



GOODWILL-EASTER SEALS FOUNDATION
553 Fairview Ave. N., St. Paul, MN 55104

VIRTUAL REALITY FOR CAREER EXPLORATION MEDIA RELEASE Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota

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Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota Provides Virtual Reality Programming to Break Down Learning Barriers

Virtual reality programming features a hands-on career exploration module that allows Central Minnesota students to “try on” a variety of in-demand careers – from manufacturing to automotive.

ST. PAUL, MINN. (April 9, 2024) — Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota (GESMN) offers career development programming in Central Minnesota to high school students who face barriers to success. Through Employment and Career Readiness and Youth Employment programs, GESMN provides work-based learning and work experiences to students. In turn, they gain exposure to employers, understand types of training and education that may further their career, and gain confidence while building community connections. Core program activities include skill development, career exploration, and employment services.

As a value-add enhancement to GESMN’s proven curriculum, each program site in Central Minnesota classrooms offers immersive exploration and skill-building opportunities using virtual reality (VR) headsets funded by the Power of Work Comprehensive Capital Campaign. The \$12.8 million campaign currently underway was designed in response to Minnesota’s employment disparities and addresses common barriers to success by providing resources and training necessary for today’s job market.

“Immersive learning experiences transform the classroom and allow students to practice soft skills and gain exposure in safe and controlled spaces,” says Julie Danda, who is in Workforce Development at GESMN. “This can be especially powerful for youth with disabilities and other barriers. We see students’ confidence increase when they use the headsets.”

The platform includes a wide-ranging career exploration module that allows students to “try on” a variety of in-demand careers in manufacturing, skilled trades, warehousing and storage, healthcare, automotive, and more. The platform also includes hands-on learning modules that help youth hone their interests and develop occupation-specific skills critical to 30 in-demand career roles, such as assemblers, robotics specialists, carpenters, automotive service technicians, nursing assistants and electricians.



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On Thursday, April 18, the organization will host an open house, "Behind the Seams," at the St. Cloud Goodwill store (50 2nd Ave S, Waite Park). The event will feature the opportunity to see the VR headsets in action and a backstage tour of the store, demonstrating how community giving and donated goods help fuel workforce development programs.

"We're grateful to the donors who made this possible through the Power of Work Campaign," says Danda. "The virtual reality headsets give students an opportunity to explore career pathways they never thought were options after high school. The real-life modules provide a level of student engagement that traditional exploration is not able to, resulting in students being better equipped to make decisions based on their interests and the individual community labor market outlook." To learn more about the Power of Work Comprehensive Capital Campaign, which is helping to fund this exploratory learning programming, visit gesmn.org/future.

About Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota

Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota is a 501(c)3 nonprofit that offers job training and customized career support to eliminate barriers to work and independence. Reuse and recycling operations contribute to Minnesota's environmental sustainability and employ nearly 2,000 people in the community. Proceeds from thrift retail, e-commerce, grants and financial contributions fund nearly 20 customized services that help Minnesotans get equitable access to jobs, create stable careers and advance in the workplace. Shopping and donating items divert over 65 million pounds from local landfills annually and have helped the organization connect people to jobs since 1919. Learn more at gesmn.org.