



The **Workforce Development, Inc. (WDI) - Caledonia/Houston County office** has been focusing on the partnership aspect of our community; whether it be partnering with our county businesses, government agencies, educators, or other service vendors.

One of the major annual events is the Houston County Coat and Boot Drive. For the past three years, the **WDI Houston County office** has partnered with the Caledonia High School Student Council and community volunteers to put on the Houston County Coat and Boot Drive. Winter apparel is collected at the elementary and high school, area churches, and Quillin's IGA. The apparel is then brought to our office for sorting and distribution. Several people in the area who hear about the drive also donate apparel. Our backroom is filled with racks of coats and tables of hats, mittens, scarves, socks, and boots. Long before we actually get any donations, we have customers asking if there will be winter apparel again this year. November through January are busy months, with "shopping in our backroom;" everyone is very appreciative. Many customers come in wearing just a summer jacket or sweatshirt and are thrilled to leave with a nice, warm coat; possibly boots, a hat, scarf or mittens as well. We had one couple come in with their grandchildren; one grandson being carried since he was wearing only socks. He was so excited to get boots and proudly showed everyone his new boots! It is very heartwarming and rewarding to know we are helping this community! When the season is done, usually at the end of March, volunteers come in to sort through any remaining apparel. It is then donated to other places in need. This year, apparel was donated to Twice is Nice, the Immanuel Lutheran Church Shoe Drive in Caledonia, the Lion's Club Shoe Drive in Caledonia, the Salvation Army, Women's Clothes Closet in La Crosse, WI, and the Pine Ridge Orphanage in North Dakota.

The **WDI Houston County office** recently partnered with the Houston County Economic Development Authority (EDA) and the Perkins Consortium on a couple of events. The first was the Houston County Economic Summit, which included attendees from Houston County private businesses, Houston County Government, and Houston County Schools. A Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) representative presented information on the current employment data and future predictions. A period of discussion amongst the attendees ensued on what we can do to fulfill the needs of area employers in the future. Additional meetings are scheduled to begin taking positive actions on things that were discussed.

We have also been meeting and building strong relationships with local employers; in part, to bring awareness to the resources we can offer in helping them find viable employees, and partly to educate them on programs and target populations they may not have previously considered for employment. For instance, individuals who were previously incarcerated or those who may lack experience in their fields of work.

Another event the **WDI Houston County office** partnered on was with area high schools, the Perkins Consortium, and the Houston County EDA. We hosted a Seniors Career Day at the Minnesota State/Winona campus. High school seniors had the opportunity to learn about a variety of real-world topics, such as, "How to Avoid Living with Your Parents for the Rest of Your Life" and "Oh Crap, I Don't Know What I'm Doing Next Year!" They all had the opportunity to do mock interviews with real employers from our region. Many actually made connections with and filled out applications for employers they were interested in; the feed-back was very positive from both students and employers.