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**PHILLIPS Programs for Children and Families Growing Futures Program Named Semi-Finalist for The Zero Project Award**

*A workforce paradigm shift: an indoor vertical farm career and technical education program*

LAUREL, MD (September 13, 2019) [PHILLIPS' Growing Futures](#), a career training practice that incorporates a vertical farm and commercial kitchen, was included on The Zero Project Award shortlist.

Zero Project shared that “These nominated practices and policies have made it through a detailed quality check and through one round of peer-reviewing from experts – with and without disabilities – from around the world. From an incredible 469 nominations, 169 Practices and 24 Policies have made it through to the Shortlist. All shortlisted projects will be invited to attend the Zero Project Conference 2020 at the United Nations Offices in Vienna, Austria.”

Growing Futures, a CTE curriculum initiated by PHILLIPS Programs to create a paradigm shift in meaningful employment for our youth is mission critical work because the current systems supporting young adults with complex needs transitioning from school to work are not meeting the rising demand. The economic and social costs of unemployment include lost income to the individual, lost tax revenue to the government and societal costs such as debt, homelessness and housing stress, family breakdown, alienation, shame and stigma, increased social isolation, the deterioration of work skills and ill-health. Consider the data:

- Young adults with disabilities are more than 3 times likelier to live in poverty
- Young adults with behavioral health needs are 4 times less likely to find employment, let alone sustainable employment with livable wages.
- Of the nearly 18,000 people with autism who used state-funded vocational rehabilitation programs, only 60 percent left the program with a job. Of these, 80 percent worked part-time at a median weekly rate of \$160, putting them well below the poverty level.

To address this crisis, PHILLIPS created Growing Futures where students with behavioral health needs are trained in hydroponic vertical farming cultivating fresh produce all year. Products grown are used in culinary activities to augment flavor and nutrition; are shared with families; and are sold to restaurants. Youth learn the curriculum, increase engagement, develop healthy eating habits and are exposed to essential soft skills to improve their employment outcomes after graduation.

Currently, the practice is located at PHILLIPS School ~ Laurel. Since launching the program in the Fall of 2017 enrollment has more than doubled. The practice was expanded through sales to three local restaurants: Faddensonnen (recently named by Bon Appetit as one of America's 50 Best New Restaurants), Orto, and Bramble Baking Company, as well as increased the amount and number of products grown, used and distributed. In addition, a student earned a spot with a community internship at an urban indoor farm. Based on student feedback there are plans to add a "feed the homeless" component.

The practice can be replicated anywhere across the globe. With minimal investment a space can be converted with low tech build it yourself systems all the way to state of the art equipment. Access to water is required, however plants grown hydroponically use much less water than other growing methods as water is recirculated. Electricity or solar is required as a power source for the LED lights.

The goal of PHILLIPS' CTE program is to provide youth with the soft skills, technical skills and drive to succeed so they become gainfully employed. The success of this practice has opened up a new career pathway in urban agriculture. PHILLIPS aims to build upon the educational program by operating a social enterprise worker cooperative to meet the growing demand for locally produced indoor vertical farming crops and provide employment opportunities for youth transitioning from school to work.

To learn more visit [www.phillipsprograms.org](http://www.phillipsprograms.org)

For a full list of semi-finalists visit <https://zeroproject.org/shortlisted-projects/>

**About PHILLIPS Programs:** PHILLIPS serves youth with behavioral needs. For 53 years, PHILLIPS has helped youth succeed by providing customized support and education through three programs, including: Special Education Day Schools in Annandale, Fairfax and Leesburg VA and Laurel, MD; PHILLIPS Family Partners offering home- and community-based counseling and support; and PHILLIPS

Career Partners, which offers our career and technical education avenues including Building Futures, Growing Futures and Designing Futures.

**About the Zero Project Award:** The Zero Project was initiated by the Essl Foundation in 2008 and focuses on the rights of persons with disabilities globally. It is a platform where the most innovative and effective solutions to problems that persons with disabilities face, are shared. Its mission is to support the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) and to work for a world without barriers.

The annual Zero Project Report presents the Policies & Practices that have been selected as the most innovative in their approach to that year's theme. It also evaluated just how the UN CRPD is being implemented around the world.

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