



# The Vodec Voice

March-April 2024

A Publication of the Vocational Development Center, Inc.

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## Valentine's Dances and Romances

All three of Vodec's regional locations, Urbandale, IA, Omaha, NE, and Council Bluffs, IA, celebrated Valentine's Day in various ways.

Council Bluffs Consumers attended the annual Valentine's dance at the Council Bluffs development center. They danced to a popular song list hosted by a DJ. They also enjoyed Hershey's Kisses, boxed meals, and delicious mocktails. Vodec registered Nurse Karen Godin was in attendance. "This was my first dance at Vodec," said Godin. "I am amazed at how quickly the consumers took to the dance floor. They have been looking forward to a fun evening with their friends!"



Above, left to right: Sharply-dressed couple Megan and Matt taking a break from dancing at the Council Bluffs Valentine Dance.



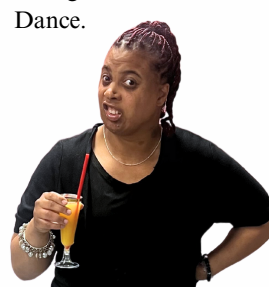
Above, left to right, Kimberly, Sarah Meyer, Day Services Assistant, and Raymond enjoy snacks at the Valentine's Party in Urbandale.

Vodec's direct support professionals (DSPs) prepared boxed meals. These meals comprised of a sub sandwich, chips, and a cookie.

Consumers quenched their thirst with some bright red mocktails. The mocktails were made from a combination of juice and soda pop, garnished with fruit.



Above, left to right: Kyleigh and Lori DeSart, Day Services Assistant, sharing a laugh at the Valentine Party in Urbandale.



Above: Marlo is enjoying a mocktail at the Omaha Valentine Dance.



Above, left to right: Lynn and Edward, mother and son, pose at the Valentine photo booth.

Meanwhile, in Omaha, consumers also celebrated. A DJ was hired for the dance, and DSPs created a balloon backdrop for photos and provided light refreshments and mocktails. The mocktails were a combination of pineapple juice and Sprite served in a champagne glass.

The celebrations continued on Valentine's Day in Urbandale. Consumers from the Transition Focus and Cares program enjoyed a Valentine's Day party with plenty of food and friendship. "Everyone had a terrific day," reported Elise Axtell, day services supervisor. The consumers played Valentine-themed carnival games and created Valentine cards and crafts."

Steve Hodapp, Vodec's CEO, who attended the dance in Council Bluffs, expressed his appreciation, "We are privileged to have a dedicated, compassionate team of DSPs and management who make an extra effort to coordinate these special events for our consumers in each region," said Hodapp.



# Responding to the Needs of Youth with Disabilities



Steve Hodapp, CEO

Vodec takes pride in its responsiveness to filling a need. We have a development strategy designed around having a culture of

preparedness to be responsive. This is atypical of development strategies more commonly thought about, where a company is interested in return on investment (ROI) and market domination.

Vodec is fiscally responsible without focusing on ROI. And we're not interested in dominating any market. We ARE interested in being the best service provider we can be. Keeping in mind our development strategy, we have been responding to calls for services for youth, both in-school and youth out of school. The following explains how we're responding.



Left to Right. Elijah and Auston prepared the chili using Vodec's Adult Transition Kitchen in the Council Bluffs Development Center.

School will be out soon; for some families, that means finding meaningful childcare for youth 13 to 19 during the summer months. For Iowa families, Vodec now offers a program for school-age youth 13 years old and older who have a developmental disability. The summer program is available to youth who are Medicaid members and on the HCBS waiver.

Vodec is also a certified Iowa childcare provider, meaning families may qualify for reduced fees when paying for the program privately. This may have more appeal in the summer, but I will mention that this is available year-round, like when there are no classes during parent conferences and teacher planning days.



Left to Right: Kristen Joslin, Day Services Coordinator. Joe, Elijah, and Auston are preparing for a cooking class in Council Bluffs' ATP.

A special education teacher is involved in planning and implementing instructional activities. As summer approaches—it will be here before you know it—we are seeing a growing interest in our childcare for youth 13 years old and up.

It's not too early to make arrangements. Our youth programs are available in Council Bluffs and to youth in Nebraska on a private-pay basis.



Top Row Left to Right: Day Services Coordinator Kristen Joslin Students: Joslin, Gavin, Ryan, and Christian Bottom Row Left to Right: Students Lilly and Rachel, Day Service Assistant Amanda Franks, Student Ryan, Day Service Assistant, Tana Lidgett (Council Bluffs' ATP's 2023 graduating class.)

We've added space to our Urbandale, Iowa, location for an Adult Transition Program (ATP) for in-school youth with developmental disabilities. This is us being responsive to expressed need in the area for a program to support students in their quest to learn skills for maximum independence after graduation. This will be similar to the ATP available in Council Bluffs, Iowa. The new space will be available on April 1.

Recent high school graduates access our Transition Focus program in Urbandale and Indianola, Iowa. Transition Focus aids participants in learning and hardening their independent life skills through instruction and

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community involvement. There is also a certified special education teacher involved in planning and implementing instructional activities for both the youth programs in Urbandale and Indianola.

We're also planning to be a service provider for Nebraska's new Family Support Waiver. Provider enrollment is available March 1, so by the time you read this our approval should be in-hand. This will enable us to serve youth up to 18 years old.

Like our Iowa youth services program, this will be available when there are no classes, like summers, parent conference days, and holidays. A certified special education teacher is involved in planning and implementing instructional activities. I encourage you to learn more about these programs designed for youth. For Iowa programs, contact Vodec's Services Development Director, Daryn Richardson, at [daryn@vodec.org](mailto:daryn@vodec.org)



Above: Transition students enrolled in Vodec's Day Programs in Urbandale. Top Row: Charles, Cameron, Katrina, Rachel  
Bottom row: Cael, Kyleigh, Alexis

or call 712-310-7453. Of course, you can also talk to local Vodec employees at any Vodec location.

If your student's school district is not yet a part of Vodec's youth programs network, please let Daryn know, or you can contact Kylene Simpson at [ksimpson@vodec.org](mailto:ksimpson@vodec.org) or 641-344-7491.

For the Nebraska Family Support waiver, contact Services Operations Director Micky Jackson at [mjackson@vodec.org](mailto:mjackson@vodec.org) or call 402-455-4648.

## Firefighters Visit Vodec Consumers in Urbandale



Above, left to right: Torie, Tim, Urbandale Firefighter, Marty; Mary, Matthew, Liz, Dale, and Martez pose in front of a fire truck.

Recently, firefighters from the Urbandale Fire Department stopped by the Urbandale Cares day program. They were invited as part of our first responder awareness program for consumers. The firefighters exhibited their firefighting equipment, including fire trucks, and also took the time to connect with the consumers.

“Individuals with intellectual disabilities like our consumers may get confused and become

disoriented when there is an emergency like a fire. Imagine seeing a firefighter in their mask and protective gear. It would be frightening to me and may appear frightening to consumers,” states Tina Hardy, Services Operations Director, “This is why we reach out to local fire stations. We are creating opportunities for them to become comfortable interacting with first responders before an emergency occurs.”

# Vodec adds IPS to the Community Employment Options

Last year, the Southwest Iowa Mental Health and Disability Services Region (MHDS) asked Vodec to help individuals with mental health and substance use issues and homeless individuals find work. In addition to the Southwest Iowa MHDS region, Vodec joins Heartland Family Services and Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation to offer a solution. Together, the agencies applied for funding to support bringing IPS to Southwest Iowa.

Approximately a year ago, the MHDS region received an award letter from the Iowa Health and Human Services Behavioral Health and Disability Services (BHDS) Division and Iowa's Center for Excellence in Behavioral Health (CEBH). Vodec's role in the process is to provide job development and coaching using the individual placement and support (IPS) model.

The supported employment IPS model helps job seekers with mental health and substance use issues and homeless individuals. This evidence-based practice requires therapists, social workers, and substance abuse counselors to create an employment plan for the job seeker. Then, Vodec job developers and coaches help find the job and coach the job seeker.

The state has been working to bring the IPS model to Iowans for several years. In 2020, the process began when Iowa received technical assistance from the Office of Disability Employment Policy to craft a funding model to deliver IPS services and participate in the Advancing State Policy Integration for Recovery and Employment Initiative (ASPIRE). Iowa is one of seven states selected to participate.



Above left to right: Darcey Sebolt-IPS State Trainer/Fidelity Reviewer; Tiffany Foley, SE & IPS Supervisor; Katey Mikels, IPS Employment Specialist, and Linn Nibbelink-Employment Policy Planner, Division of Aging and Disability Services

“The goals of IPS and Aspire are important,” says Tiffany Foley, Vodec’s Supported Employment Supervisor, “We are seeing results; we are helping people find work,”

Foley says Vodec's IPS program (and IPS in general) requires a placement professional who is trained and specializes in IPS. For Vodec, that person is Supported Employment Specialist Katey Mikels. "Katey is responsible for implementing the employment plan from opening to closing a consumer's case. Foley states, "So, no one on the SE team coaches them. Katey is the only one that works with them from start to finish, so to speak."

“Helping people with mental health and substance use issues find work is greatly needed, especially in Pottawattamie County,” adds Foley, “We need to make sure that our elected officials make funding for services like this a priority. Employing people with mental health or disability benefits the job seeker, the employer, the mental health and long-term care system, and supports economic development.”

“We are honored to provide IPS supported employment for job-seekers who have mental health diagnoses or are recovering from substance use,” says Steve Hodapp, Vodec CEO. “I encourage our elected officials in Iowa to continue prioritizing all support services for people with disabilities or other barriers to community integration.

# Consumers Rally at the Nebraska State Capitol

On March 12th, 2024, Vodec consumers and direct support professionals traveled to Lincoln, NE, to participate in a rally. The rally, sponsored by the Nebraska Association of Service Providers (NASP) and the Arc of Nebraska, sought to raise awareness and ask that services that support people with developmental disabilities be adequately funded. Many others from across the state joined Vodec consumers. The rally was held in the Rotunda of the capitol building.

Alana Schriver, NASP Executive Director, feels the rally is urgently necessary to advocate for Nebraskans with DD. "We received word from a Senator on the Appropriations Committee that there will be no additional funding for DD services in the budget," reports Schriver. This is unacceptable." This information from sources in the Unicameral quickly spread through the DD community, facilitating the rally.

A call for participation in the rally was sent out to all Nebraska providers. Vodec consumers were among those who answered the call. "We are always looking for ways for consumers to learn about government and civic processes," says Micky Jackson, Services Operations Director, "We support the consumers' making a trip to the state capital at least once a year; this year is no different," Jackson reports that consumers learn by doing. "We help them learn about democracy and their constitutional rights as voters. In total, 25 consumers made signs and attended the rally. For some, it was their first time to the capitol."



Above, back row left to right: Drake, Kate, David, Justin, Day Services Assistant Rhian Kocer, Jose, Rayliesha, and Day Services Assistant Priscilla Zadina rally in the capitol rotunda in Lincoln, NE

Schrive says the Nebraska budget proposal amounts to a cut in fees that pay for direct support professionals that most Nebraskans with DD rely on. "Between the rising costs of doing business and Nebraska's minimum wage increase, keeping the rates at the same level is essentially a rate cut," Schriver adds, "The truly frustrating thing is that Nebraska has a budget surplus and significant revenue. The state can afford to both cut property taxes and increase provider rates. It's deplorable for DHHS to sit on funding that could improve people's lives."



Above: Rayliesha stands holding a sign in the Nebraska capitol building.

# Developmental Disability Awareness Month

Every year, March marks Developmental Disabilities (DD) Awareness Month. As in years past, Vodec encourages everyone to recognize the significant contributions of men and women with developmental disabilities. This year, awareness events were planned at all our locations throughout the month. Additionally, we asked everyone to wear orange to support DD Awareness, discover the benefits of neurodiversity, and recall the history of people with developmental disabilities.

DD Awareness Month can be traced to 1987 when Ronald Reagan first declared March as a month dedicated to raising awareness. Reagan said, “According to our fellow citizens with such disabilities, both encouragement and the opportunities they need to lead productive lives and to achieve their full potential.”



Above, left to right: CEO Steve Hodapp poses with Council Bluffs Mayor Matt Walsh and the Official Proclamation.

Right, left to right: Day Services Manager Nicole Chase, Supported Employment Supervisor Tiffany Foley, and Supported Employment Specialist Katey Mikels prepare orange-colored treats for DD awareness day in Council Bluffs.



Above, left to right: Proudly wearing orange at the Omaha DD Awareness celebration are Amber, Kya, Scott, Employment Training Assistant Malik Crawford, Michael, Lori, and Lauren; bottom left to right: Krystal and James

All three Vodec regional locations hosted various events designed to raise awareness. On March 22, Council Bluffs Mayor Walsh proclaimed that March is officially developmental disabilities awareness month in Council Bluffs. On the same day, everyone enjoyed orange-themed refreshments and bright orange clothing in Council Bluffs and Omaha locations. On April 1, Urbandale also had a similar event, including comments by Mayor Bob Andeerg of Urbandale.

“Our Vodec history provides many examples of the innovative way we support our consumers with developmental disabilities and create community education events to highlight and encourage neurodiversity throughout the community,” says Daryn Richardson, Services Development Director, “We will continue to educate and advocate for consumers well into a brighter future. A bright orange future.”



# Transition Focus Consumers Provide “Hope” to the Homeless



Left; left to right: Transition Focus consumers Jazzmin, Cael, Day Services Assistant Connor Bustamante, Sammie, Katrina, and Taylor volunteer by serving lunch in downtown Des Moines Hope Cafe at the Bethel Mission.

Transition Focus consumers in Urbandale volunteer at the Hope Ministries Cafe at the Bethel Mission in Des Moines. They work with staff to set up the food area, serve meals, interact with guests, and help clean up after the meal. “Volunteer opportunities like Hope Cafe provide excellent work experience, an important part of the transition-focused program,” says Tina Hardy, Services Operations Director.



Above: some of the hot meals served by consumers at the cafe.

Many of the skills developed through work experience opportunities are considered transferable skills. This means that some skills are needed to maintain a job regardless of the occupation. These skills include professional ethics, productive work habits, routines,

acceptable verbal and nonverbal communication, and subjective and objective thinking. The Transition Focus Program was created for consumers who want to develop skills that lead to life with minimal support required.”

The cafe exists to help people who are homeless, hungry, abused, and illegal substance users. Located in downtown Des Moines, the cafe provides hot meals and a sense of hope. In addition to the cafe, consumers volunteer at the Des Moines Ronald McDonald House, where they prepare meals and help clean for families that are guests of the Ronald McDonald House.



Above, left to right: Jazzmin learning how to serve the guests from Day Service Coordinator Ryley Schulte.



612 S. Main Street

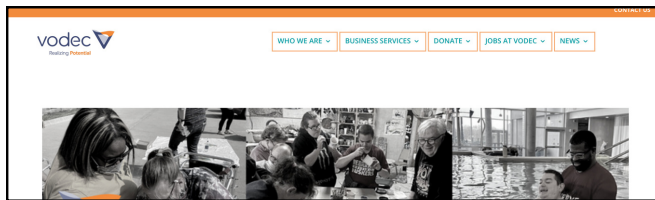
www.vodec.org Council Bluffs, IA 51503

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 (consult your tax preparer for specific information about this).

**Use the QR code below to find our website:  
www.vodec.org**



## We are thankful for these generous donors.

Donna Bush  
Jeremy Dunkirk

Miles and Crystal Havekost  
Steve Hodapp

Andrea Smith

### Vodec is accredited by:

- The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF)

### Vodec is Certified by:

- 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

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

- Wellpoint
- Iowa Total Care
- Molina Healthcare

### Vodec is a contracted Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) 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

**For additional information about Vodec, please get in touch with Daryn Richardson at drichardson@vodec.org or call (712) 328-2638.**

