



ABOUT MDI

MDI is a nonprofit manufacturer driven by its mission to provide meaningful employment opportunities and services for people with disabilities.

Throughout its more than 60-year history, the social enterprise has led by example in proactively supporting its employees – approximately half of whom are people with disabilities – through cultivating an inclusive workplace.



MINNESOTA'S WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FUND

MDI receives state funding from the Workforce Development Fund. This funding is integral to ensuring MDI's employees with disabilities are supported and can reach their highest potential. Employment services assist with:

- Job placement
- Career counseling
- Skills training
- Coaching and development

THE VALUE WE PROVIDE

- People with disabilities are unemployed at twice the rate of people without.
- MDI is proud to have many long-tenured employees, including people who retire with more than 30-40 years of employment.
- Less than 5% of MDI's revenue is made up by state funding, which helps make this work possible.

KRISTIE'S STORY



Kristie Armbruster has worked at MDI for more than 36 years. She began by working on the production team, and after participating in MDI's Unified Work career skills training, now manages MDI's front desk and supports payroll. Learn more about Kristie's story [here](#).



LEGISLATIVE ASK

In the 2025-26 biennium, MDI is asking for an appropriation of **\$450,000 per year from the Workforce Development Fund** to continue to meaningfully support its employees – [HF 2036](#) (Jordan) / [SF 2452](#) (Putnam).



Roseville | Cohasset | Grand Rapids | Minneapolis | Hibbing
www.mdi.org

ABOUT UNIFIED WORK

Launched in 2017, Unified Work is the philanthropic arm of MDI and offers valuable, no-cost career skills training to individuals with disabilities. Participants learn essential career-building tips, like how to **communicate** with confidence, strengthen **interpersonal skills**, develop **critical thinking** and **set goals**.

ELEMENTS OF UNIFIED WORK



Mobile Academy



Online learning



Virtual Reality (VR)



STEM boxes

RESULTS

- In 2023, MDI received \$1 million in state funding to support Unified Work training through piloting aspects of the program.
 - This funding made possible 18 in-person trainings, 15 virtual trainings and a partnership with Transfr VR, a virtual reality company, to further develop job skills training.
- Since 2023, Unified Work has had 640 program participants.
- More than 95% of participants have stated that Unified Work classes helped them gain self-confidence, made them more likely to apply for a job and made a positive impact.

STATEWIDE IMPACT OF UNIFIED WORK

Unified Work advances MDI's vision statewide. While programming was originally developed for individuals with disabilities, it has also been successful for formerly incarcerated individuals, women exiting domestic violence situations and teenagers exploring career choices.



LEGISLATIVE ASK

MDI is seeking legislation for a **one-time \$250,000 appropriation** to further develop training opportunities through continued course development, expanding virtual reality work experiences and piloting science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) experiences for statewide (remote) deployment — [HF 2036](#) (Jordan) / [SF 2452](#) (Putnam).

Where did \$450K each year go for MDI?



Your support has directly impacted the lives of employees with disabilities and helped drive our mission forward. Here's how your investment is making a difference:

225+

Employees with disabilities supported

An additional 30% of our employees disclose a disability but require no accommodations.



Employee Development

Caleb: Gained valuable skills, now is a **Process Technician** earning \$23.34/hour

Hunter: Trained as a **Packaging Designer** with a wage of \$21.00/hour

Steve: Promoted to **Safety Coordinator**, now earning \$18.50/hour



Advocacy & Leadership

- Steve participated in Partners in Policymaking, sponsored by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, to develop advocacy skills for himself and others with disabilities.
- Steve advocates for people with disabilities, MDI, and the Dodge Nature Center, where he volunteers.

MDI is a workforce development solution. Employees, like Angie and Jessica, have spent over 40 years building long-term careers at MDI and others use MDI as a stop in their career.

Where will the dollars go?

Continued support and growth for employees with disabilities, ensuring more opportunities and success in their careers.

- Tanner who is working to become an Assembler 4, the highest assembler position.
- Joe who is working toward becoming a Line Lead.
- Brenda who is on a personal health journey and has lost more than 100 pounds and is more engaged in her work than ever before!

Maximizing Impact and Empowering Individuals with Disabilities



What did the \$1M for Unified Work go toward?

Your investment in Unified Work has significantly empowered individuals with disabilities, providing essential resources and educational opportunities. Here’s how the \$1M was spent:

Unified Work Staff & Trainers

18

Supported 18 in-person and 15 virtual classes—all offered for free

640

Reached 640 participants with training that enhances workplace readiness

Development of Learning Platform

10

Launched 10 courses, freely accessible for all participants

Why it matters

In a time when services for people with disabilities face underfunding and there is a shortage of direct support professionals, Unified Work can step in to fill the gap. Our platform offers vital learning and development opportunities at no cost to people with disabilities and partnering organizations.

Advancements in Virtual Reality and STEM

With additional funding, we are advancing virtual reality work experiences, 40 modules, macro credentials, and STEM learning boxes, offering more immersive and hands-on opportunities for participants.

Research Partnerships

In collaboration with the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement of the University of Minnesota, we’ve conducted research on best practices in training and employability for people with disabilities, helping to refine effective methods for workforce inclusion.

Investing in Staff & Curriculum

- Hiring additional staff for continued curriculum development
- Completion of the learning design and content creation for our expanding learning platform
- Ongoing support for the pilot and implementation of virtual reality work experiences

Your Support Drives Us: With your continued support, Unified Work can expand its reach and provide even more opportunities for Minnesotans with disabilities to thrive in the workforce. Together, we’re breaking barriers and creating a more inclusive future.



STEM Learning Boxes

Are you...?

- Looking for a fun way to build your people's problem-solving skills?
- Hoping to prepare your people for the careers of the future?
- Seeking to empower people with disabilities to realize their potential?

If so, Unified Work STEM learning boxes are for you!



STEM Circuit

Introduction to STEM, electricity, basic circuitry, and complete a series of electrical circuit mazes to demonstrate their new knowledge!



STEM Invent

Level up your learners' knowledge of electrical circuits by having them create unique inventions that light up, spin, and solve real-world problems.



STEM Robot

Learners discover the world of robotics! Each participant will be taught to program a wheeled robot to drive, navigate, and follow simple instructions.

Who?

Unified Work is seeking facilitators to lead this learning with small groups of 5-10 participants at their location. No training required and everything is provided (online modules and STEM kits). Target audience is people ages 14+ with intellectual disabilities.

Time

Estimated times for each experience, which can be completed in one session or across multiple sessions.

STEM Circuit	2 hours
STEM Invent	2 hours
STEM Robot	3 hours

It's FREE!

Did we mention this STEM experience is totally **FREE**? If you are interested, reach out to unifiedwork@mdi.org today to schedule a fun and engaging experience for your group!

The State of Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) funded (or funded in part) this training through a grant. The grant recipient created this training. DEED does not endorse this publicity or training or make guarantees, warranties, or assurances of any kind, express or implied, regarding the accuracy, completeness, timeliness, usefulness, adequacy, continued availability or ownership of the information herein or elsewhere.



Unified Work Academy VIRTUAL REALITY



Career Exploration & Training Simulations

Discover Careers and Gain Real-World Skills with Unified Work's VR Experiences

Unified Work offers cutting-edge virtual reality content designed to empower individuals with career knowledge and hands-on training. Our VR experiences are divided into two key categories:



Career Exploration

3–5-minute simulations that explore 40+ different jobs, with more coming! Each sim features tasks to complete and information about the career, providing users a realistic, immersive job shadow experience from the comfort of home.



Training Simulations

In-depth virtual training programs, each featuring a longer series of hands-on, competency-based modules, in the follow career areas:

Manufacturing & Construction, Hospitality & Tourism, Automotive, Diesel Technology, Aviation Maintenance, Electrical Construction

Who?

- MDI Employees
- Transition Schools
- 245 D Organizations
- Individuals with or without disabilities

**Learn more about VR
Career Exploration and
Training Courses at
[UnifiedWork.com](https://www.UnifiedWork.com)**



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Testimonials



At MDI **everyone is unique and accepts eachother** and works together with a good attitude most of the time.

Devin Guilfoyle



Overcoming our differences is what makes us a great team. We all feel like a family.

The company keeps all employees in the loop and communication is good. It makes everyday a new experience.

Stacy Masog



Being different is important, because it would be a boring world if we were all the same. **MDI makes me feel included** by giving me the chance to fold different boxes.

Tina Tweet



A diverse work floor helps us to learn from each other. **MDI employees are here to help one another learn the jobs** and fit in to the team.

Anthony Ybarra



"I like working at MDI because the variety of jobs I learn, most recently, I learned data entry and now help with time keeping. **I believe it is important for folks with disabilities to have employment and to have the opportunity to learn new job skills**, also be able to interact and develop friendships with others. Employee of 28 years."

Kristie Armbruster



Testimonials



Steve's impact extends beyond the walls of MDI. A multi-year volunteer at Dodge Nature Center, active in the Special Olympics, and a participant in the Polar Plunge, **Steve's dedication has earned him "volunteer of the year" accolades.** His advocacy radiates through social media, where he proudly promotes the organizations he supports. His advocacy isn't confined; he has also spoken at the state capital, and MN Counsel for Disability in 2020, amplifying the voices of those he represents.

Steve Reinardy



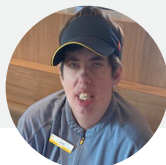
Now working as an assembler for our plastic totes, Kathy finds joy in the variety her job offers. **"There is always something new to learn on the job,"** Kathy says, reflecting on her experience. Her previous work in the restaurant industry provided a solid foundation, but it was at MDI where she truly found her calling.

Kathy Mayer



Julie Carpenter, a Grand Rapids, MN native, has been a dedicated member of the MDI family since 2006. Throughout her time with us, Julie has embraced a variety of roles, each contributing to her growth and development. Her journey with MDI reflects **our mission of not only providing meaningful work but also unlocking pathways to further opportunities** beyond our walls as an employee at McDonalds.

Julie Carpenter



A diverse work force elevates all employees involved. People with more challenges strive to improve when they see coworkers that may be more successful in their job duties. Those without challenges, learn patience and compassion for their coworkers who may struggle a bit more. **MDI allows people of all abilities to contribute, feel valued, and financially support themselves** in an inclusive work setting.

Maggie & Matt Hagman

Parents of Sam Hagman



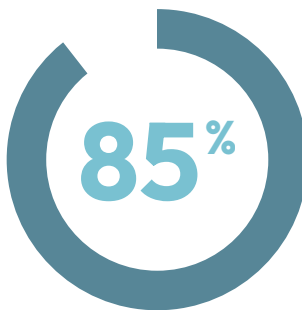
Testimonials



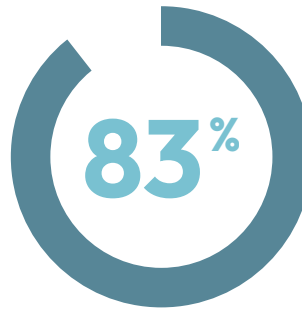
I attended one class with my daughter. I came back for the graduation and was so surprised to see the progress the students made. They were more focused and prepared on what they had learned. **They stood up with pride to tell us what they want to do.** I was very impressed by them. I think they learned some valuable skills from this class.

Mary Ecker

Parent of a participant



**Gained
Confidence**



**Are more likely to
apply for a job**



MDI Unified Work Mobile Academy provided an **invaluable 4-week session for my transition age students, equipping them with essential employment skills.** Thanks to their comprehensive curriculum and supportive environment, my students not only gained confidence but also developed the tools necessary to thrive in the workforce.

Kasey Anderson

BEST Program

Testimonials



Anyone who knows this student knows that she is a bright and bubbly 8th grader, but also someone who struggles with significant cognitive impairments. Her bright and bubbly personality is evident before and after class and passing in the hallways, but rarely during class time. She has difficulty attending to the lessons in class and profoundly struggles to demonstrate her learning with reading and writing tasks. That said, her experience with STEM Circuit was completely different. She completed challenge after challenge, not without difficulty, but also with great success. **After completing one of the challenges, she shouted "I'm a genius" for the whole class to hear.** It was a beautiful moment, where she realized her incredible potential, and not one she gets to experience very often.

Dan Struck

Learning Designer

Unified Work Academy is a great course to help job seekers build important skills needed to succeed in employment. **The trainers provide a fun and welcoming environment that helps the participants feel comfortable to engage in discussion.** I have seen participants gain so much confidence and find their voice after completing this course. I highly recommend it!

Chloe Tralle

Udac



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