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Students with Disabilities and Families Get Support in Planning for Post-High School Life

St. Paul, Minnesota (May 22, 2018) – One hundred students with disabilities, their parents, and their guardians attended “Planning for Life After High School: My Next Steps,” held May 17, 2018 at the Washington Technology Magnet School in Saint Paul. This was the first such event held in Saint Paul Public Schools, where students receiving special education services and their families learned and asked questions about resources, supports, and tools to help them plan for a life after graduation. Recent graduates who have disabilities shared tips and lessons they have learned along their journey to living and working successfully in the community

Jackie Kelly, Special Education Family Liaison for the Saint Paul Public Schools, one of the event sponsors, said comments from those attending were positive. “Parents and guardians said that hearing the success stories, hopes, dreams, and different journeys of the young adults was useful and inspiring,” Kelly stated. “My favorite feedback was hearing a young adult say it was most helpful to hear the message, ‘We can do anything no matter who we are.’”

Thomas Heinn and Pierre Young were among those graduates sharing the positive steps they have made in becoming more independent and greater participants in the community. They shared how various members of their support network, such as Ramsey County case managers, personal care attendants, and supported employment services have supported them in their goals. “Believe in yourself, and never let go of your dreams,” Heinn said in his presentation to the attendees. “Mistakes happen, and it’s okay. Every day is a new day to try again!”

Young echoed Heinn’s words of encouragement and shared a number of his strategies to help make a transition to the community successful. “Only focus on one goal,” he stated. “Don’t try to overwhelm yourself by multitasking. Trust the process.”

A panel of graduates, staff from Ramsey County Social Services -- another event cosponsor -- and representatives from advocacy organizations answered questions about how community-based services can help students achieve their community life and employment goals, and how to access those services. In addition, these staff and representatives shared tools and resources for planning a life after high school.

Melinda Shamp, Lead Community Resource Connector for A Working Life Alliance at The Arc Minnesota -- another event sponsor -- was among the panelists. “One of the goals of this event is to help the students and their supporters see that a competitive job in the work force is possible for them. The landscape for employment opportunities is changing for job seekers with disabilities, and this evening was a chance to help them navigate that landscape.”

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