

Industrial Arts Mentorship for All Launches Four?Month Pre?Apprenticeship Program Empowering Underrepresented Youth in Minnesota

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Minneapolis, Minnesota??? Industrial Arts Mentorship for All introduces an innovative four?month Pre?Apprentice Program designed as a leadership and technical skills pathway for underrepresented youth aged 17 to 24 in the Twin Cities. This initiative reflects the organization?s enduring commitment to inclusive, hands?on education in metalworking disciplines and professional development tailored to nurture creative confidence and community leadership.

The Pre?Apprentice Program operates as an immersive youth leadership experience weaving together technical training, professional development, studio stewardship, exposure to industry role models, and a culminating public exhibition. Participants deepen their proficiency in industrial arts such as blacksmithing, welding, torch cutting, and other metal fabrication techniques within IAMA?s supportive North Minneapolis studio environment. The program builds upon prior knowledge, recognizing that all participants bring some foundational experience in metalworking, enabling them to elevate craft practices through sustained mentorship.

Professional development elements emphasize résumé preparation, artist statements, interview skills, leadership articulation, and community collaboration. Pre-apprentices engage in maintaining a functioning studio, learning about tool care, workspace organization, and the daily responsibilities essential to sustaining a creative industrial environment. Program participants benefit from a series of presentations and dialogues with professional artists and tradespeople who represent diverse pathways in the arts, fabrication, and trades. These connections ground the learning process in real-world perspectives and illuminate possible career and creative trajectories.

At the conclusion of the program, participants contribute their work to a final public exhibition. This exhibition offers a platform to showcase individual artwork, technical proficiency, and creative expression developed over the course of the program. The exhibition event invites the wider community to witness outcomes of dedication, artistic growth, and cultural participation, reinforcing IAMA?s place as a catalyst for youth empowerment and metal arts representation.

IAMA underscores that the Program is offered without charge. Eliminating tuition barriers ensures accessibility for youth from marginalized backgrounds, consistent with the organization?s founding mission to offer enriched industrial arts education to communities historically excluded from creative and trades-based learning environments. This fully funded structure fosters equity and extends opportunity to voices often underrepresented in traditional apprenticeship tracks.

The inaugural cohort includes four young participants deeply engaged in the full pre?apprenticeship cycle. Swiff, a 17?year?old high school senior and passionate blacksmithing enthusiast, has been forging hot steel in the IAMA studio since fall 2024 and is now exploring potential career pathways in metal arts alongside interests in drawing and upright bass performance. Jakailah, age 18, completed the Minneapolis Public Schools CTE Welding Program and has been active in the IAMA studio since early winter. Their dual interests span welding and writing while building community connections. Lili, 23, blends a background in robotics and chemistry with artistic metalworking explorations learned through blacksmithing and copper forming; originally from Northern Ireland, Lili also nurtures a love of cooking alongside creative practice. Brandon, a 17?year?old from St. Paul currently enrolled in the St. Paul CTE Welding Program, began engaging with IAMA in fall 2024, bringing experience in welding and metal fabrication and exploring new interests in boxing and sewing. These four pre?apprentices represent a diversity of identities, experiences, and artistic motivations, underscoring IAMA?s intended reach and values.

Participants meet weekly over the span of four months. Studio practice is scheduled across thoughtful sessions, balancing technical training with creative autonomy. Professional development workshops are interspersed to complement metalworking curriculum. Community and visiting artist sessions provide

networking and visibility into varied professional trajectories. The program is structured to cultivate not only craft skills but also leadership, creative confidence, and collaborative spirit among young makers.

Behind this effort stands IAMA?s guiding philosophy that industrial arts are transformative tools for building self?efficacy, identity affirmation, and community belonging. The studio environment is intentionally curated as a space where marginalized youth?particularly queer youth, youth of color, young women, and gender?expansive individuals?can develop artistic agency without encountering the exclusion often present in traditional trades and arts spaces. IAMA embodies an inclusive ethos that uplifts multiple identities and integrates metal arts with community care, storytelling, and social justice motivations.

The Pre?Apprentice Program emerges at a moment when Minnesota faces persistent workforce shortages in skilled trades, and when pre?apprenticeship models are increasingly recognized as essential pathways to both entry-level employment and long?term career development. Statewide initiatives such as Apprenticeship Minnesota promote educational pathways combining technical instruction with on?the?job learning models. The IAMA Pre?Apprentice Program aligns closely with this broader trend, while emphasizing youth leadership, artistic expression, and identity affirmation in addition to technical mastery.

The concluding public exhibition scheduled for the first of June welcomed community members to view emerging work from Swiff, Jakailah, Lili, and Brandon. The event celebrated both completion of technical training and growth in artistic confidence. Visitors experienced forged steel pieces, welded sculptures, copper-formed artworks, and narrative statements that reflected participants? identities and aspirations. The exhibition underscored the importance of combining technical skill with creative storytelling and community presentation.

Through this Pre?Apprentice Program, IAMA seeks to establish a replicable model for equitable, inclusive pre?apprenticeship training in industrial arts statewide. The initiative demonstrates that robust metalworking education and leadership development can be made accessible and culturally affirming for young people who have historically lacked access to trades and arts training. The program cultivates pride in craft, confidence in creative identity, and pathways toward apprenticeship, employment, or continued artistic education.

Industrial Arts Mentorship for All stands at the forefront of combining industrial arts instruction with social equity. By offering an intensive, tuition?free experience that pairs hands?on forging, welding, fabrication, professional learning, and exhibition practice, the Pre?Apprentice Program reflects a commitment to youth empowerment, visibility for underrepresented voices, and the demonstration that creative trades education can be rooted in community and justice. As IAMA continues to refine and expand this model, the organization anticipates broader partnerships and replication in additional cohorts, stimulating new opportunities for youth

in Minnesota and beyond.

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Industrial Arts Mentorship for All (IAMA)

Industrial Arts Mentorship for All (IAMA) is a Minneapolis-based 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to providing accessible industrial arts training programs for underrepresented youth in the Twin Cities.

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