



THE VOICE | #realizingpotential

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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.

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VOLUNTEERS

Consumers Choose to Step Up and Step Out



1 - Central Iowa consumers Ronnie, Sam and Craig are masked up and ready to volunteer at the Greater Des Moines Habitat for Humanity Restore.

It's a Wednesday afternoon in July at Vodec's Urbandale Development Center. While a group of consumers on the activity floor get ready to make paper ice cream cone art topped with real sprinkles, Sam, Ronnie and Craig head to the parking lot, where they load into a Vodec van for a short trip to the Greater Des Moines Habitat for Humanity Restore.

The place is a treasure trove for home improvement seekers on a budget. It's also familiar territory for the Vodec trio, who choose to volunteer at the store on a regular basis. Restore relies on volunteers to help staff prepare donations for display, assist customers, keep the store clean and organized, and even help with special events.

"Volunteering opportunities are incredibly important for our consumers because it gives them a sense of accomplishment and, in some cases, provides them with the opportunity to learn soft work skills," said Central Iowa Services Operations Director Sheila Gathercole, who oversees Vodec's Urbandale location.

Upon arrival at Restore, the three volunteers make their way to the back room to clock in and receive today's task – sweeping the store's massive aisles. Each grabs a broom and is eager to begin. Vodec Day Services Assistant Mark Morris, also the group's driver, follows along with a large dustpan. He is at the ready to answer questions, provide direction if needed and offer praise for a good effort.

"I like picking up the dirt," says Ronnie, who works closely with Mark. Craig is eager to point out two men he calls his bosses—a pair of Restore employees in blue T-shirts with welcoming smiles. Sam concentrates on maneuvering his 36-inch push broom through the packed aisles, careful to avoid any customers stopped in front of an item they're considering.

After 30 minutes of continuous effort, Sam, Ronnie and Craig put away their work tools and say their goodbyes to the Restore staff. On the drive back to the development center, they talk about what they did. Everyone gets a high five from Mark as they exit the van.

Gathercole launched the volunteering program in 2017 as Vodec's sole day services employee in Urbandale. She helped establish the current day habilitation program as a day services supervisor and was named Central Iowa Services Operations Director in 2019. Goodwill of Central Iowa in Waukee and New Hope Bargain Shoppe in Perry were the first businesses to serve as volunteering sites for Vodec consumers in October 2017. Gathercole then established a partnership with the Greater Des Moines Habitat for Humanity Restore the following month.

Then COVID-19 hit, and Vodec's volunteering efforts ended at all three locations for safety reasons. Consumers just began volunteering at Restore again in July 2021. Gathercole said she hopes to reconnect interested volunteer consumers with Goodwill and New Hope in the coming months.

Many of the Urbandale development center's consumers refer to volunteering as their job or their work. Opportunities to volunteer are offered twice a week, and those interested can sign up as often as they like. "It's so rewarding seeing the smiles on their faces when they return from a volunteer activity," Gathercole said. "They're eager to tell me what they did."

If you're an Urbandale-area business interested in having Vodec consumers volunteer, contact Gathercole at sgathercole@vodec.org or 515.777.2114.

Steve's Corner

Together, we will successfully get through this and thrive.



by Vodec CEO Steve Hodapp

I'd like to share some of Vodec's responses to COVID-19 and some of the unique challenges we face. COVID fatigue is shared by most, but please bear with me.

First, some acknowledgments. Many of Vodec's responses are directly attributable to Andrea Smith. Andrea is our Quality Assurance Director. She has been the point person for navigating the myriad and ever-changing guidance from the CDC, NIH, OSHA and Iowa's and Nebraska's state and local Departments of Public Health.

Credit also goes to Joanne Hiller. Joanne is our HR Generalist. Joanne has been instrumental in management of the HIPAA and OSHA rules applicable to employees impacted by COVID.

In our finance department, Finance Director Aaron Houser and Accounts Payable Administrator Teresa Prosser have been responsible for requesting and/or tracking, then reporting about, the various COVID Cares Act and Payroll Protection Program funds received and subsequent COVID-related expenses.

Our foremost goal is protecting the health and safety of Vodec consumers and employees. Through the pandemic, our health and safety policies increased in number and intensity. Toward that goal, we have made hundreds of gallons of hand sanitizer available. We've gone through thousands of face masks. Bleach and bleach wipes have been used endlessly. Most in-person meetings have been suspended and replaced by virtual meetings, with investment made in employees' training and necessary equipment in support of the virtual meetings. Social distancing has been in place and supplemented with physical barriers on table tops and in our vehicles. Outings in the community for consumers were put on hold.

Plus, and maybe most importantly, we made COVID vaccinations available for all employees and consumers earlier this year. I could go on, but I hope you get the idea that Vodec has been responsible in taking measures to protect the health and safety of our people.

Consumers sheltering at home voluntarily or involuntarily has been a significant challenge for consumers and for Vodec. Absence from programs negatively impacts consumers' skills' acquisition and retention. Absence creates feelings of isolation, anxiety and depression.

Toward overcoming those challenges, Vodec creatively offered virtual services and activities. Who knew, for example, virtual dances could be the hit they've been? But if you are a consumer who has been sheltering at home and would like to return for in-person services, please contact us.

Absence also has a fiscal impact on Vodec. When a consumer does not access authorized services, Vodec does not receive payment it otherwise would. From March to June 2020, day programs – including Vodec's – weren't allowed to operate in Iowa per a proclamation by Iowa's governor. There still has not been a full recovery to the level of participation prior to the pandemic's first impact in March 2020.

There's also a challenge with the workforce. No doubt you know there isn't a business that hasn't been adversely impacted in its ability to attract and retain employees as a result of the COVID pandemic. Vodec has not been untouched by this challenge.

Despite a lesser need due to the number of consumers still sheltering at home, we still need to add employees that will enable more consumers to return to service. I ask for your help by making referrals for employment. Certainly, you know someone who's been displaced or is interested in rejoining the labor force. Direct them to Vodec, please.

If you have a question about our COVID responses, please reach out to us at 712.328.2638. We will continue to do everything in our power to make sure health and safety stays a highest priority.

Resources will continue to be available on site. Employees will remain vigilant about required protocols. Cooperation from all guests and visitors will be expected.

Together, we will successfully get through this and thrive.

Vodec Days in the Books

The first-ever Vodec Days celebration was held July 19-23 at Vodec's Omaha Development Center.

"It was a week-long celebration of every single person at Vodec," said Kellie Katelman, special education teacher at the Omaha development center. "After the hard year we had with COVID-19, we wanted to bring something fun to welcome back our consumers."

The Omaha development center plans to make Vodec Days an annual celebration to bring everyone together for years to come.

Events included chalk art in the parking lot, a pie-in-the-face contest, tie-dye projects, karaoke, games in the departments, a free lunch courtesy of Arby's, water activities, yard games, a visit from the Kona ice truck, pancakes and a week-ending dance party with DJs and glow sticks.

If your business is interested in sponsoring Vodec Days next year, contact Katelman at kkatelman@vodec.org.





DANCE

Across the Floor Teaches Movement, Manners + More



They started with sunglasses, scarves and drumsticks. Ten weeks later, then ended with attitude, new social skills and different ways to bust a move.

More than 60 consumers from Vodec's Council Bluffs, Omaha and Urbandale development centers participated in the "Across the Floor" pilot – a new movement program developed by WhyArts, a local arts nonprofit. The kicker...it was all done virtually.

All 10 sessions of the adaptive dance-based curriculum were taught via Zoom. Vodec day services staff helped consumers participate from each Vodec development center they attend. Each session focused on a new dance and a new social skill. In addition to learning a variety of line dances set to different eras of music, participants learned about relationship building, setting expectations, party planning, dining etiquette and personal hygiene, including clothes and hair.

"Each week, the consumers' excitement and confidence levels grew," said Stephanie Goodrich, a Vodec special education consultant. "They wanted to come up to the camera and show off their moves, answer the social skills questions and participate in role-play scenarios. Initially, we weren't sure how the consumers would respond to this curriculum since it was being offered virtually for the first time. Fortunately, with the support and encouragement of Vodec staff, it was a success!"

The final session included a public performance in June at Omaha's Turner Park hosted by Gotta Be Me, an Omaha nonprofit dedicated to promoting the inclusion of adults with disabilities into community life.

WhyArts Program Director Kim Clark-Kaczmarek said the next step for "Across the Floor" is to offer it in person.

"When you dance with a partner, you are learning a whole other skill set – how you ask someone to dance, how you touch hands appropriately, how you exhibit teamwork and respect," Clark-Kaczmarek said. "These are the key elements to the social-emotional connections we make when interacting with others."

The pilot program was funded by grants from the Lincoln Financial Foundation, the Omaha School Foundation and the Omaha Community Foundation's Community Enrichment Fund. For more information about "Across the Floor," email kim.ck@whyartsinc.org.

Restrictions on Group Homes Ease

Vodec recently revised Phase 4 of its COVID-19 plan for group homes. As of June 25, consumers in all Vodec group homes can now have unlimited visitors, non-essential outings can resume, and home visits are unlimited. Safety precautions remain in place. Please review the following information if your loved one is in a Vodec group home.

Visitors

- Group home consumers can now have unlimited visitors.
- People cannot visit if they are sick, have a temperature over 100.4 degrees, have respiratory symptoms or have two of the other known COVID-19 symptoms.
- Visitors will be required to take their temperatures before entering a Vodec group home.

- Visitors will be required to wash their hands upon arrival.
- Visitors will be asked to maintain social distance if they have not been vaccinated.
- Visitors will be required to bring and wear a mask.

Outings

- Outings can now include essential and non-essential trips.
- Consumers will follow social distancing rules if they are not vaccinated.
- Consumers will wash their hands before and after returning home
- Consumers will follow the mask requirements of all public places they visit.

Home Visits

- Home visits are now unlimited.
- The monitoring of a consumer's temperature, respiratory symptoms and other known symptoms will be completed when he/she returns to the group home.

To read the COVID-19 residential plan in its entirety, visit www.vodec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Amended-Residential-Phase-Plan-6.25.21.pdf.

Vodec Receives Community Impact Grant

Vodec is the recipient of a \$1,000 Community Impact Grant from the Pottawattamie County Community Foundation (PCCF) to support the purchase of a Phillips HeartStart Automated External Defibrillator (AED) for its 4th Street Duplex in Council Bluffs.

This lightweight, portable device delivers an electric shock through the chest to the heart, which can potentially stop an irregular heart beat and allow a normal rhythm to resume following sudden cardiac arrest. "This will support Vodec's efforts to provide a safe environment for those we serve and for Vodec employees and visitors," said Vodec CEO Steve Hodapp. "We are appreciative to the PCCF for its wonderful support."

Vodec has AEDs at its development centers in Omaha, Council Bluffs and Urbandale.

Host Home Providers Wanted in Cass County, Iowa

Vodec is growing its services in Cass County, Iowa, and is looking for families interested in becoming a host home provider.

Host homes provide training and support for people with developmental or intellectual disabilities in a single-family home setting, said Jade Donovan, Vodec's Western Iowa Residential Services Manager. They help individuals develop the skills necessary for daily living, including:

- Personal grooming and cleanliness

- Bed making and household chores
- Food preparation
- Community inclusion
- Transportation
- Social and leisure skills

Although host homes are not new, their numbers have grown tremendously in recent years due to successful outcomes for both parties involved.

Host home providers can be single, a couple or a family with children. The 24-7 seven-days-a-week care environment gives both provider and consumer consistency in terms of boundaries and expectations. For many host home providers, the consumer becomes an extended part of their family, Donovan said.

For more information about becoming a host home provider, email jdonovan@vodec.org, or call 712.328.2638.

Thank You for Your Support

The following list reflects donations to Vodec from Feb. 28 through July 21:

- Arby's
- Jana Benitez
- Donna Bush
- Barb Diblasi (in memory of Mike Driscoll)
- Jeremy Dunkirk
- Jacque Evans
- Family Fare
- Teresa Gleason
- Miles & Crystal Havekost
- Steve Hodapp
- HyVee
- Eric Jensen
- Claire Kelly
- Knights of Columbus
- Marilyn Leggio (in memory of Rose Leggio)

- Rob Mathena (in memory of Danny Propst)
- Maria Mabe
- Tim McMahan
- Pat Nekuda
- Mia Schrieber
- Andrea Smith

You can donate to Vodec via PayPal at www.vodec.org/donors, or send checks and money orders to:

Vodec

ATTN: Donations

612 S. Main Street

Council Bluffs, IA 51503

Contact Us

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

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