

The Voice

April-May 2022

Mia Explores a Career in Psychology

Mia Anderson is looking forward to a career in psychology. She wishes to specialize in helping individuals with intellectual and mental health disabilities. Mia is a student at Johnston Iowa High School in Johnston, IA, and works at Vodec Urbandale, Iowa development center three days per week through a work-based learning opportunity. Mia does this through a school-to-work internship experience through high school.

Vodec employees met with Mia's work-based learning instructor, Lexi Shafer, to brainstorm and create a training plan specifically to meet Mia's career goals. As part of the plan, Mia works as a day services assistant. She is learning to communicate and advocate for consumers, observes individual training plan processes, and writes a long-term habilitation plan.

Mia's understanding of consumers with intellectual disabilities grows with her Vodec experience. Some aspects of the job were unexpected. "I was surprised by the consumer's knowledge of their disabilities," said Mia, "They're very open. They know their abilities too. They want to have a purpose and to be able to do things.



Ronnie with Mia Anderson at Vodec in Urbandale

I have a good relationship with many of the consumers because of how open and understanding they are. I think it has been perfect for my education and knowledge of intellectual disabilities," declares Mia. "My education is a priority, and Vodec's employees are very flexible and understanding. "

Halsey Scales, Vodec Day Services Manager in Urbandale, is responsible for evaluating Mia's progress. "Mia has been a wonderful asset to both the employees and consumers at Vodec," reports Scales, "She is a tremendous advocate for the consumers she works with and is always willing to go above and beyond to help. I look forward to watching her expand her career knowledge."

Mia has a bright future ahead. "I plan to stay on at Vodec for the summer; then I am going to Iowa State to study psychology. My goal is to further my education leading to some specialty which involves working with those who have intellectual disabilities and mental illness," Mia states.

New Nutrition Habits that are Chopped & Tasty



Above, (Rebekah, Liz, Connie, and Konner showcasing their "Chopped" culinary talents.)

Employees and consumers at Vodec's Urbandale, Iowa Cares program inspired by the popular TV show Chopped, spent time trying healthy versions of traditional foods over the past few weeks. Some examples included ham and pineapple instead of pepperoni on pizzas; and toasted coconut and flaxseed instead of heavy syrup on Eggo waffles.

Those were just two of several ways Day Service Coordinator Holly Adams and Urbandale Iowa employees encouraged consumers to explore foods that offer a healthier outcome.



Above left to Right: Mark, Liz, Day Services Assistant Molly King, Deb, and Mary discovering healthy ways to snack during the weekly "Chopped" class at Vodec in Urbandale

"Initially, we planned to have a cooking competition like Chopped, but encouraging our consumers to try healthy and delicious food was more important than the competition," Adams said.

Adams identified one consumer who enjoys pepperoni pizza for lunch several times a week as someone who wanted the healthier Hawaiian pizza option with ham and pineapple. So instead of pizza dough, they made the pizzas with English muffins and corn taco shells (gluten-free option) with red or white alfredo sauce.

Not using traditional pizza dough proved a healthy alternative for diabetic consumers. Adams said she envisions this healthy cooking practice as a regular activity.

"So many consumers bring the same food every day for lunch that this was a nice alternative," Adams said. "We don't want these activities to be a meal replacement – we keep the portions small – but it's a great way to get consumers to try new foods they might not otherwise try."

Consumers Combat the Winter Blues with Sunlight and Exercise



Enjoying Spring at Lake Zorinsky Park in Omaha, Ne.

Left: Dylan, Middle Left to Right: Elia, Isaac, Josh, Jon, Thomas, Right: Chris

Recently, consumers from Vodec in Omaha, Ne. development center went to Lake Zorinsky. They not only took in some fresh air, but they also enjoyed nature walks and played on the park swings, absorbing some great sunlight.

"It was a very successful outing which melted away some of the blues that tend to develop over the winter season," said Megan Davidson, Day Services Coordinator in Omaha. "Soaking in natural ambient light in combination with mild exercise lifted many spirits for consumers."

Vodec Receives Grant for Development Center Improvements

The Southwest Iowa Mental Health & Disability Services Region (SWIA MHDS) awarded Vodec \$94,855 for building improvements for the Council Bluffs development center. These improvements are part of a transition of space formerly used for prevocational service which ended in the Council Bluffs development center in October 2021. The Cares and Adult Transition Program (ATP) are expanding into the space formerly used for prevocational service. Vodec continues to offer the prevocational service at its development center in Omaha, Nebraska.

The grant is paying for new lighting, lockers, and windows.



Consumers (left to right) Jacob, Kennedy, Amanda, and Day Services Coordinator Sandy Andersen enjoying the spring sunshine at Vodec's Council Bluffs, IA development center.

Consumers in Cares learn laundry and cooking, social skills, and about exercise, and wellness. Vodec's Adult Transition (ATP) program uses this space, too. ATP, students learn about financial literacy, self-advocacy, safety, and many other areas critical to adult life.

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“In planning these improvements, we start with what is best for the consumers we serve,” said Steve Hodapp, Vodec’s CEO.

“Our planning team has toured schools and transition programs that have recently made improvements. We learned about the importance of installing adjustable lighting,

adding windows that provide ambient light, and adding color to the space.”

“The southwest Iowa MHDS region is a reliable partner,” added Hodapp, “we are thankful for their continued support of Vodec and the consumers we serve.”

Did You Know?

The Food and Drug Administration has a fourth Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccine dose for people ages 50 and older, amid uncertainty over whether an even more contagious version of omicron will cause another wave of infection in the U.S. as it has in Europe and China.

Contact your physician for more information.

We are thankful for these generous donors.

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Vodec is certified by:

- Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services
- Iowa Department of Human Services
- Nebraska Department of Education
- Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Vodec is affiliated with the following organizations:

- Council Bluffs Chamber of Commerce (IA)
- Human Services Advisory Council (HSAC)
- Iowa Association of Community Providers (IACP)
- Iowa Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE)
- Nebraska Association of Service Providers (NASP)
- Nonprofit Association of the Midlands (NAM)
- Omaha Chamber of Commerce (NE)

Vodec is an authorized provider in the following Iowa HealthLink networks:

- Amerigroup
- Iowa Total Care



Vodec Entrance Criteria:

- Be at least 16 years old for any employment training program
- Have behavioral needs within Vodec’s scope of service
- Have medical needs within Vodec’s scope of service
- Have transportation needs within Vodec’s capability to provide
- Have adequate funding in place (including service hours authorization or private payment in place) for services being requested
- For in-home service, an applicant’s home must meet basic health and safety requirements .

For more information, or to apply for Vodec services, contact Daryn Richardson at drichardson@vodec.org or call (712) 328-2638.

Transformative, Flexible, Responsive, & Sustainable.



Steve Hodapp, Vodec CEO

Transformative, Flexible, Responsive, and Sustainable. These are words that describe your Vodec. I do not use them lightly. I use them to convey that Vodec is surviving the COVID-19 pandemic. “

“Surviving” is a somewhat ambiguous term, though. We have taken some hits and had to react accordingly. In 2020 we were forced to temporarily close our day habilitation programs in Iowa from mid-March until July. The number of consumers in our Nebraska day habilitation programs and student services dropped off in 2020 as some consumers decided, or had it decided for them, that they would shelter at home; a group of them still have not returned. This same phenomenon has continued in Iowa since July 2020. In Urbandale Iowa’s day habilitation program, we decided last October that it was necessary to downsize the daily census to match a reduced number of employees during COVID-19. There is no service revenue for absences mentioned.

But, of late, there has been interest in returning by a growing number of consumers who are frustrated by the extended sheltering. They are missing the friendships with their peers and the nurturing of their staff at Vodec. So, we are working to accommodate their return.

Helping support our reactions have been a variety of COVID-19 relief grants from local, State, and Federal sources and Payroll Protection Program (PPP) loans.

which have been forgiven by the Small Business Administration (SBA).

We used this pot of money to buy COVID-19 prevention items (stereotypically: hand sanitizer, but so much more). We purchased equipment to provide day habilitation services virtually when preferred by a consumer. There have also been employee recruitment and retention strategies funded. We are extremely grateful for the support.

Survival has also forced us to explore options we’d not otherwise have done. One option has been a shift in our residential services. We are less reliant on group homes now, having transitioned away from nearly all. The 24/7 service model isn’t sustainable as we experience the same workforce challenges as every other business. The number of persons in the national job market shrank since the pandemic’s onset for reasons you no doubt have already heard multiple times. That has also negatively impacted local employers’ ability to recruit and retain employees. Vodec is no different. By phasing down the group home option, we became less frustrated by the inability to recruit employees in adequate numbers. We made a conscious decision to do what we can, and do it well.

Vodec is recovering, actually better than just surviving. Consumers are returning. More job candidates are seeking us out to join this local premier provider of disability services. We are rounding a corner and will emerge stronger. Isn’t that what they say about what doesn’t kill you?

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Vodec has been a premier provider since 1968. Our 'look' has transformed several times as we exhibited our flexibility and responsiveness to changing funding models and emphasis on some services.

We are sustaining. I thank each of you for the continuing support you afford Vodec. It means the world to all of us here.

Vodec Helps Consumers find Jobs



Cole Osbar

Before Christmas last year, Cole earned a position sanitizing and distributing carts at Fareway grocery store in Council Bluffs, IIA one day per week. A young man who loves meeting people, it only took a couple of months for him to be promoted to sorting produce. "I love seeing consumers like Cole become independent, reach their full potential, and know they are a valuable member of the community," said Vodec Employment Specialist Katey Mikels.



Sarah Arnold

After graduating high school, Sarah was interested and ready to get a job. She worked hard and was prepared to take that next step. Among her options was working in the YMCA's Child Watch in Council Bluffs. After a successful working assessment and job shadow, she showed a natural inclination for childcare and was offered a position. "Sarah has stated that she loves working with little children and loves having a community job," said Vodec Employment Specialist Katey Mikels.

VODEC ONLINE STORE



Help us create awareness in the communities we serve.

We're proud of what we do, and we're not afraid to show it. So when you purchase Vodec gear and wear it in your community, you're helping us **spread the word about our services**, and that's great!



FOR A LIMITED TIME

April 1st through May 15th.

Start your online shopping spree here:

<https://vodecapparel.itemorder.com/shop/sale/>

Donate online for the Polar Plunge May 7th

The Vodec polar plunge team in Council Bluffs, IA, is now taking donations online. Special Olympics Iowa is holding the event at Lake Manawa in Council Bluffs on May 7th. Money raised from the event supports Special Olympics Iowa.

“Many of our consumers enjoy participating in Special Olympics,” states Collin Hames, Vodec’s Residential Manager in Council Bluffs. “Consumers enjoy the competition and learn about sportsmanship and teamwork. The mission of Special Olympics Iowa aligns with Vodec’s mission of realizing potential. As with prior polar plunges, we will have a real cool time (pun intended).”

- The Special Olympics Polar Plunge is Saturday, May 7th. The entry fee for the Polar Plunge is \$75.
- This year, Special Olympics Iowa is adding a Cornhole Tournament the morning of the plunge. The entry fee is \$50.
- Proceeds from both events go to Special Olympics Iowa.

To join Vodec's team or donate, please check out Vodec's team fundraising page for Special Olympics Iowa.

(<https://www.classy.org/team/417654>)

Vodec Iowa Home and Community-Based Services Re-certified

On March 23, Vodec was issued a three-year certification from the Iowa Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) quality improvement organization. The three-year accreditation for the maximum period possible. The three-year accreditation results from an on-site review of policies and procedures, member records, employee records, site tours, and other evidence. The Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) requires state certification.

Jeremy Dunkirk and Tina Hardy, Vodec's regional Operations Directors for Council Bluffs and Urbandale, IA, respectively, led their teams in the review. "I enjoyed the certification review process," states Jeremy Dunkirk, western Iowa Services Operations Director. "Many players on my team participated in the review, including Andrea Smith, Vodec's Quality Assurance Director, who did a nice job linking us to information and resources. She has a great deal of knowledge," added Dunkirk.

Thank you all for the terrific response to our wishlists!

Here are a few more things we need:

word search books	25-piece jigsaw puzzles
toilet paper tubes	100-piece jigsaw puzzles
plain paper plates	300-piece jigsaw puzzles
craft tissue (crepe paper)	Q tips
colorful markers	colored Pencils

Drop any of these items off at one of our three locations listed on page 8

Right: Consumer Tim using donated items in a craft project in Vodec's Urbandale, IA development center.





612 S. Main Street
Council Bluffs, IA 51503

Our mission 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 an equal opportunity employer. There is equal opportunity for services and for employment, retention and advancement without regard to race, national origin, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability and veteran status or any other classifications protected by state or federal law.

VODEC is a private, non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation.
Donations may be tax-deductible.

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