

After School Matters Program at the Hanford Site – 16569

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ABSTRACT

CH2M HILL Plateau Remediation Company (CH2M), a prime contractor for environmental remediation at the U.S. Department of Energy Hanford Site in southeast Washington State, partnered with the nonprofit After School Matters (ASM) organization to provide outreach to local elementary school students in 2013-2014. The program emphasizes building relationships between youths and adults through academic tutoring, homework assistance, mentoring and physical fitness development. The program assists students from families where adults are often unemployed or underemployed. This project not only gives employees an opportunity to mentor and teach local youths, it also helps them prepare the next generation of leaders and experts. A substantial number of employees will be eligible for retirement within the next ten years, and their extensive institutional knowledge will go with them. Visiting schools and sharing this knowledge and experience gives students insights into career opportunities they might not otherwise consider. This program proved so successful, another Hanford Contractor involved their workers, expanding the program to a second elementary school. Also, the program caught the eye of a nonprofit organization, 21st Century After-School Program, who invited the team to expand to a third elementary school. The ASM program at the Hanford Site: (1) targets an often overlooked group of students and provides an opportunity to mentor and teach the future generation; (2) positively impacts the students, volunteers and community; (3) has expanded its reach to other contractors and schools. Lessons learned from this community education program provide valuable context for other organizations interested in similar outreach efforts.

INTRODUCTION

CH2M HILL Plateau Remediation Company (CH2M) is a prime contractor for environmental remediation at the U.S. Department of Energy Hanford Site in southeast Washington State. CH2M performs complex cleanup work that requires a plethora of skilled workers, including trade workers such as millwrights, electricians, pipefitters, and carpenters. Many of the jobs with CH2M at the Hanford Site do not require a college degree, with many of the positions seeking experienced, skilled technical workers.

However, as of 2012, 53 percent of skilled workers within the U.S. were 45 years and older, and 18.6 percent were between the ages of 55 and 64 [1]. Compared to the overall labor force, where just 44 percent of workers were at least 45 years old and 15.5 percent of workers were held by workers aged 55-60, it's clear that trade workers are comprised of mostly "baby boomers" who are approaching the retirement age.

At CH2M, 38.9 percent of the workforce consists of trade workers. Of those trade workers, 73.2 percent are at least 45 years old, and 28.2 percent are aged 55-60. Compared to industry averages, these numbers are staggering. The statistics make it quite clear that we will soon be faced with the enormous challenge of replacing the “baby boomers” within the workplace, especially at the Hanford Site and other sites across the DOE complex. The baby boomer issue is looming and must be addressed, as it will have impacts on businesses around the country as we see more and more workers approaching retirement within the next decade.

APPROACH

In 2013, employees from CH2M were inspired to reach beyond the worksite and get involved in an outreach project that would benefit the community and provide an opportunity to influence safety knowledge and practices outside of Hanford. CH2M partnered with the nonprofit After School Matters (ASM) organization to provide outreach programs to students at a local elementary schools. The ASM organization is a non-profit organization that emphasizes building relationships between young people and adults through academic tutoring, homework assistance, mentoring, and physical fitness development. The program assists students from families where the adults are often unemployed or underemployed.

CH2M employees, specifically skilled trade workers, show a serious interest in sharing their wealth of knowledge and passion for their trades with young students in the local community. Employees volunteer to go to the schools, talk about their professions and the hazards they face, and allow the kids to experience hands-on activities related to their jobs. Employees have a goal to target an often overlooked group of potential future Hanford workers and inspire them to learn about future career opportunities within their own community.

It is no secret that vocational programs in the education system receive less interest from students and less funding from the governments in favor of a curriculum that prepares students to attend college. Many students do not realize that the skilled trades are a legitimate career path that provide many of the same financial opportunities that are found in jobs that require a college degree, but without the high tuition cost. In fact, the average trade school degree costs just \$33,000, compared to \$127,000 for the average four-year bachelor's degree [2].

The ASM program in the Tri-Cities area is affiliated with schools that historically serve a lower-income population than other schools in the Tri-Cities area. Due to a number of socioeconomic issues that occur in schools that serve lower-income communities, the ASM team believed they would have the largest impact on the community by sponsoring programs within schools such as, Amistad and Eastgate Elementary in Kennewick and Jefferson Elementary in Richland.

The curriculum within most schools is heavily focused on preparing students to attend college upon graduation. While college and the careers that are attainable after college are appealing to many students, there remains a large group of

students who do not share the same interests in higher education, or perhaps do not possess the resources required to afford a college education. There was once a time where a student was given the option as to whether they wanted to pursue a technical program or follow the college track when in high school; however, times have changed and technical programs are receiving less funding as teachers and administrators are pushing students away from technical programs and towards college. The ASM program seeks to expose students to careers and career paths that they may not otherwise know about, including apprenticeships, vocational programs, and a wide variety of skilled trades.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 2013-2014 ASM program proved to be highly successful, with overwhelmingly positive feedback received from the students, volunteers, and teachers. Word of the program's success quickly traveled to another Hanford Site contractor, the Mission Support Alliance (MSA). In 2014-2015 the Mission Support Alliance partnered with CH2M to expand the program into a second elementary school, and another nonprofit organization, 21st Century ASM, invited the CH2M/MSA team to expand to a third elementary school.

The ASM program demonstrated and integrated the Voluntary Protection Program's tenets (Management Leadership, Employee Involvement, Worksite Analysis, Hazard Prevention and Control, and Safety and Health Training) for both the students and the volunteers. The volunteers were able to make a significant impact in the community by educating and inspiring hundreds of children with hands-on experiences and knowledge related to potential future careers. The students were exposed to new skills, including worksite analyses, hazard prevention and control, and the concept of Safety 24/7.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the ASM program was extremely successful and fulfilling for both the volunteers and students who participated in the program. While planning this outreach project, employees went above and beyond their normal duties and built a program that will continue to inspire children to explore their various career opportunities. Employees use their skills and expertise to develop interactive displays that engage students and help them to understand the various jobs, job hazards, and safety measures that are associated with the Hanford Site.

According to school site directors the students are incorporating the valuable safety lessons taught through ASM into their personal lives. "You see children's thinking change and they start talking about safety such as, how to properly plug something into the wall or why it's important to wear a helmet," said Lionell Singleton, Former ASM Executive Director. School site directors around the Tri-Cities area have recognized the value of the program and plan to expand it to other after school programs at local middle schools and high schools.

REFERENCES

1. Hamm, T. 2015. Why You Should Consider Trade School Instead of College. Available at: <http://www.thesimpledollar.com/why-you-should-consider-trade-school-instead-of-college/> (last updated Dec. 7)
2. Groves, D. 2013. America's Skilled Trades Dilemma: Shortages Loom as Most-In-Demand Group of Workers Ages (Forbes, March 7). Available at: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/emsi/2013/03/07/americas-skilled-trades-dilemma-shortages-loom-as-most-in-demand-group-of-workers-ages/>