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LPPS construction class for young adults with autism builds confidence, teaches entrepreneurship skills

Interactive program at the Mixer Institute of Transition prepares students to enter workforce and live independently

Lincoln Park, Mich. – Young adults with autism have the opportunity to learn how to use power tools, develop entrepreneurship skills and build confidence through an innovative construction class at the **Mixer Institute of Transition**. At Mixer, **Lincoln Park Public Schools** offers post-high school vocational instruction for 18- to 26-year-old students with autism from 16 Downriver communities.

“We launched the construction class in 2010 to give students the opportunity to gain jobs skills while exploring working with tools in a comfortable, pressure-free environment,” said **Jason Reese**, the construction class teacher at Mixer Institute of Transition. “We started this program nine years ago with just \$400 and a few borrowed power tools. The program has grown tremendously and evolved into a student-run business that is completely self-funded and embedded in the community.”

Mixer’s unique construction class provides vocational skills and job training and helps students develop sensory and fine motor skills. Students also learn the basics of household construction, from safety precautions to proper tool usage and care.

“Our construction class is one of the most popular classes at our school and another example of the cutting-edge programs we offer to prepare our students for the workforce and to live as independent adults,” said **Jessica Fessler**, principal of Mixer Institute of Transition. “We have found that as students become engaged with their projects, they have fewer behavioral issues and demonstrate an increased sense of belonging, confidence and self-worth in the classroom.”

New students engage in extensive job training activities and gradually progress in the workshop until they can independently carry out projects from start to finish.

Their finished projects include birdhouses, cornhole boards, pallet signs, furniture and more. Items are sold in the school resale store and across Lincoln Park and the surrounding communities. All proceeds go directly back into the program and are used to buy supplies and repair or replace broken tools.

The construction class has received generous support from the community. The students’ hand-made cornhole boards have become so popular there is currently a waitlist to purchase one.

“When customers receive their well-made products, it helps demonstrate the benefits of employing individuals with disabilities,” Reese said. “Our students have a strong work ethic and demonstrate great attention to detail, which are both skills that will allow them to thrive in the modern workforce and the real world.”

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