

10 Years Later Elm Program Still Running Strong and Changing Lives



(Above L to R) A Few of the original 10 consumers from ELM. Jae Messerschmidt, Miko Walker, Kate Klemmensen, Emily Havekost, and Margaret Riley

“The Elm program means everything to us,” said Chris Havekost. Chris, along with many other parents including Marcia Riley and Cheryl Henkenius, participated in an Elm 10th anniversary celebration on July 1st. They, along with Elm consumers were treated to pizza, chips, pop, and three amazing cakes. Consumers also made time capsules that will hang in the ELM area of VODEC’s 72nd street location and will be opened on next year’s anniversary.

This party marked a change in not only the lives of the parents of the those who needed the service, but also with VODEC. “VODEC was a pioneer in this form of service. Any other provider we contacted didn’t want to or was scared to service our children. VODEC stepped in and said why not,” said Marcia Riley. She continued with “it was a perfect case of money following the client. It was designed to fit our children’s needs not the needs of the company providing the service.”

The Elm program strives to create a stimulating environment that offers music, therapy, arts and crafts, and allows consumers to be around peers. Parents state that many nights their Elm participants come home tired because they have had such an eventful and busy day.

When asked about their fondest memories of the ELM program opening they had many. “We were

having a meeting with Colleen Peterson, a Training Coordinator, and we were all talking at once. Colleen stopped it all and turned to CEO Steve Hodapp and asked if it was possible to be open in the allotted time. His response was a simple yes. That really brought it home,” said Havekost. They also spoke fondly of Ida Bryant who came from OPS and knew all the kids, which made things much more reassuring for the parents.

The Elm program currently serves over 50 consumers on a daily basis and it is only increasing in size. It is a far cry from the original ten that came through the doors and into hearts of VODEC staff that first day of July 2003.

From the Desk of CEO Steve Hodapp

July 1 marked the tenth anniversary of the first day of Elm . . . and the day it was closed down. Ah, but I get ahead of myself.

In the Spring of 2003 I was asked to meet with a group of parents about creating an adult services program for a dozen of their kids graduating from Omaha Public Schools’ J. P. Lord School that year. “J.P. Lord School serves students who have severe or moderate mental and physical handicapping conditions. Some students are considered to be “medically fragile” and may also have hearing, vision, speech, and/or motor impairments.” according to Principal Michael Dotson on the school’s website. In short this would be a more challenging population to serve than we were serving at the time.

So prior to July 1, 2013 the parents, their graduating seniors, and the seniors’ Nebraska Service Coordinators and I met numerous times. These meetings were guided by Colleen Peterson who at the time was a Training Coordinator with Parent Teacher Information who kept us on track.



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From the Desk of CEO Steve Hodapp

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Overall there was a need for an appropriate space, safe reliable transportation and nurturing employees. Basically we said we didn't know we couldn't do this. Oh, and there was the lack of our being certified in Nebraska yet, a situation remedied by Region V Services which allowed us to subcontract for a time under its certification.

Cut to July 1, 2003. We hired Laidlaw Transit for the transportation. We had our initial space at North 90th and Fort Street, and super staff was on-board. The first day's consumers were brought inside. Soon some City of Omaha official arrived. He said we didn't have the correct approval from the city so "close down now." Momentary panic passed, all consumers were taken back home, and we had multiple phone calls with the city. Revelation: the city official was looking at us through the wrong rules, we were in fact ok.

What followed were a couple years of Elm losing money but growing in numbers. VODEC's Board kept the faith and said "we are committed to Elm's success." Well, let me tell you that Elm is a success! Today nearly fifty persons participate in Elm. It covers its expenses. Participants and families are pleased. I could not ask for more. I am so proud of the employees who have worked and do work in Elm, and of the Board's commitment to the program through the years. But most importantly I am gratified by the collaboration of those founding parents and their trust in us. Hopefully we have made a difference in their lives and the lives of their "graduates."

Elm Anniversary Celebration July 1st, 2013



(Above)- Consumer Megan Reilly enjoys the celebration.



(Above)- Consumer Edward Dawson smiles for the camera.



(Above)- Consumer Susan McIntosh and VODEC staff member Ashley Pickinpaugh share some food and conversation.



(Above)- Consumer Will Hall laughs at one of the many jokes he told during the anniversary event.

Happy 10th Anniversary

See What's Happening at VODEC



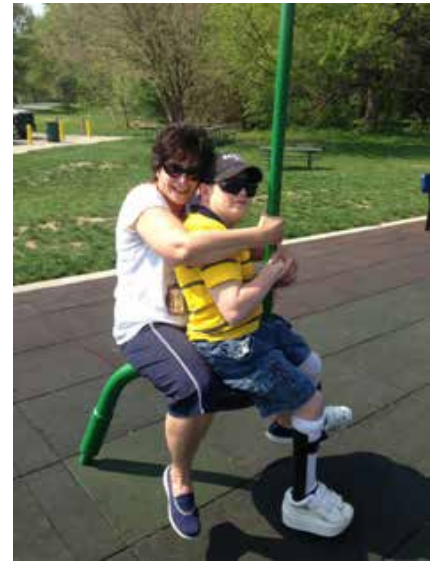
(Above)- Consumer Crystal Newton enjoys time on the slide.



(Above L to R)- Consumers David Steinhoff, Celeste Ring, and Brian Major show off their talents.



(Above)- VODEC staff member Travis Porter does some fishing during an outing with consumers.



(Above L to R) VODEC staff member Anna Strandberg and consumer David Christian spend time enjoying the great weather.



(Left)- Consumer Norman Menrad works on a 4th of July banner during his day in the Cares program. (Above)- Consumer Rhonda Rodgers poses for the camera during an outing to a local museum.



An Evening with the Arts

“An Evening with the Arts” in June was enjoyed by everyone....especially Denise Chapman and Lisa Kalantjakos.....the artists! Lisa worked with groups on a printmaking activity and Denise led groups through fun theatre games! We had a wonderful response from everyone,” said WhyArts? Director Carolyn Anderson.

Professional artists Lisa and Denise shared their respective talents by helping over 45 total participants explore their artistic talents through printmaking and theatre. Attendees were divided into two groups and then spent 45 minutes painting and acting. They also had time to socialize and share refreshments.

“On September 12, participants will enjoy movement activities with Courtney Stein and clay sculpture with Pam Hinson, we are looking forward to another fun arts evening,” continued Anderson. The next ‘An Evening with the Arts’ will be held at VODEC’s 72nd street location. If you would like to sign up your family member, please contact Michelle Nelson at 712-328-2638, or via email at mnelson@vodec.org or by contacting their staff member.



(Above) VODEC staff member Wendy Elliott tries to determine what the blue fabric could be.



(Above- L to R) VODEC residential supervisor Jessica Minor looks on as consumer Joyce Donahoo is covered up by a “sheet” by artist Denise Chapman.



(Top- L to R) Consumers Norma Hammers and Richelle Dennis work on their printmaking project. (Below) Consumer David Ortega shows off a finished product.



(Above)- Consumer Jonathan Hancock and staff member April Wilson enjoy some theatre games during the event.

Vocational Development Center, Inc.

VODEC

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The purpose of VODEC is to support and advocate for persons with disabilities so those persons have opportunities to develop to their fullest potential, to interact with society, to experience a sense of belonging, and to contribute something of themselves at their own levels of ability.



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1. Be at least 16 years old for any vocational program
2. Have behavioral needs within VODEC's scope of service
3. Have medical needs within VODEC's scope of service
4. Have transportation needs within VODEC's capability to provide
5. Have adequate funding in place (including service hours' authorization or private payment in place) for services being requested
6. If applying for an in-home service, the applicant's home must meet basic health and safety requirements

An applicant must meet the following criteria to be considered eligible for any VODEC service:

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