

Grassroots continued from page 1

employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities through procurement initiatives.

The experience is an empowering one that affords AbilityOne employees with disabilities opportunities many of their peers might not have. Employees receive travel to Washington, D.C., a full day of training and a chance to communicate with Members of Congress. For many, this is their first time flying in an airplane and being asked to speak before a group of legislative officials.

Self-advocates receive training on best practices when telling their own stories to Congressional Members related to the

positive impact obtaining employment through the AbilityOne Program has had on their lives.

Sgt. Kendrick's Story

Sgt. David Kendrick (U.S. Army Ret.) shared his moving story with the attendees at the 2011 NISH Grassroots Advocacy Conference, in Washington, D.C. As a featured speaker for the conference held from June 20-24, Sgt. Kendrick touched the hearts of audience members as he connected with them by sharing his experiences, obstacles and triumphs. Kendrick is employed with CDS Unistel as a production supervisor in the spice factory.

"I'm just one person, but I represent a population of more than 45,000 people

with disabilities who are employed by the AbilityOne Program right now," says Kendrick.

His story began in a rough east side neighborhood of Rochester, N.Y. where he lived with his parents until he joined the U.S. Army in 2005 at the tender age of 18. This major life step was an exciting one for Kendrick since he had only traveled once outside the state of New York.

Kendrick attended cavalry scout training at Fort Knox, K.Y. and was assigned to the 361st Cavalry Regiment. In October 2006, his unit was deployed to Iraq. Nothing in the recruitment videos has prepared Kendrick for a time as this. It was clear from the locals that his reconnaissance unit was not welcome. The locals would even spit on them and throw rocks.

After only eight months of duty, his life would be forever changed when he was shot in the leg on June 17, 2007. The damage was so severe; he could hardly recognize his leg. After receiving treatment in Baghdad, it was discovered he sustained femoral artery and nerve damage in his left leg. The femur is the largest bone in the body that enables running and jumping. The injury left Kendrick with questions about his future. Was it dismal and hopeless?

Upon returning to Rochester, N.Y. in the spring 2010 as a 23-year old man with gunshot wounds, nerve damage and post traumatic stress disorder, many did not know how to interact with him.

Kendrick was not the same 18-year old boy who left home just five years earlier.

While experiencing homelessness and unemployment, Kendrick's desperation caused him to start thinking of people he might be able to turn to for help. That's when he remembered General Mixon, his commander at Ft. Carson during his hospital stay.

When Kendrick contacted Gen. Mixon, he was working with CDS Unistel, an AbilityOne NPA. He helped Kendrick enroll in the Warrior Salute Program. This program provides service members, who sustained injuries in the line of duty, urgent assistance to transition back into civilian life.

2011 Grassroots Self-Advocates

Aleta Haywood Goodwill Industries of Southeastern Wisconsin

Amanda Napper Work Services Corporation

Byron Cole

ServiceSource

Charquilla McGaffeny Calidad Industries, Inc.

Cindy Toth ServiceSource

Darius Henderson Challenge Unlimited, Inc.

David Ogletree Vocational Guidance Services

Devaughn Pratt Eggleston Services, Inc.

Donte McKinley Solano Diversified Services

Erin Anderson Work Services Corporation

Eugene Shelly Tommy Nobis Enterprises

Jack Freeman Bobby Dodd Institute

Jack Busby ServiceSource

Jason Dale The Arc of Caddo-Bossier

Jerry Sethongkang Pioneer Adult Rehabilitation Center

Johnathan Smith IBS Industries

Dewayne Quick Goodwill of Greater Washington

Kevin Ogletree ServiceSource

Linda Saffore Bobby Dodd Institute

Lori Thieberger ServiceSource

Louie Rivera Bobby Dodd Institute

Michelle Hensley United Cerebral Palsy

Milton Canty Didlake, Inc.

Neil Colomac Skookum

Patricia Cruz Job Options, Inc.

Patrick Haight Tommy Nobis Enterprises

Ramon Thibodeaux Toolworks

Rebecca Hardin New Leaf, Inc.

Rodney Yamada The Arc of Hilo

Ron Devine Knox County ARC

Rosemary Perez Tresco, Inc.

Sandra Shade Human Technologies Corporation

Scott Noell BH Services, Inc.

Steven Blunt Eggleston Services

Tabatha Neller Peckham, Inc.

Tom Ingoldsby ServiceSource

Victor Prassel Goodwill Industries of San Antonio

William Gould Pathways, Inc.

William Totten OE Enterprises, Inc.