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fusion

THE MANUFACTURING WORKFORCE EVENT

A DIVERSE TALENT PIPELINE:  
**TRANSFORMING WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT &  
EMPLOYMENT**

THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
**MEET THE TEAM**



**Toni Neary**  
SME



**Tara Havlicek**  
MEAF



**Tara May**  
Aspiritech

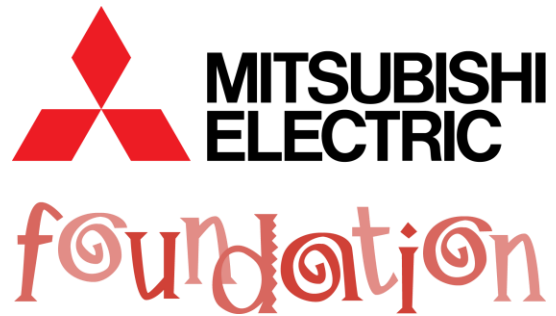


**Joann Blumenfeld**  
North Carolina State  
University





## **Introducing the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation**



**with Tara Havlicek, Program Manager**

Our commitment at Mitsubishi Electric is simple, yet profound:

## MAKE CHANGES FOR THE BETTER, SO THAT TOMORROW'S WORLD CAN BE **GREATER THAN** TODAY'S



# GREATER » THAN





MEAF Board of Directors, March 2024

## Our Mission is Inclusion

MEAF's mission is to maximize the potential and participation of youth with disabilities in society.



MEAF was established in 1990 by the Mitsubishi Electric Corporation (MELCO) in Japan and the Mitsubishi Electric US group companies to support philanthropic & volunteer efforts in the U.S.



1 in 4 adults

### National Grant Programs

Grants to empower the next-generation of youth with disabilities

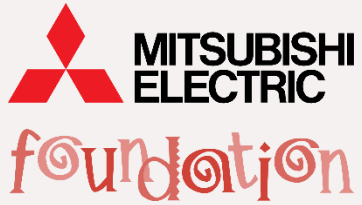
**M>PWR possible.**

### Employee Volunteer Programs

Volunteers are on the M.O.V.E. creating more inclusive & sustainable communities.

**MOVE**  
MITSUBISHI ELECTRIC  
Organized Volunteer Efforts





Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation's vision is to empower youth with disabilities to lead productive lives through increased employment.

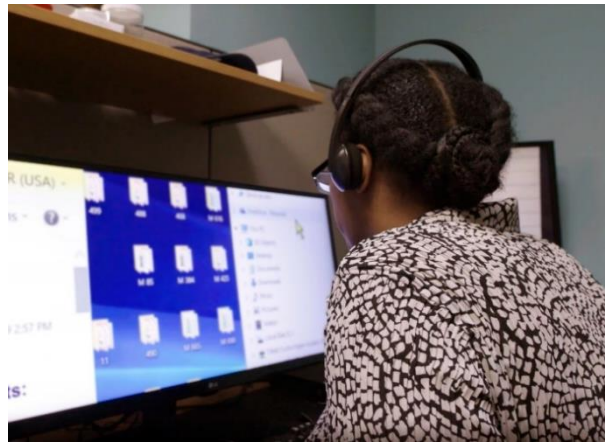
# FOCUSED ON ABILITY FOR GREATER INCLUSION

## Access-Ability



» Promoting access to quality education and inclusive job opportunities

## Adapt-Ability



» Supporting workplace adaptation, accommodation and collaboration for success

## Scale-Ability



» Bringing promising practices to scale to build a pipeline of capable talent

## Sustain-Ability

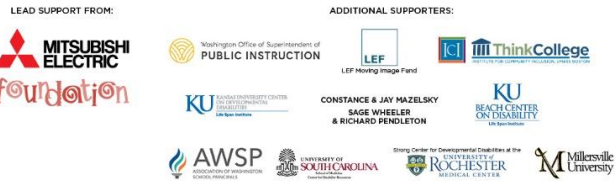


» Supporting sustainable models focused on careers of the future





**THANK YOU TO OUR MAJOR FUNDERS**



**THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS**



[The Ride Ahead \(rideaheadfilm.com\)](http://rideaheadfilm.com)

**Introducing WID's first cohort of Global Heumann Fellows**



**Kasim Sajjabi, MA**  
Uganda

**Robbie Francis Watene, PhD**  
Aotearoa New Zealand

**Munir Sewani, PhD**  
Pakistan



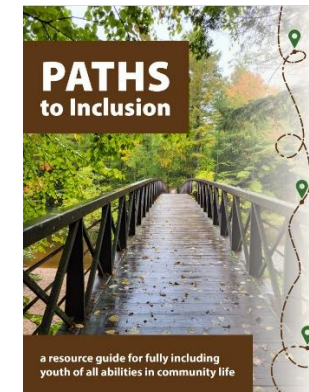
*Our Future:*  
**Built Better Together**

**Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation Awards Grant To Disability EmpowHer Network!**

“We are so proud of our graduates and their impact on their communities already. We are grateful to Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation for recognizing the value of continued support for our camp alumni.”

-Stephanie Woodward, Executive Director

**FANTASTIC NEWS!**



**Paths to Inclusion**

Paths to Inclusion is a resource guide for fully including youth of all abilities in community life.



# fsm fusion Careers in Technology & The Trades: Collaborating for Scale



**Stanford Neurodiversity Summit 2024**  
Putting Strengths-Based Approaches in Action  
**September 22-24, 2024**

**Employment Track**

Tara May  
CEO  
Aspiritech

David Siegal  
CEO  
Exceptional Minds

Dan Rosenberg  
The Uniquely Abled Project

Ben Schwartzman  
Vanderbilt

Caroline Grantz  
Grants Psychological Services

Alex Shurm  
Loyola Marymount University

Danny Combs  
Founder/President  
TACT

Sept 22 - Strengths-Based Culture in the Workplace  
Sept 23 - Partnership between Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories and Neurodiversity Researchers  
Sept 24 - Having a Strangths-Based Career in a Trade

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**ACTE's CareerTech VISION 2025**  
NASHVILLE TN  
TUES.-FRI. DEC. 9-12

EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION OPENING SOON!

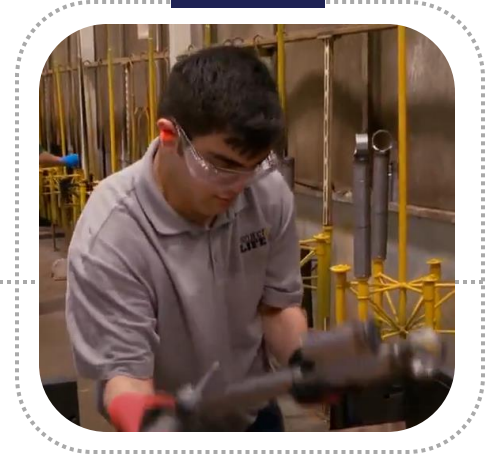
MEAF supports career tech programs to help build a pipeline of capable talent for in demand tech careers. MEAF collaborates with the Association for Career and Technical Education to disseminate inclusive disability workforce programs.

**CTA FOUNDATION**  
**INNOVATION CHALLENGE:**  
DIGITAL HEALTH FOR ALL  
DEADLINE: NOV. 1ST, 2024

CES

**Aspiritech**

**Introducing: Aspiritech's New Remote Internship Program**







- » Stacy, who is blind, led tours of the U.S. Capitol while working for a U.S. Senator
- *She studied architecture drawings using text to voice technology*



- » Leah, who is deaf, worked in the Office of Communications for the First Lady, then as ROTUS for President Obama
- *She now works on Social Impact with LinkedIn*

“...sometimes hiring somebody with a disability can be the best engineer or scientist that you can hire because we're problem solvers”



- » Jill, who has an intellectual disability, works at Cincinnati Children's Hospital & Medical Center
- *She sterilizes surgical equipment (a vital, but repetitive task).*



- » Tia, who has CP, is a Software Engineer & Technology Consultant
- » Jonathan, a wheelchair user, works at UPitt Human Engineering Research Labs.

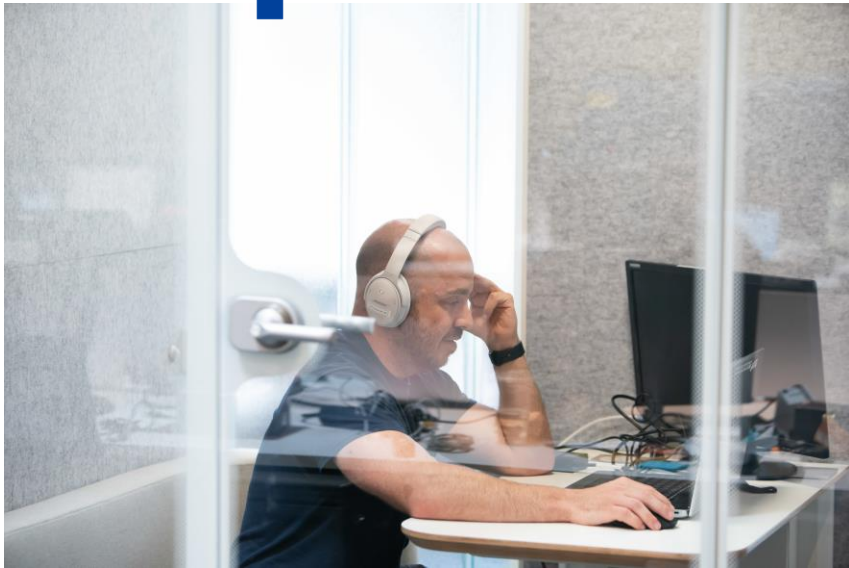




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THE MANUFACTURING WORKFORCE EVENT

Aspiritech



AN INNOVATIVE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE  
**Aspiritech**



**EMPLOYEES**

100 autistic adults at every level of the company

**MISSION**

Meaningful employment for autistic adults

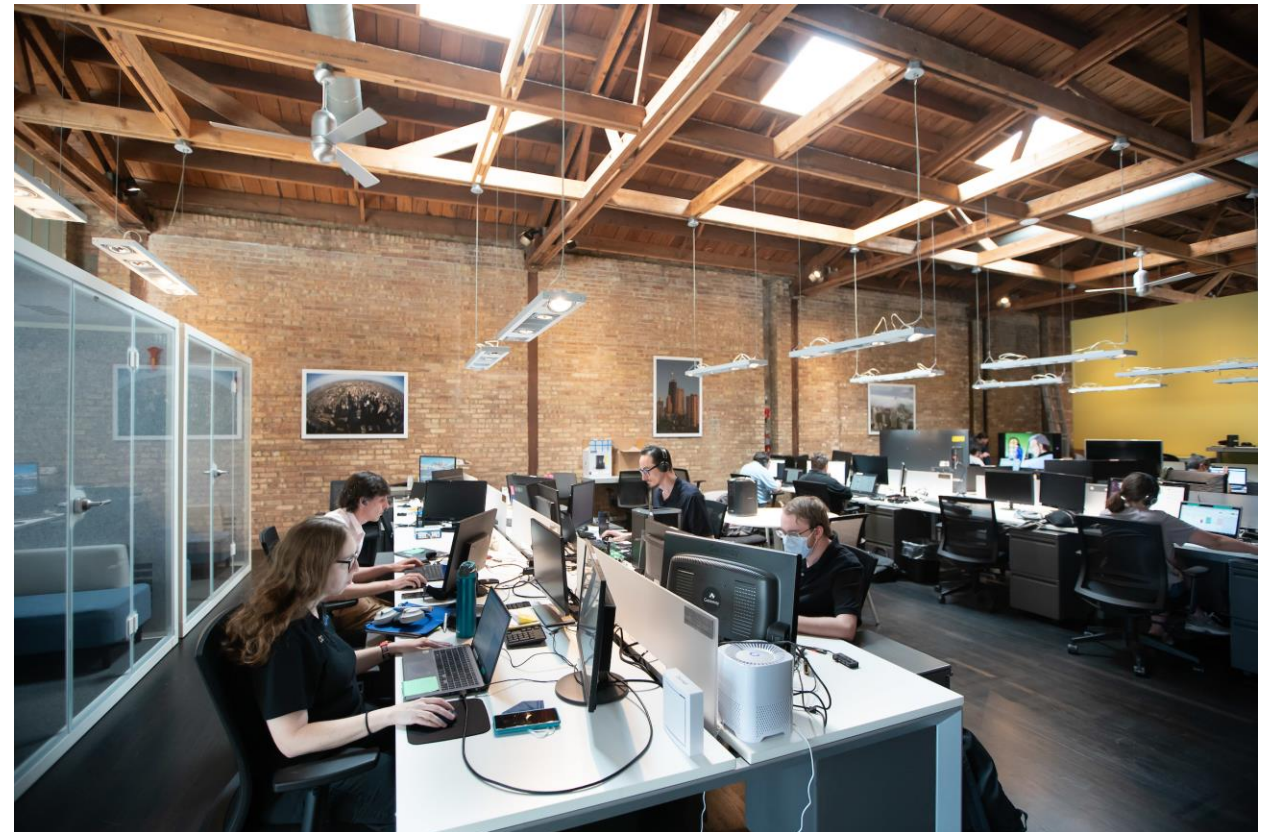
**SERVICES**

Software & Hardware QA

Development

AI & LLM

Data Services



The Autistic Workforce  
**BY THE NUMBERS**



# The Employment Crisis

85%

Autistic adults are under- or  
unemployed

15%

Meaningful Careers



## The Autistic Workforce **BY THE NUMBERS**

### **HIRING**

- Understanding the opportunity
- Easy-to-implement support systems

### **TRAINING**

- Matching skills with workforce needs

### **INNOVATION**

- Problem-Solvers & Creativity
- High Standards

## Impressive Results

99%

Retention YoY

97%

Employees report high work  
engagement

9.7

Client NPS



# Training the next generation **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**



Soft Skills

- Interviewing
- Resumes
- Communication
- Confidence & Self-Esteem



Quality Assurance

- Defect Logging
- User Testing
- Exploratory Testing
- Regression & Smoke Testing



AI & LLM

- Prompt Engineering
- Data Annotation
- Natural Language Development



Cybersecurity

- Threat Hunting
- Network Security
- Compliance Analyst
- Digital Forensics



# Partnerships that drive innovation

## **MAKING AN IMPACT TOGETHER**

### **Colleges and universities**

- North Carolina State University
- College of Lake County
- City Colleges of Chicago
- Seminole College in Florida

### **Workforce development organizations**

- Department of Labor apprenticeship
- Chicago Tech Workforce Development Initiative

### **Employers & Industry Associations**

- SME
- MHI
- Bace Cybersecurity

**....And many more. Are you next?!**



Get In Touch

**We'd love to hear from you!**



**Tara May, CEO**  
tara.may@aspiritech.org



**Visit Our Website**  
[www.aspiritech.org](http://www.aspiritech.org)



Let's connect!







**Catalyst:  
Building a Strong and Innovative  
STEM Workforce!**





# What Are the Challenges Facing Students with Disabilities in K-12 Schools?

- Note: 12-15 % of the student population in public schools in NC over 225,000 with disabilities
- EC Teachers with little STEM Background
- STEM Teachers making STEM Accessible, large class sizes
- Lack of hands-on STEM, text-based learning, should use UDL
- Low Expectations
- Low budgets/ Supplies, many students are low-income too! Mine was \$1.50 per year for each student
- Lack of real-world experience for teachers and instructors
- Lack of Executive Functioning and Workforce Readiness Skills
- Transition Planning begins in Kindergarten
- Access to higher level courses and high-quality course
- 80% Unemployment Rate between 24-64, according to the US Department of Labor, the system not the students who have a disability!!!
- Mindset Switch! Our kids can save the world- MIT Story
- Growth Mindset: Failure is okay!
- Food, filth and flowers
- Teaching towards tests <https://time.com/6178808/joann-blumenfeld-innovative-teachers-2022/>

## The Science House

[sciencehouse.ncsu.edu/studentprograms/catalyst](https://sciencehouse.ncsu.edu/studentprograms/catalyst)

## Creating Opportunities in STEM for Students with Disabilities



Catalyst is a free international and national award winning high school program for students with disabilities interested in STEM Careers!



You can participate if you are a rising Grade 9-12 High School Student with any disability who is in Regular Education Classes (Standard, AP, Honors, or College Level), or in the Occupational Course of Study program, whether in public or private or home school



### The program includes:

- Hands on STEM Program that includes a wide range of STEM Content, Skills and Fields, taught by Professors, Graduate Students, and Industry Professionals
- Paid STEM Internships in research labs at NC State University, or with government and industry partners
- Workforce and college readiness skills
- Life 101 Skills including, stress management, navigating a college campus, etc.
- Week long summer session, plus Saturday sessions during the school year
- Optional multi-year program
- Field study trips, that are in state, out-of-state, and international
- Case Management, resource support, and transition planning
- Optional certifications in Quality Assurance and AI
- Annual Reach For the Stars! Be A Star! STEM and Resource Fair for K-12 Students in NC with Disabilities, Family and Friends



### Catalyst is an award winning program:

- Excellence in Education Award, Raleigh Mayor's Committee For Persons with Disabilities, October 2024
- Airwards 2023/24 Winner in the Education and Research / Training Category
- Invited by US Airforce Academy and Space Foundation, Colorado Springs, CO for a Field Studies Program, April 2025
- Field Studies and Service Learning Program, Rwanda, June 2025
- Invited to the International Institute of Tropical Forestry, San Juan, Puerto Rico for a Field Studies Program, April 2024
- Invited to NASA Johnson Space Center, April 2023 for a Field Studies Program
- Recognized by Time Magazine, 2022
- Received a National Science Foundation (NSF) Grant For Connecting Students with Autism to Geographic Information Science & Technology, 2021
- Program of Excellence Award, 2021, International Technology and Engineering Educators Association
- National Energy Education Development Project: Special Project Award, 2020
- Invited to the US Patent Office, June 2018 for a special program
- National Lemelson-MIT InvenTeam Competition Winners and Technical Award, 2017
- Letter of Commendation from President Obama 2017
- All graduating Seniors have pursued STEM educational pathways in college



### For More Information contact:

Joann Blumenfeld, Catalyst Director [jrbumen@ncsu.edu](mailto:jrbumen@ncsu.edu) 919-633-3120  
Jessica Yose, Catalyst Program Coordinator [jnyose@ncsu.edu](mailto:jnyose@ncsu.edu) 919-618-0433  
Catalyst is funded through NC Vocational Rehabilitation and our community partners



<https://sciencehouse.ncsu.edu/studentprograms/catalyst>





## Ways you can help:

- Building your workforce starts in Kindergarten!
- High-quality cutting-edge STEM Sessions
- Hands on Experiences
- Process not just the product
- Growth Mindset- share failures and perseverance
- STEM Mentors and Professionals with Disabilities
- ABB- Role Model- Quality Assurance Certificates, Internships, Classes in hard and soft skills, Opportunities, Hire Long Term, Funding

**ABB**

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## **Workforce Readiness: A Place at the Table!**

- You can't pick a career from a webpage
- Offer paid STEM Internships, partner with Vocational Rehabilitation
- Partner with local college work-study and Career Centers
- Employment Resource Groups
- Teach workforce and College Readiness Skills
- Have mentors with disabilities
- A workplace good for people with disabilities is good for all!
- Watch your AI! AI interviews can be barriers or the interview process
- Offer Certifications and Apprenticeships
- Teacher professional development, funding, fellowships



## Give Opportunities and Experiences

- Field Studies Trips- Real World Experiences
- Industry Trips
- Students can't dream of things they don't know exist easily
- People with disabilities are innovators, all minds needed
- Put in leadership roles
- Teach Life 101 Skills

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## Community Events:

Reach for the Stars! Be a Star! STEM and Resource Fair for K-12 Students with Disabilities interested in STEM, Family and Friends

- 78 Tables, hands-on STEM, Career and Educational Pathways
- Speakers, Government Officials, free prizes
- 800+ Attendees Yearly

<https://ncsciencefestival.org/events/reach-stars-be-star-stem-and-resource-fair-k-12-students-disabilities-family-and-friends>

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THE MANUFACTURING WORKFORCE EVENT

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**DETROIT, MI**

April 8-10, 2025