

NEWS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Community Partnership Provides Reliable Transportation for Adult Education Graduate

MANISTEE, MI – A successful community partnership is helping a recent adult education graduate overcome a common barrier to employment: reliable transportation.

Stephen Duncan, a recent GED graduate through **Northwest Michigan Works!** Adult Education, needed dependable transportation to travel between the Adult Education lab and his new job at Meijer. Through the **Bikes for Education and Employment program**, Duncan is now receiving a custom bicycle made possible through the generosity of the Big Bear Sportsman's Club in Kaleva.

Maria Turner, Adult Education Navigator with Northwest Michigan Works!, learned about the Bikes for Education and Employment program through Staircase Youth Project. After learning about the Bikes for Education and Employment program, Turner connected with Bob Schuelke Director of the Big Bear Sportsman's Club in Kaleva, who worked to find a special frame for Duncan's bike.

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The process took several months as Schuelke searched for a frame that would accommodate Duncan, who is 6 feet, 3 inches tall. The process began in April, and after several months of searching, Turner received word recently that the custom bike was ready.

"I had almost given up on getting the bike for Stephen since I had been trying to get this since April," Turner said. "Then I received a call Monday that it was done. It's beautiful, and Bob went above and beyond to make sure Stephen had what he needed."

The bicycle came equipped with a helmet, reflectors and a light, a lock, chain oil and other supplies to help Duncan safely and reliably get to work and continue his education.

"This bike means having a job. Being able to get to work every day is very important to me right now. For me, this job means being able to save money for college. Without any stable transportation that wouldn't be possible," states Stephen Duncan, Northwest Michigan Works! Adult Education Graduate.

The partnership demonstrates how local organizations can help remove barriers that may prevent individuals from pursuing education and employment opportunities.

"This is a great example of how community partnerships can remove barriers and create opportunities for our students," said Christy Nelson, Regional Director of Adult Education for Northwest Michigan Works!. "Reliable transportation can make a tremendous difference for someone working to complete their education and establish a career. We are grateful to Bob and the Big Bear Sportsman's Club for investing in Stephen and other students in our community."

Schuelke said the Big Bear Sportsman's Club is interested in continuing to support students who need transportation assistance for education or employment and hopes to expand the program.

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“We are generally community-driven. This program is huge for us. It helps so many young students and adults to do things they can’t typically do,” remarked Treasurer of Big Bear Sportsman Club, Jeanette Somsel.

“This program is initially a way to help individuals get to and from their job. We have plenty of bikes available and trying to fit the student or adult to the bike is very important. Just give us a call and we are willing to help,” states Director of Big Bear Sportsman Club, Bob Schuelke.

For Duncan, the bicycle represents more than transportation—it provides greater independence and a reliable way to get to work and continue moving forward after earning his GED.

“This is what community partnership looks like,” Nelson said. “When organizations come together around the needs of an individual, they can make a lasting difference in that person’s ability to succeed.”

Northwest Michigan Works! Adult Education provides adults with opportunities to improve their academic skills, earn a high school equivalency credential and prepare for employment and continued education. Northwest Michigan Works! is a program of Networks Northwest. To learn more, visit nwm.org/learninglabs

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