



THE VOICE | #realizingpotential

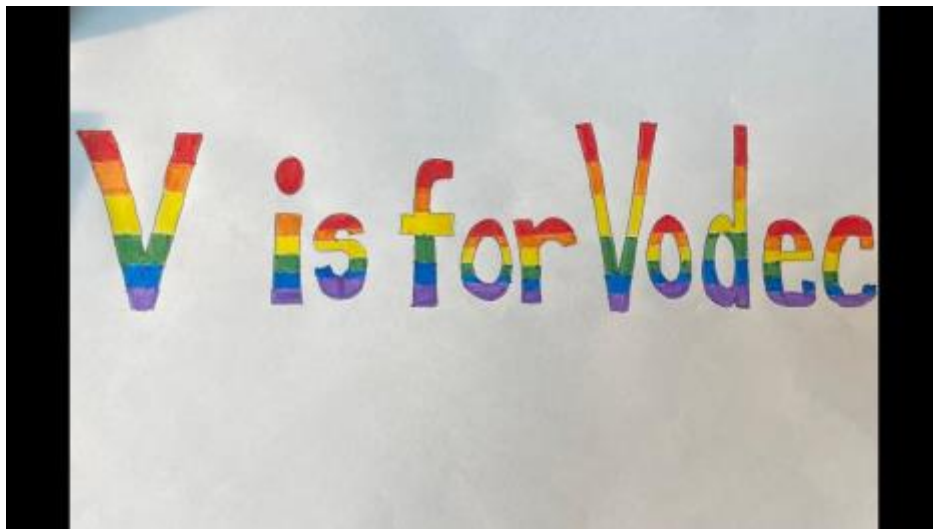
MARCH | APRIL 2021

Vodec provides services to people with disabilities so they may live, work and participate in the community in the least restrictive environment to achieve their full potential. We are 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 classification protected by state or federal law.

## In This Issue

- Raising Awareness: March is DDAM
- Steve's Corner: What Can You Do?
- Introducing Virtual Vodec After Hours
- Vodec Host Home Helps Consumer with Brain Injury Thrive
- New Health & Fitness Sessions Under Way at Omaha Development Center
- Employee and Consumer COVID-19 Vaccinations Help Create Safe Physical Environments
- SAVE THE DATES: Polar Plunge, Harvester Art Market
- Thank You for Your Support
- Milestone Buster
- Contact Us

## Raising Awareness: March Is DDAM



1 - V is for Vodec

*The mayors of Omaha and Council Bluffs have proclaimed March as National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month in their respective cities. Pictured at the top of this issue is Vodec consumer Emily H.*

with Omaha Mayor Jeanne Stothert's proclamation. Below is the text of Council Bluffs Mayor Matt Walsh's proclamation, which he presented to Vodec CEO Steve Hodapp March 8. Take a moment to view and share our "V is for Vodec" video on your social media channels!

**WHEREAS**, individuals with development disabilities, their families, friends, neighbors and co-workers encourage everyone to focus on the abilities of all people; and

**WHEREAS**, the most effective way to increase this awareness is through everyone's active participation in community activities and the openness to learn and acknowledge each individual's contribution; and

**WHEREAS**, opportunities for citizens with developmental disabilities to function as independently and productively while reaching their full potential must be fostered in our community; and

**WHEREAS**, we encourage all citizens to support opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities in our community that include full access to education, housing, employment, and recreational activities.

**NOW, THEREFORE, I**, Matthew J. Walsh, Mayor of the City of Council Bluffs, Iowa, do hereby proclaim March 2021 as *Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month* in the City of Council Bluffs, and we recognize that our communities are stronger when everyone participates. Take time to get to know someone with a disability and recognize that we all reach full potential together.

**IN WITNESS WHEREOF**, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the official seal of the City of Council Bluffs, Iowa, to be affixed this 8th day of March, in the year Two Thousand Twenty One.

**Matthew J. Walsh, Mayor | City of Council Bluffs, Iowa**

## Steve's Corner: What Can You Do?



by Vodec CEO Steve Hodapp

March is National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. To help foster awareness, let's start with a definition.

Developmental disabilities are a group of conditions due to an impairment in physical, learning, language or behavior areas. These conditions begin during the developmental period, may impact day-to-day functioning and usually last throughout a person's lifetime\*.

In plain speak, a developmental disability could be a mental or physical condition that creates challenges for a normal inclusive life. It could be obvious - someone in a wheelchair. It could be less obvious when the disability is cognitive.

One side effect is the attitude of a non-disabled person toward a person with a developmental disability. Generally, this attitude is one toward the person with a development disability as being 'less than', unimportant or worse.

Sad to say, but in the old days (and not really all that long ago), a person with a developmental disability may have been hidden by the family or pushed off to an asylum. The person would have been treated horribly by members of his or her community.

During March, there'll be any number of 'feelgood' activities and announcements throughout this country to create more awareness of the progress that has been made for inclusion of persons with developmental disabilities in their communities. There'll also be awareness created about the progress yet required for those persons to be fully included.

To be very clear, a LOT of progress has been made to enable a person with a developmental disability to enjoy the benefits of inclusion. There are more opportunities for employment, housing and socialization in the community than ever before. Yet, for example, as recently as 2019, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports the unemployment rate for a person with a developmental disability was 7.3 percent, about twice the rate for a person without a disability.

It's great that a whole month can be devoted to creating awareness. But how about the other 11 months? The stories of people with disabilities, their successes and challenges need to be shared. People need to pay attention. People need help to learn how they can help inclusion be more than a goal.

What can you do?

- Hire a person with a developmental disability.
- Rent safe and comfortable housing to him or her.
- Include him or her in the social activities you enjoy.
- Give him or her a ride to the grocery store.

In short, help him or her be part of the life you enjoy. Simply include him or her as you would anyone else, and do it year round.

*Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

## Introducing Virtual Vodec After Hours



*2 - Ignite Your Imagination, which will use acting techniques to help consumers tell their own stories, will be offered as an April course as part of Virtual Vodec After Hours.*

It's been a year since COVID-19 began changing the way people live their lives, and many of those changes remain in place today. One of the most difficult is staying home and avoiding unnecessary contact with the public.

In an effort to help consumers combat the social isolation they may be feeling when they are unable to attend Vodec day services, Vodec has added another tool to its roster of virtual programming: Virtual Vodec After Hours. Here's how it works:

- Virtual Vodec After Hours (VVAH) is a series of courses consumers can take during the evening and on weekends.
- The courses are available on Zoom, a virtual platform you can access from your smart phone, tablet, laptop or desktop computer.
- Each course is taught by a Vodec staff member or community partner experienced in providing services to adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities.
- Each course comes with a limited-edition supply box to enhance participation.
- The fee is \$25 per month. This \$25 monthly VVAH membership fee allows consumers to attend any or all course sessions.

In March, the VVAH course offerings are Movie Mondays, Drawing Basics, Sports & Nutrition, Community Influencers and Musical Instruments.

The Sports & Nutrition Course, held on Wednesday nights, is designed to help consumers learn how to eat well and stay active. It also includes some fun health and fitness challenges.

The Community Influencers course, held on Saturday afternoons, focuses on a different topic each month. To celebrate March as Women's History Month, the March sessions are helping consumers learn about famous women who've made a difference locally and worldwide.

All courses offered in Virtual Vodec After Hours are developed around the interests of Vodec consumers. Some courses will be offered more than once, and others may be one-time offerings.

The monthly \$25 VVAH membership fee also includes admission to one Virtual Vodec Social Event each month. The March 2021 Virtual Vodec Social Event, Disney Villains vs. Sweethearts, will be held Saturday, March 27, from 6:00 to 8:00pm.

Registration for the April 2021 courses is open now through March 31. [You can register online](#) or in person at the front desk of Vodec's development centers in Omaha, Council Bluffs and Urbandale. The \$25 fee can be paid via cash or check. The payment deadline is March 31 - the same day you can pick up your supply box. Register early to secure your spot!

For more information about participating in Virtual Vodec After Hours, contact Vodec Services Operations Director Daryn Richardson at [drichardson@vodec.org](mailto:drichardson@vodec.org) or the Vodec Services Operations Director in your area (see [vodec.org/who-we-are/our-team/](https://vodec.org/who-we-are/our-team/) for contact information).

## Vodec Host Home Helps Consumer with Brain Injury Thrive



3 - Felicia N. and a few of her puzzles

*Every nine seconds, someone in the United States sustains a brain injury, culminating in more than 3.5 million injuries each year\*. March is Brain Injury Awareness Month, a nationwide effort led by the Brain Injury Association of America to destigmatize brain injury, empower those who have survived a brain injury and promote the many types of support available. Vodec is certified to provide day and residential services to individuals with brain injuries.*

Felicia N. loves cheetah print and watching movies that give her a good scare. She's also a puzzle master, and the walls of her room display the results of her patience and determination in putting them together, tiny piece by tiny piece.

It's been four years since the Des Moines native suffered a stroke that left her with aphasia (loss of the ability to understand or express speech) and difficulty with her balance. She was unable to move to a standing position from her wheelchair without assistance and couldn't turn herself around to face the opposite direction.



After a hospital stay and a year in a nursing home, Felicia was ready for the next phase of her life. Returning to her Des Moines apartment and job as a housekeeper wasn't an option, so Felicia's care team placed her in a local group home with three consumers. While the group home setting can be an ideal match for people who enjoy the roommate experience and spending time with their peers, Felicia's team began exploring other options that might better suit the 54-year old's preferences and personality.

The result? A Vodec-managed host home in Felicia's hometown.

"A host home is a home-based family first program that allows people with disabilities to live in a residential setting with the natural supports of a family setting," said Vodec Central Iowa Services Operations Director Sheila Stoneburner. "It allows our consumers to receive one-on-one assistance with achieving their individual goals."

Vodec host home provider Aidah Cherop said the decision to open her home to Felicia after their first encounter just felt right. "She was super happy and jovial, and I thought to myself, 'This is my person,'" Cherop said.

Felicia moved into Cherop's Des Moines home last June and has been making steady progress on her goals. Struggles occur, but they're approached with patience, caring and a sense of humor. At first, communication was difficult, which Felicia found incredibly frustrating. "She had a hard time expressing herself, so we did a lot of pointing and writing," Cherop said.

With a lot of hard work, communication has improved a great deal since move-in day, as has Felicia's mobility. "She's funny, engaging and likes to be independent, which is why I think we get on so well," Cherop said.

Felicia helps with shopping, is learning to cook healthier options, folds and puts away the family's laundry, and loves playing with Malki, Aidah's 10-month-old son, when time allows. She's lost 30 pounds since moving in with the Cherops and has increased both the time and distance she's able to walk with the help of a cane.

Now that spring is almost here, more time outdoors will soon be possible. One of Felicia's favorite places to visit is Gray's Lake Park, a 166.6-acre urban oasis with a walking/bike path and a variety of water amenities. There's also plenty of shaded tables – perfect for spreading out the pieces of a puzzle.

*\*Source: Brain Injury Association of America*



## New Health & Fitness Sessions Under Way at Omaha Development Center



*4 - How about some karate?*



*5 - Beth Joslin (left) and Micky Jackson*

Micky Jackson and Beth Joslin have a shared vision: to make Vodec's Omaha day services the best in Nebraska.

Jackson, Vodec's Nebraska services operations director, and Joslin, day services manager for Vodec's Omaha Development Center, spent more than a year researching and planning a new approach to day services, one that puts consumer choice at the top of the list each time they enter the front doors at 7110 F Street in Omaha. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Fast forward to March 2021, and Vodec's Omaha Development Center is beginning to implement its new approach, one topic area at a time. Up first: health and fitness.

"My desire to remain as healthy as can be is something I love to share, so I thought why not incorporate something so beneficial into our routine at Vodec?" Joslin said. "It gives us the opportunity to expand our day services while continuing to offer a variety of activities to the consumers we serve. Your body is your most priceless possession – take care of it."

As of March 1, Vodec consumers attending day services in Omaha now have the option of participating in daily sessions of health and fitness fun. Every Monday through Friday morning, they are being introduced to new ways to improve their health and wellness. March session topics include Zumba, karate, line dancing, yoga, strength training, boxing and even hula dancing. But the emphasis isn't all on the physical side of health.

Other sessions focus on how to cope with stress, the importance of good hygiene and understanding mental health. "I want to show our consumers there are fun ways to exercise that don't require you to be a super athlete," said Malik Crawford, day services assistant and instructor of the health and fitness offerings. "You can swim, dance, bike, lift weights, do yoga or participate in team sports — it doesn't matter."

Consumers can sign up to attend sessions that interest them. The karate sessions, which are happening weekly in March, were incredibly popular from the start. "The sign-up sheet for this class was two pages long," Crawford said. "I want our consumers to understand that moderate activity does far more for us than make us physically stronger. It helps us socialize and reveals hidden strengths."

A large front section of the Omaha Development Center has been repurposed to accommodate the health and fitness activities so consumers can participate in a safe way that follows established COVID-19 protocols. For starters, it's currently home to inspirational décor, a treadmill, an exercise bike, yoga mats, health and fitness reading materials, and a variety of workout videos and apps. Other items will be added over time.

In the future, consumers from other Vodec locations and residential settings will be able to participate in the Omaha health and fitness activities via Zoom, adding to Vodec's growing list of virtual service offerings.

Subsequent topic areas will be introduced in Omaha in the coming months. All will be based on consumer interest. Individual staff will manage each topic area, just as Crawford is doing with the health and fitness activities.

Jackson credits her entire team with embracing the new approach to day services and noted that Kellie Katelman, Vodec's special education teacher, has been integral to its development.

"Our goal is to provide habilitative yet fun activities for our consumers on a daily basis," Jackson said. "These activities will be implemented based on what the consumers want and allows them to choose what they want to participate in throughout the week."

For more information about Vodec's health and fitness activities in Omaha, contact Joslin at [bjoslin@vodec.org](mailto:bjoslin@vodec.org).

## Employee and Consumer COVID-19 Vaccinations Help Create Safe Physical Environments



*6 - Western Iowa Services Operations Director Mark Stromer receives his 2nd COVID-19 vaccination.*

Vodec celebrated more than Valentine's Day and Fat Tuesday in February. The year's shortest month also marked an important milestone in the fight against COVID-19.

In Omaha, Vodec - with help from Kohl's Pharmacy - held vaccination clinics Jan. 14 and Feb. 12 for eligible employees, consumers, shared living and respite providers so they could receive both doses of the vaccine.

In Western Iowa, Vodec sent eligible residential employees, host home and respite providers to vaccinations clinics Jan. 16 and Feb. 13 through the Pottawattamie County Health so they could receive both doses as well as a March 6 clinic for those who missed the first clinic.

In Central Iowa Jan. 12, Vodec started sending eligible employees, host home and respite providers to local pharmacies to receive vaccinations with help from a local health department.

"Our day program environments are now as safe as they're going to get without the total elimination of COVID-19," said Vodec CEO Steve Hodapp. "We're seeing consumers return to service, and we're not letting up on any of the safety protocols we've carefully put in place since last March," he noted.

Below is a partial listing of what Vodec continues to do to help prevent the spread of COVID-19:

- Employees, visitors and consumers are required to wear masks when they are in all Vodec development centers.
- Employees are wearing masks when working in a residential group home.
- Vodec is following CDC and state guidance on the number of people who can gather in one room at the same time.

- All shared surfaces are disinfected daily.
- Air purifiers were purchased and placed at the Council Bluffs and Urbandale development centers and in employee training rooms.
- Individualized tables were purchased for some areas to assist with social distancing.
- Consumers are not sharing equipment, devices or materials.
- Route drivers are wiping down and disinfecting the interior of each vehicle after each transport with consumers.
- Vodec has installed sneeze guards at the front desk of each Vodec facility, in vehicles and on tables.
- Lunch and breaks are staggered. Appropriate spacing of lunch tables was created for social distancing.
- Every consumer is expected to wash his or her hands upon arrival, during break and lunch, and before departure. Employee assistance is provided as needed.
- Consumers can wash their hands at any time during the day but are expected to at the times listed above.

**For a complete list of Vodec's COVID-19 safety protocol, visit [www.vodec.org](http://www.vodec.org).**

## SAVE THE DATES: Polar Plunge, Harvester Art Market

### **2021 Polar Plunge April 10**

Let's face it - living through this winter prepared you for the cold. Why not put that experience to a good cause? Join Vodec's 2021 Polar Plunge Team! This year's event is set for Saturday, April 10, at the Lake Manawa Yacht Club.

Vodec Team Captain Jade Donovan is currently seeking team members for this annual Special Olympics fundraiser. Team members are asked to raise a minimum of \$75. If you're too chicken to take the plunge, you can register as a chicken and raise funds! If you don't want to become a team member, consider donating to one! Vodec consumers routinely participate in Special Olympics events.

[Click here](#) to become a team member or donate to an existing team member.

Questions? Contact Jade at [jdonovan@vodec.org](mailto:jdonovan@vodec.org).

### **Harvester Artist Market May 8**

Vodec consumers have been invited to participate in the 2021 Harvester Artist Market Saturday, May 8, at the Harvester Artist Lofts & Gallery, 1000 S. Main Street in Council Bluffs.

Vodec will have a table at the event and will be selling art created by Vodec consumers. All sales proceeds will be given directly to the artist. Watch our social media channels for more information as the event nears!

## Thank You for Your Support



*7 - Thank you from Vodec consumer Drake P. and all of us at Vodec for your support!*

The following list reflects donations to Vodec from Jan. 15 through Feb. 28:

- Amazon Smiles
- American National Bank
- Bank of America
- Donna Bush
- Jeremy Dunkirk
- Jacque Evans
- Teresa Gleason
- Miles and Crystal Havekost
- Steve Hodapp

- Holy Family Knights of Columbus
- Patricia Kelly
- Maria Mabe
- Thomas and Ann Moore
- Network for Good
- Omaha Community Foundation
- Andrew Smith

You can donate to Vodec via PayPal at [vodec.org/donors](https://vodec.org/donors) or send checks and money orders to:

Vodec

Attn: Donations

612 S. Main Street

Council Bluffs, IA 51503

## Milestone Buster



*8 - Matt J. at work in Council Bluffs*

Matt J. loves to count and often celebrates with numbers. On Dec. 14, 2020, the Vodec consumer observed his third-year anniversary as an employee at the Salvation Army Store and Donation Center on



West Broadway in Council Bluffs. With the encouragement of store staff and assistance from Vodec's Supported Employment Program, Matt has progressed from working in the back room to pricing, tagging and placing items on the store floor. He's now working toward reaching his next milestone...work anniversary #4 at the store.

## Contact Us

Do you have a question or a comment? We'd love to hear from you!

Vodec

612 S. Main Street | Council Bluffs, IA 51503

712.328.2638

[info@vodec.org](mailto:info@vodec.org) | [www.vodec.org](http://www.vodec.org)

[www.facebook.com/vodecinc](https://www.facebook.com/vodecinc)

[www.youtube.com/vodec-tv](https://www.youtube.com/vodec-tv)

[www.linkedin.com/vodec](https://www.linkedin.com/vodec)