

Speaking Up: Telling Our Stories



Above- L to R- Marcus Sikora and his mother Mardra.

“At 7 months pregnant, there came a night when I woke up in terrible pain. I climbed into our stick-shift car, which I did not know how to drive, and started down the road. It wasn’t pretty and probably didn’t sound too good, the car either, but we (the car and I) got to the hospital in time for me to pass out in a wheelchair just inside the emergency room doors. That was nearly 23 years ago. Two months later I gave birth to a beautiful boy and I still find myself winging it.

“My son has grown up to be an amazing young man. He loves his job, attends acting classes, hopes to put his own musical on Broadway, and doesn’t seem to mind that he has an extra chromosome in his DNA. I didn’t know how to raise a child with Down Syndrome any more than I knew how to drive a stick-shift. But we’ve cruised through the years, pushed over a few roadblocks and taken several detours. We’ve learned many lessons that have been more special than the needs.” This short story comes from Mardra Sikora, a mother of a handsome 20+ year old son with Down

Syndrome and advocate for persons with disabilities and their families. Mardra and her son speak, write and motivate to help empower people to create positive change. Mardra is a local writer who is in process of completing a novel, *The Innocent Prince*, in addition to writing essays and blogs.

On March 20th at 6PM VODEC held the first Parent Advocacy Network Meeting for Nebraska Families. This meeting was held at VODEC in the 72nd Street Development Center, 7110 F Street Omaha, NE. The meeting featured Mardra as the key note speaker. More information on Mardra can be found on her website, www.mardrasikora.com/. “We want parents to continue to advocate for their children and to learn from others,” said Daryn Richardson, Services Development Director. “Over the years it seems that any time a group of parents band together something positive follows. This is what we are hoping to facilitate with Parent Advocacy Network.”

Richardson also hopes to continue to provide a regular meetings for parents and caregivers of individuals in VODEC services to network with each other. “The amount of information that is shared with parents by parents is amazing” added Richardson. “By sharing their experiences with each other, they can help each other as only parents and caregivers can.” The meetings will be held on a regular basis and will feature a speaker, time for networking with other parents, and information on events and issues related to VODEC’s services. The first meeting was held in Nebraska for Nebraska Parents and a meeting for Iowa parents will be held in Iowa on April 17th at the Council Bluffs VODEC at 6pm at 612 S. Main St.

If you would like more information regarding future Parents Advocacy Network Meetings please contact Daryn Richardson or Michelle Nelson at 712-328-2638. If you would like to share your story with the VODEC community please send them to our Council Bluffs office Attn: Services Development Office 612 S. Main St. Council Bluffs IA 51503 or via email to mnelson@vodec.org

From the Desk of CEO Steve Hodapp

As someone with a connection with a person with a disability you may believe you have had unique experiences because of that connection. Surely you may imagine no one else could have had the same experiences you had. Likely at times you felt very alone, very isolated. No doubt you could have used an ear or a shoulder of somebody else.



Then you learned you were not alone. There were others before you who had similar experiences. You connected through schools or other elsewhere with people who would become supportive, and for whom you would become supportive. You became each others' ears and shoulders in times of need.

VODEC is creating an opportunity for you to share some of your stories. Sharing may be cathartic for you. It certainly will be affirming for others. And for some it will likely be eye-opening. You are invited to submit short anecdotes of experiences along your path. Maybe there was an answer you had to search for. Maybe an obstacle to a school activity or service funding. Maybe attitudes needing to be overcome. Could you share what you did and how you felt as you walked through it?

Please contact Michelle Nelson at mnelson@vodec.org. For a limited time she will accept submissions, from which some may be selected to appear in this publication or on our Facebook page (obviously only with your permission). Others can learn from your experiences. You have much to teach. We encourage you to consider sharing.

Michelle also would like ideas about what more VODEC could be doing to enhance your sense of belonging. As she awaits your suggestions we're going to start with some activities soon which we hope you find helpful. The first will be announced soon.



Left- Parents during Elm's 10th anniversary celebration.

Right- Volunteer Cheerleading coach Tami Barber helps get consumers ready.



Thank You FOR YOUR HELP

Kohls Pharmacy	Tiffany Hoffman
Trailblazers-Salem United Methodist Church	Rebecca Lepin
Jamie Brown	Erin Lucas
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*This list reflects donations received between
2/13/2013 and 3/17/2014*



Donations Made in Memory of Erin Hunt, Mico Walker & Paul Skoumal

Miles and Crystal Havekost
Steve and Mary Hodapp
Bo and Wanda Morris
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Cheryl Walker-Billups

VODEC Vikings Cheerleaders Win Gold

The VODEC Vikings traveled to Iowa City on March 14th to compete in the Special Olympics. On the evening before the event they were treated to a banquet dinner with 250 other athletes. They also went swimming and had a practice session. On March 15th they competed in the group cheerleading event and brought home the gold for VODEC for the 4th year in a row. "The trip home was complete with smiles and excitement to show off the gold. This would not have been possible without their amazing coach Tami Barber, and staff Rheanna Webber, Steve Handley, and Kelsey Preston," said VODEC Residential Manager Jamie Brown.

Council Bluffs and Omaha Mayors declare March Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month with Proclamations.

March was National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. VODEC observed National DD Awareness Month with proclamations from both Council Bluffs Mayor Matt Walsh and Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert.

On March 6th, Council Bluffs Mayor Matt Walsh declared March as Developmental Disabilities Awareness month with a reception at VODEC that included many members of the Council Bluffs business community. "I am grateful to Mayor Walsh for making this event a success this morning," stated Daryn Richardson, "One of our goals was to bring together representatives from business, education and human services. Clearly, we achieved that goal. It seemed that some connections were made this morning that will help individuals with developmental disabilities become increasingly integrated into our community," added Richardson.

Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert declared March Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month with an official proclamation presented to VODEC. In the proclamation Mayor Stothert discussed that oppor-

tunities for citizens with developmental disabilities to function as independently and productively as possible must be fostered in the community. "Mayor Stothert's proclamation underscores the importance of making full community inclusion possible for all persons with disabilities," said VODEC CEO Steve Hodapp.



Above-Front Row Left to Right Suzanne Watson, Lauren Fukuda, Holly Senrick, Lane Till, Linda Robicheau, Andrea Smith

*Back Row Left to Right Beth Vanderpoll, Rik Shannon, Joe Bosco, Mark Stromer, Mayor Matt Walsh
(Not Pictured: Becky Zorn Council Bluffs Schools, Dorothy Duran Iowa Western Community College, Natalie Battles ID Action & Capture Marketing Group)*

VODEC Day Programs get ready for summer with trips to the zoo

VODEC's day programs spent as much of March as possible outdoors enjoying the change in the weather. On one of their outings they visited the Henry Doorly Zoo. Both the Cares and Elm programs spent time at the zoo visiting the animals. Always on the list is the Lied Jungle, the Scott Aquarium, and the Desert Dome. They also love going to see the cat and gorilla complexes. These trips also provide an opportunity to learn about the different animals and their eating habits, living spaces, and more. It is something all the day programs look forward to each and every time they go.



Left and Above- VODEC consumers and staff enjoys several trips to the zoo in the month of March.

Artist Workshops Culminate with Gallery Show in May

With the support of the Nebraska Arts Council and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment, VODEC has partnered with WhyArts? and Hot Shops Art Center to provide artist workshops for VODEC consumers. These 8 workshops consisted of projects using mediums including clay, watercolor, acrylic, paper products, writing exercises, and even photography. Between 25 and 30 consumers attended each workshop and the work they created will be on display in an Artists Exhibition on May 3rd and 4th at Hot Shops Art Center, 1301 Nicholas St. Omaha, NE.

“This has been really fun and I hope we keep getting to do these workshops. I want to work on my art as much as I can,” said Jonathan Weitfeld about his experience. Workshops like these are not just simply an opportunity for individuals to create art work, but rather the opportunity for them to work side by side

with full time artists who challenge them to create pieces that are unique. The consumers are exposed to new art materials they may have never worked with before and with that come learning how the medium and the tools used for that medium work to create art. “Art exhibits provide opportunities for the “artist” to see the work they have personally created alongside other works of art in the art gallery. As importantly, the community is exposed to --and can enjoy-- the work of VODEC consumers, who have been creating a variety of visual arts pieces during the past month. The talents of these individuals is truly amazing!” said Director of WhyArts? Carolyn Anderson.

(Photos at right show the process of creating the art pieces from the various workshops.)

With the support of the Nebraska Arts Council and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment

Artists with Disabilities Public Exhibition

Saturday, May 3rd from 12 to 8 pm
Sunday, May 4th from 12 to 5 pm
At the Hot Shops Art Center
1301 Nicholas St Just north of TD Ameritrade Park



We don't think that people with disabilities sometimes create art; rather we believe that artists sometimes have disabilities. It is our hope that you will join us as we "create new perspectives."



The Nebraska Arts Council, a state agency, has supported this arts event through its matching grants program funded by the Nebraska Legislature and the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. Visit www.nebraskaartscouncil.org for information on how the Nebraska Arts Council can assist your organization.



Vocational Development Center, Inc.

VODEC

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Contact us @ 712-328-2638 to
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version of the VODEC *Voice*
instead of the print version

The mission of VODEC is to provide services to persons with disabilities in order that those persons may live, work and participate in the community in the least restrictive environment to achieve their full potential.



VODEC is a private, non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation. Donations may be tax deductible. VODEC is an equal opportunity employer. Applicants for services or employment are considered without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, or disability. We are a certified provider of day and residential services by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. We are approved by the Iowa Medicaid Enterprise to provide waiver services to individuals with intellectual disabilities, brain injuries and we are an approved habilitation service provider. We are a provider of Host Home services in Iowa and Extended Family Homes in Nebraska. We have accreditation from CARF for Community Employment Services, Organizational Employment services and Community Integration.



VODEC is a proud member of:

dritchardson@vodec.org

For more information on VODEC services please contact Daryn Richardson or Michelle Nelson at 712-328-2638 or by email at

GoodSearch is a Yahoo! search engine that pays charities you select a penny per search! Go to www.good-search.com and add GoodSearch to your browser. Then select Vocational Development Center as your designated charity! And pass the news on to your friends and family! Over 15,000 searches have benefited VODEC so far! It's easy and it works!



VODEC IS ON GoodSearch!

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

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



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REACH FULL POTENTIAL