



The Vodec Voice

Realizing **Potential**

Vodec Days Return to Omaha for Third Year

The 3rd annual Vodec Days celebration was held at Vodec's development center in Omaha, NE. Vodec Days is a week-long celebration held from July 24 to July 28. Each day during the festival, consumers and employees happily enjoyed various games, food, crafts, and other activities. With the atmosphere of a mid-summer county fair, Vodec Days celebrates diversity and the talents of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and reminds us that we have much more in common than we sometimes realize.

Consumers and employees participated in a color run, creating colorful sidewalk art, face painting, and tie-dyed t-shirts. Consumers competed in a bubble-blowing contest, karaoke, and minute-to-win games. Consumers explored a variety of jobs during "career day."



Above: Madison Marshall, Day Services Coordinator, happily recovers from a pie.



Above: Lauren shows her singing talent.



Above: Justin creates some bubble magic.

Vodec employees volunteered to be targeted in a pie-in-the-face event. Other employees volunteered for an ice bucket challenge. A popular vote cast by consumers elected participating employees. The pie-in-the-face event produced predictably messy results, which were thoroughly enjoyed by all. Since the ice bucket challenge was held on a scorching summer day, the cooling effect of the water was enjoyed by the participants (after the initial shock, of course).

Delicious food was also on the menu. Consumers made monstrous root beer floats with the help of employees. A much-anticipated event was the arrival of two food trucks. Consumers and employees patiently waited in line to order from Family Traditions BBQ and Santiago's Mexican Food. We thank them for coming out.

"Vodec Days" continued on next page

"Vodec Days" from previous page

"It's important to remember how much we have in common regardless of our abilities. We all laugh the same," states Steve Hodapp, Vodec CEO. "Our team here creates a wonderful place to be," adds Hodapp. "I believe if work isn't fun, then it's work. Why not work at a fun place if you need to work?"



Above: Consumers and employees wait in line for marvelous mexican food from Santiago's food truck.

Bowling with Elm Consumers

Bowling at Omaha Western Bowl is one of the favorite community outings of the consumers in the Elm program in Omaha. In midtown Omaha, Western Bowl offers a successful experience in a stimulating environment. The bowling alley is a favorite for employees as well. "Western Bowl is full of colorful lights and exciting sounds," stated Kellie Ketelman, Day Services Manager. "Consumers bowl using adaptive devices and enjoy some friendly competition."



Above: Sophia Tongvanh, Day Services Assistant, coaches Matthew.



Above: Corrin Kozol, Day Services Assistant, coaches Faute.

Iowa MCOs Reach Out to Consumers Who May be in Danger of Losing Their Medicaid Benefits

Iowa Medicaid and the Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) - Amerigroup, Iowa Total Care, and Molina Healthcare - are working to make sure as many members as possible keep their Medicaid health coverage after the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) continuous coverage requirement.

The MCOs might contact Vodec consumers and guardians in several ways –phone calls, texts, or emails- to ensure the consumers' information is current. Suppose they cannot contact the consumer or guardian? In that case, someone from their organization might appear at the consumer's home to help with renewal paperwork or to schedule an appointment to fill it out over the phone.

This effort is targeted at consumers who qualify for Supplemental Security Income (SSI)



and for members who are elderly, blind, or disabled.

If a consumer or guardian is not sure if they have completed or received renewal paperwork, they should reach out to the Iowa HHS Contact Center at 1-800-972-2017



Direct Support Professionals are the Lifeblood of Vodec

DSP is a term that you may have been hearing more frequently and will be more so. A DSP is a Direct Support Professional. Today, this is loosely defined as a front-line employee of an organization that provides services to persons with developmental disabilities.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), “DSPs support people with disabilities to participate in their communities, including through employment. For example, they may serve as job development staff to assist in finding and/or customizing jobs or as job coaches who provide direct employee assistance on the job.” They also provide other services, such as helping with activities of daily living.

The DOL goes on to explain some functions a DSP provides.

Supporting engagement with the community by providing:

- Support in less congregate and more individualized settings
- Job Coaching
- Employment support
- Transportation
- Using creative thinking for accommodations to help people with disabilities to be more independent

Providing caregiving and support with activities of daily living, including:

- Medication administration
- Mobility assistance
- Wound care
- Accessing food
- Working with the people they support to

Advocate for rights and services, such as:

- Accessing resources and opportunities in the community
- Working with the employer to customize job duties
- Providing emotional support



DSPs are the lifeblood of any organization. All the things they do are in direct connection with consumers. DSPs also connect with consumers’ families, building positive relationships. DSPs are part of the team approach to service delivery.

Within the developmental disabilities industry, DSPs are well-recognized. But outside the industry, not so much. There is an effort to provide more recognition of the status of DSPs in the overall workforce.

The U.S. Senate’s Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee (HSGAC) passed the Recognizing the Role of Direct Support Professionals Act ([S.1332](#)) earlier this year. The bill requires the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to consider the creation of a Standard Occupational Code (SOC) for direct support professionals when the code is subsequently revised (the next revision is anticipated to be 2028). If not, OMB must report why it did not create the code to Congress.

ANCOR supports the bill. ANCOR recently said, “The establishment of a distinct SOC for DSPs would enable the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to capture employment and wage data specific to this profession accurately. This, in turn, would support state and federal agencies in making informed policy decisions concerning the Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) program.”



“Direct Support” continues on the next page

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In short, An SOC may eventually positively impact wages earned by DSPs and the service rates providers receive to pay the wages.

Regardless of whether there's a SOC created for DSPs, DSPs are the lifeblood of an organization. Even without a SOC, DSPs have been recognized with their own week.

since 2008, September 10-16 is this year's national DSP Recognition Week. This is a time when those who benefit from their work can honor persons in those roles. Take the opportunity to say "Thank you" to DSPs with a kind word or action, not just this week but every week.

Recreating the Iowa State Fair

A week-long "Come to the Fair" celebration for Vodec's day services consumers was held at Vodec's Urbandale location. Consumers played a variety of carnival games, a photo booth, prizes, arts and crafts, and dunked employees in a dunk tank.



Above: Gloria is excited to cash in her tickets

The week-long event was held during the week of August 14 to 18. Consumers Led the event planning.

The event coincides with the Iowa State Fair. Iowa's world-famous state fair is a popular event that is the topic of conversation throughout the community.

Vodec employees produced the event. "Our employees enjoy ensuring our consumers have an amazing experience while in our care," said Tina Hardy, Vodec's Services Operations Director. Consumers are involved in selecting the fair events. "Consumer choice is one of our core principles, and our employees painstakingly work to expand their horizons by listening to what they want and creating new experiences for them. I am proud of our employees and the work they do."



Above: Sarah Meyer, Day Services Assistant, plays "Prize Drop" with Brittany.



Above: Austin enjoying the "Football Throw".



Above: Allison Watters, Residential Services Support Supervisor, plunges into the dunk tank, thanks to Martez.

Walking Clubs Take First Steps This Summer

Vodec employees created two walking clubs this summer. One walking club is in Urbandale, IA. The other walking club is in Council Bluffs, IA. Six to 10 consumers at each location participate in each Walking Club. Consumers and employees plan each walk. A walk may occur downtown, in a park, or on a woodland trail. The primary benefit of walking clubs is fun. Other benefits of the walking clubs include exercise, fresh air, and community wayfinding.

Consumers choose from various options. Des Moines has many miles of trails, as does Council Bluffs. With so many options, consumers easily find a new path to explore. There are favorite trails that consumers return to frequently. Consumers love walking over pedestrian bridges. In Council Bluffs, the Bob Kerrey is a 3,000-foot-long pedestrian bridge that spans the Missouri River between Council Bluffs and Omaha. In Des Moines, the Iowa Women of Achievement Bridge links the east and west sides of Des Moines at the northern edge of the Principal Riverwalk loop.



Above left to right in front:
Megan, Kennedy, Amanda, Curtus, and Janet
Standing in the back: Dan and Logan



Above from left to right:
Tommy B, Adriana, Norma, Derek, James, and Chris

The primary goal is to help consumers explore their community and have fun. Learning to navigate around the neighborhood is a useful and even a life-saving skill. Exercise is essential for everyone, including individuals with intellectual disabilities. According to Special Olympics, individuals with intellectual disabilities are likelier to lead sedentary lifestyles. Studies have shown that routine exercise helps reduce a multitude of health risks, aids in maintaining weight control, and improves mental well-being. Vodec's walking clubs help consumers achieve those objectives.

Below, left to right: Deb, Connie, Madilyn Kalbach,
Day Services Assistant, Paul, Rita, and Lindsey



Students Return to Council Bluffs, Urbandale, and Omaha Student Services Programs

With the conclusion of summer, students are returning to Vodec's Student Services programs. These students receive instruction and guidance from Vodec's direct support professionals throughout the school year.



Above left to right: ATP students Jacianna and Elijah enjoy a visit from some furry friends.

Vodec works with many school districts in Nebraska and Iowa. Vodec developed an agreement with these school districts that outlines the services to be provided. "We have several meetings with each school district to precisely design services that each district requests," states Daryn Richardson, Services Development Director. "It's important to take all the time needed to listen to the needs of each district and each special education teacher. It's interesting and understandable why each district's needs are slightly different. Each school has different resources, geographic locations, and prioritized areas of instruction. As a private nonprofit company serving the needs of individuals with disabilities, Vodec is in a unique position of adaptability and responsiveness."



Above left to right: ATP students Chad and Jacianna learn about making connections.

Each of Vodec's student services program locations is uniquely designed. The Council Bluffs IA Development Center has a bedroom, dining room, living room, kitchen, and classroom. This location also has a student work experience program (WEP). Students participating in WEP work in a community-based business under the guidance of a Vodec direct support professional. Referred to as a work site, each has a list of job duties students perform while working alongside business employees. Students are paid for the work they do. This way, WEP provides work experience and an opportunity for financial literacy. Additionally, WEP has a facility-based component for students with more complex needs.

The development centers in Council Bluffs and Urbandale, IA, each focus on activities of daily living, cooking, household cleaning, budgeting, internet safety, and appropriate social interaction. In Urbandale, students also participate in various volunteer activities and community outings. Students attending Vodec in Omaha, NE, are trained in transferable work habits and work routines and receive work-related instruction as part of an internship. At all locations, Vodec uses a curriculum designed for Vodec by a team of special education teachers.

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Each school district decides which student can participate in Vodec's student services. Once determined to be eligible, students remain so until they exit the program. Typically, this is when the

student reaches the age of 21. "Our goal for all of the students is to help them and their parents plan for the day after school services end. When each student is well prepared for this day, then we've done our job," adds Richardson.

Central Iowa Expands Urbandale Location



Left: Transition Focus consumers move in to the expanded area of the Urbandale Development Center.

Below: Workers install information technology hardware in the expanded area.

Work was recently completed on an expansion project for the Urbandale location. The location that houses the Transition Focus and Cares programs expanded into the bay to the west of the current site. The expansion will add 2,600 feet. The new space will be used for consumer development and meetings. The expansion adds conference rooms and more space to the location. The growth results from an increased demand for Vodec services in Urbandale.



Above: Workers install a doorway linking the expanded area to the rest of the Development Center.

"We've simply responded to the community's demands," said Steve Hodapp, Vodec CEO. "We've seen an increase in applications for enrollment in Transition Focus and Cares." Vodec operates two separate day programs at the Urbandale site. The Transition Focus

helps consumers develop the skills necessary to live as independent adults. The Cares programs helps consumers explore their community and develop the skills needed for community inclusion.

"We expect to continue to expand. Families are coming to us each day seeking help," adds Hodapp. "We don't want to turn away or stop anyone. We will do everything possible to help as many people as possible." In the last 12 months, Vodec has added a student services program for our students who have exited high school but are still eligible for school-funded services until age 21. Vodec has also been asked to expand to small towns around the Des Moines metro area.



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www.vodec.org 612 S. Main Street
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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.

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We are thankful for these generous donors.

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Steve Hodapp

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Vodec is certified by:

- The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF)
- Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services
- Iowa Department of Human Services
- Nebraska Department of Education

Vodec is affiliated with the following organizations:

- Council Bluffs, Iowa Chamber of Commerce
- 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)
- Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce

Daryn Richardson at drichardson@vodec.org or call (712) 328-2638.

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

- Amerigroup
- Iowa Total Care
- Molina Healthcare

Vodec is a contracted Community Rehabilitation Program with the Iowa Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

Vodec Entrance Criteria:

- Be at least 16 years of age for employment services
- Have behavior that is not dangerous to self or others
- Have medical needs within Vodec's scope of service
- Have transportation needs within Vodec's capability to provide
- Have funding in place prior to service provision