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PRESS RELEASE

Youth Transition Pilot Program: First Year a Success

GRAND RAPIDS, MN, August 14, 2018 – Several local organizations have come together to successfully launch Life Skills Academy, a pilot program for youth ages 18-21 with a documented disability. The four-week college level residential program at Itasca Community College helped students learn emotional and social development, how to identify and set goals, explore careers, build positive social skills, and learn independent living.

Developed by local school districts and colleges, along with funding from MDI, whose workforce is nearly half people with disabilities, local teens now have real, hand-on experience that will help them find jobs or schooling after graduation and into adulthood.

“MDI is pleased to partner with the local schools and colleges to offer this transitional program for youth with disabilities,” says Peter McDermott president & CEO of MDI. “We are confident this unique program will better equip students with personal and professional skills needed as they transition. In doing so, advance student aspirations and increase access to college or jobs.”

During the program, participants lived on campus with peers, many away from home for the first time. Each student was provided a community mentor who offered guidance and support. Guest speakers from local business visited and shared job search strategies, labor market information and trends, community transportation programs, advocacy services, and post-secondary training opportunities.

“You gave me the experience to live all by myself and it's changed me and my future,” says Jonah Plys, Life Skills Academy graduate. “I’ve become more mature. I feel more prepared and confident. And because of this program, I’ve decided to attend Bethel College.”

A graduation was held in late July where students presented an ‘elevator pitch’ and shared their future aspirations, and like Jonah, many were planning to further their education.

“This is an important age for growth in a young person’s life,” shared Missy Evenson, Program Director. “Our goal is to build and sustain this program. Alongside local schools, we can help create more opportunities for students with disabilities in their own communities.”

Life Skills Academy was created in part by [MDI](#), Grand Rapids School District #318, Itasca Community College, Hibbing Community College, Itasca Community College Upward Bound, Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and Itasca Area School Collaborative Special Education.

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About MDI

MDI is a leader in manufacturing corrugated standard and custom plastic packaging solutions, production assembly, and environmental services. Through a nonprofit Social Enterprise model, MDI creates self-sufficiency by providing meaningful work in an inclusive environment, with nearly half of the workforce comprised of people with disabilities. Headquartered in Minneapolis, with additional locations in Hibbing, Grand Rapids, and Cohasset, MDI offers an unparalleled customer experience, while providing high quality products and services to businesses and organizations.

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Caption: Eight students participated in Life Skills Academy, a four week college level transitional pilot program for youth ages 18-21 with a documented disability.



Caption: Jonah Plys, Life Skills Academy graduate, receiving diploma from Missy Evenson, Program Director.