It goes on both educationally as well as recreationally. And really what we try to do is become part of the community, and we are the community. So anything that we can do, we really are part of the first people there to volunteer both with labor, with assistance, with monetary, with technical support, anything we have to offer we provide to the community with open arms.

The reason we do that is that most people that work for us are from the area, or like myself, I'm a transplant to come to Iowa for this job and it's been three years now that I've been doing this particular job for Musco. And I have probably not seen more giving than any other company that I've worked with than this one, which is an excellent thing to see.

In the last two years, we have really been involved in E-mentoring, and our focus was to make a connection with former junior high through senior high students, mainly freshmen through seniors in high school with disabilities and also High Schools/High Tech.

To get to the high school tech, that's a little easier to talk about in the sense that those people know they want to go to college. They may not know exactly what they want to do, so we help them, guide them in a career, show them some different things, let them experiment with what they thought they might want to do or had no idea, so we turned them on to something different.

So it's been two years of doing that as well

as more of students with disabilities of all sorts. Whether we knew exactly what they had was one thing, but they had some troubles with school and with home, and within themselves. And we've tried to make a connection with them to say that there are people within the community that do care, and care a lot.

We think they are vital people in the world. And a lot of times not everyone can get attention, and we just wanted to see what we could do to provide that via the E-mentoring program. And we have had, I believe, some very good success with that, and we have worked with Debbie Stevens, who is our coordinator here in Oskaloosa, with a Connecting to Success program.

And it really, truly has made a difference in the kids that we've worked with so far. A lot of times we have tried to make the connection simply that there is somebody here and what can we do to help. And it has just been amazing that the kids really thought that adults, and they called us old people, didn't really care about them. That was probably the number one thing that we had to work through. That we did care and we did want to help, and we were honest about it. And after the first few weeks of getting to know each other via E-mail, that became apparent that we did care. On the face-to-face meeting, they really appreciated the honesty and the integrity that we showed them in helping them.

The reason that Musco likes to do this is one, I think we have a lot great people like there are in all the companies involved in these type of situations, that we really do enjoy doing it. And really that's the bottom line—just simply helping who we can in our community and the surrounding areas.

And that's the biggest difference. To make a difference in somebody's life, we need people here to stay here and work and take our place as we get older, and we would like to have it done with the people that grew up here and have families and friends. And if we can help them stay here or go on somewhere else to be a success in whatever they choose to do, whether that is to get a job on a construction site or go to college and get a Ph.D., we would like to be part of that. That's what we try to do, and we always look at anything else that we can do to help the students, especially because they

are our future. That's what we've done and that's what we are continuing to do, and we are looking to grow the program in the fall before school starts and continue to make it bigger and bigger within our company and within the community itself.

That's all I have for now.

MS. MACK: Thank you Cassandra and Jerry. Now let's open it up for questions and I would like to start with a question for Jerry.

Jerry, it sounds like you are doing a lot of wonderful things in the community to be a good corporate citizen. What kind of feedback do you get from your employees about being involved in the community and what your company is doing?

MR. BROWN: Certainly, probably there is a group of maybe 18 of us that are doing the E-mentoring. That will grow. But there are a lot more people involved with say the United Way, assisting them and growing, and Habitat for Humanity, to pick out just two that are simple.

What we do is also donate our time on the job, to where if there are projects that need to be done during working hours, that time is just provided, so the employees do not feel pressured to try to be part of the community after hours or on weekends when family time comes in.

I think part of the value that people respect about Musco is that during working hours, we provide time to employees that do volunteer work and Musco as a whole company is part of bigger projects. Whether somebody has something specific that they want to work on, or as a big group, we allow that time to be provided during working hours. Flexibility at work is a big part of being able to do that. This is probably key to part of our success and believing in people that we work with, whether it's building a house, putting on some sort of show for the kids educationally, or working with the library. And people are just amazed at what we can provide and do continue to provide for the community.

MS. MACK: A number of the people, both Jerry and Cassandra, have talked about being involved in High Schools/High Tech and I think Donna Mundi from Florida is also with Cassandra? Do you want to talk a little bit about how you have approached companies to be involved in High Schools/High Tech including NASA?

MS. MUNDI: Yes, and I would just like to make one comment. Cassandra did not do justice to herself in that she has been responsible for finding the interns and during the internship she also arranges for their supervisors to be their mentors during the summer. And we've actually had students who went from different departments with their supervisor from one summer to another. So it has been a marvelous experience for the students, and the relationship that we have with NASA has opened an unbelievable amount of doors for High Schools/High Tech in Florida.

And as far as working with other businesses, we've been really successful. We have now about 300 students and 11 High Schools/High Tech projects. Soon we will have 15 in the state of Florida when our next round of grants that we are working on go through. And what makes it work is just what has been mentioned today. The fact that each community takes High Schools/High Tech, brings in their own employers, and once you have that buy-in to the program on a local basis, the program really flourishes.

MS. MACK: To what extent do you think that your employers are promoting careers in science and mathematics, is it a generic interest in just promoting the sciences and math, or is it more enlightened self interest?

MS. MUNDI: I think it is both. It really and truly is. Because High Schools/High Tech, as you know, is a student driven project, and you find out what the student's interest is and then you develop that interest. And the employers that we are working with and the feedback we are getting is that they are learning as much from the students as the students are learning from them.

We have been real fortunate this year to have some of the employers who have asked the students to stay on and work with them during the school year. Several of the students who are going into college who were interning at some of our universities, they have been offered positions during the school year at the universities. So it's really a situation where everybody is gaining from it. And it's giving these employers the opportunity to see a work force that perhaps they weren't aware of before.

MS. MACK: Jerry, you said that you are in-

involved in High Schools/High Tech also?

MR. BROWN: Correct.

MS. MACK: Who is the contact organization? Who works with the kids before they get contacted by you?

MR. BROWN: Primarily, it would be Debbie Stevens.

MS. MACK: So it is the activities of the Chamber of Commerce?

MR. BROWN: Exactly. And we have two members on the board of the Chamber as well that help facilitate that, but really Debbie runs it for us. And any time she has a need or a requirement of help, then we are one of the first companies and there are many companies here in Oskaloosa that start to do what we are doing.

MS. MACK: Could you explain a little bit about it, because I don't think that many of the people on the line are necessarily familiar with how the Chambers operate in your community. It varies from community to community. I understand that in your community the Chamber acts as an intermediary organization that promotes business education partnerships. Is that correct?

MR. BROWN: Right. With Debbie, she has kind of a dual position in that she identifies with the schools any needs that they may have with anything with the kids, and sees how she can use her position at the Chamber to coordinate and facilitate those needs, whether it's an E-mentoring program, or it's with kids with disabilities, or with high tech, or there have been several other things as far as kids maybe needing something or the school needing something.

So she then starts to call the different companies within the community and asks what they can help us with. And she has worked strong with us. We had probably one of the more flexible times again, so it has us to be even more integral in it, but really providing, with the high tech, internships or summer jobs. And then we have a local university here in Oskaloosa, William Penn University, and many of those that graduate there then become a Musco employee due to their involvement with us through the years.

So really Debbie, whatever the school system and community needs, because she is tied into many

other facets, whether it's the crisis intervention center, or Habitat for Humanity, she always gets calls from them and then uses her resources to assist the community in many, many other different ways.

MS. MACK: Are there other questions?

MS. STOLP: I have a question for Cassandra. If we could have some contact information, if that's possible and if you could explain a little bit about the application process for internships?

MS. BLACK: Are you referring to the High Schools/High Tech project?

MS. STOLP: I think that and the project ACCESS.

MS. BLACK: I have a Web site for project ACCESS. It is http://students.jsc.nasa.gov/under_grad/access.htm.

MS. STOLP: I guess overall, how many students have both Cassandra and Jerry had involved in the programs?

MR. BROWN: Well from Jerry, we have had about 18 students this year. And we had 12 last year.

MS. MACK: Jerry, aren't those just the students that have had E-mentors through Connecting to Success.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MS. MACK: In addition to that, how many other students typically do you work with more on a one-on-one basis. How many internships did you provide last year? Approximately?

MR. BROWN: I would probably say maybe a dozen over the last two years.

MS. MACK: OK. And the job shadows, that would be for every employee in your Oskaloosa site that has had somebody that's done a job shadow with him or her, is that correct?

MR. BROWN: Not necessarily everybody, but probably we end up maybe upwards of 50 to 75 students a year through the job shadow.

MS. STOLP: And they come in for how long on the job shadow? Just one day?

MR. BROWN: Usually it's one day. But then we leave it open to the students if they want to E-mail the employee and ask me some further questions with the teacher's permission. If they have some other questions after they leave, then we follow up with answers for them.

MS. STOLP: OK.

MS. MACK: And with NASA, Cassandra, approximately how many young people do you work with during the course of the year between High Schools/High Tech, ACCESS, and your other programs?

MS. BLACK: Of all the programs that I manage--approximately 70 internships--of that, ACCESS is one to two per year. And High Schools/High Tech, can range from five to eight students per year. I would like to add that project ACCESS is at the undergraduate and graduate level. So those students would have to come to Kennedy for that internship. And sometimes being a student with a disability and not being able to come to the area and scope out the area, there is some reluctance to come to Kennedy.

I believe that's why there are low numbers in the project ACCESS program. High Schools/High Tech, is geared for high school students, and most of those students are local and attend high schools in our commuting area and usually car pool or have family members or friends that they can car pool with to come to Kennedy. We are located in a remote area for transportation of students.

MS. MACK: And how many people on the phone have been involved with High Schools/High Tech?

MS. MARCHBANK: I am Carolyn Marchbank, Children's Haven Adult Community Services, High Schools/High Tech program.

MS. MACK: OK.

MS. MUNDI: Donna Mundi, State Coordinator for High Schools/High Tech in Florida.

MS. MACK: So there are a number of you that are on the phone that are not High Schools/High Tech sites, is that correct?

UNIDENTIFIED: Yes.

MS. MACK: For those of you who are interested in becoming High School/High Tech sites there is a request for proposals that came out last week, I think, wasn't there Donna?

MS. MUNDI: Yes.

MS. MACK: For those interested you can access that request for proposals on the Department of Labor Web site and their office of disability employment policy. The web site is <http://www.dol.gov/>

[odep](#).

Cassandra and Jerry, do you have any additional things that you would like to add?

MR. BROWN: No, we are always looking to find better ways to do different things in the community and I think E-mentoring has been a very nice surprise, because we didn't know what to expect. And I think it's been a lot of fun. We are anxious to get the new school year started so we can see what else is coming along our way, and we are truly looking to grow the program—that we think is very valuable.

MS. MACK: Musco has been involved in a program called Connecting for Success for the past two years, the development of which was funded through the Presidential Task Force on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities, and we have successfully piloted it in Iowa and Minnesota.

We are currently looking for other states in which to pilot the model. It basically is with high school students with disabilities or other impediments to success. Students have a monitored E-mail exchange a minimum of once a week with a mentor, and then there are a minimum of two site visits where they go out to the company. Many times the company comes to the school site. It has been very successful and we are hoping to pilot that model in the juvenile correction facilities in Idaho, in New York with blind students, and in New Mexico with Los Alamos Labs. If you would like more information please access the Connecting to Success Web site at <http://ici.umn.edu/ementoring>. Thank you very much.

End of Teleconference

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