

A Publication of the Vocational Development Center, Inc - March 7, 2025

## Vodec to Celebrate Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month on March 21, 2025

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, Vodec employees and consumers are planning awareness events at all of our locations on March 21, 2025

“It is important for everyone to participate in developmental disabilities awareness day,” states Daryn Richardson, Services Development Director, “Participation helps everyone to focus on the gifts and talents of people with developmental disabilities.” Richardson explains that this awareness opens doors for inclusion and opportunity. Richardson offers four ways that people may participate in Developmental Disabilities awareness day. These are listed below.

- 1-Share our social media posts on Facebook and Instagram
- 2-Learn about success stories of people with developmental disabilities by subscribing to the *Vodec Voice*. To subscribe, email Daryn Richardson: [daryn@vodec.org](mailto:daryn@vodec.org)
- 3-Support Vodec in making a difference in the lives of people with disabilities by donating to Vodec by mail or online.
- 4-Donate by check or money order to:

Vodec  
Attn: Donations  
612 South Main Street  
Council Bluffs, IA 51503  
Donate through PayPal  
via the QR code (right).



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



Above, left to right: Pam Wyzkowski, Employment Training Coordinator and Micky Jackson, Services Operations Director



Left: Marlo holding a DD Awareness sign.

Above: Andrea Smith, QA Director



Each of Vodec’s development centers are planning events. All employees and consumers will be dressed in bright orange. Consumers and employees are planning orange-themed games, learning about the history of the disability rights movement, visiting with elected officials, and plenty of orange-themed refreshments. “We hope to inspire a lot of consumers’ self-advocacy,” adds Richardson.

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.

## Vodec Participates in Provider Onsite Review Pilot

Micky Jackson, Services Operations Director Nebraska



This past July, I was given the opportunity to join a collaboration work group formed by Liberty Healthcare and the NE Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to implement a new initiative called the Provider Onsite Review.

This initiative serves as an agency report card, evaluating a provider’s ability to deliver person-centered, safe, and high-quality support to individuals receiving waiver services. When given the chance to participate in a pilot of six providers to finalize the review process, of course we jumped at the opportunity!

The onsite review included participant interviews, staff/consumer observations, and a targeted administrative interview by Liberty with our leadership team to collect data about person-centered practices and procedures within Vodec.

Right left to right: Vodec Nebraska’s leadership team: Amy Titus, Residential Services Supervisor; Breena Walton, Employment Training Supervisor; Collin Hames, Day Services Supervisor; Kellie Katelman, Day Services Manager; Micky Jackson, Services Operations Director; Erin Moore, Residential Services Supervisor; Kay Akomolafe, Day Services Supervisor; and Corey McCormick, Transportation Supervisor.



## Consumers and Consumer Choice are not Empty Words at Vodec



-Steve Hodapp, CEO

People with developmental disabilities have for some years now been referred to as consumers.

Honestly, I've never quite figured out what they consume, but we'll go with it. More recently the reference has been migrating to people being supported. Maybe that's better, I don't know. The powers that be will likely make some announcement someday about a perfect term. For now, because consumer choice obviously uses consumer, let's do that.

Consumer choice has always been important to Vodec. What is consumer choice? Maybe it's not as easy to identify as one might think. The National Council on the Aging (NCOA) developed the following definition in partnership with a variety of aging and disability groups:

*"[It] is a philosophy and orientation to the delivery of home and community-based services whereby informed consumers make choices about the services they receive. They can assess their own needs, determine how and by whom these needs should be met, and monitor the quality of services received. [It] may exist in differing degrees and may span many types of services. It ranges from the individual independently making all decisions and managing services directly to an individual using a representative to manage needed services. The unifying force in the range of consumer-directed and consumer choice models is that individuals have the primary authority to make choices that work best for them, regardless of the nature or extent of their disability or the source of payment for services."*

To break this down, a consumer may make informed decisions alone or may enlist the help of others. Informed decisions cover a lot of ground, as is normal for anyone. The consumer is the "primary authority".



Above, left to right Services Operations Director Micky Jackson reviews activity options with Marlo.

So how does this work in the real world? Each consumer has a team of stakeholders. The consumer with their stakeholders discusses a program plan which may include where the consumer can live and with what level of supports, and what and how day habilitation or employment services, if either is chosen, are provided. This also involves 'who', as in who is chosen to provide services.

Despite the consumer being the "primary authority" about what they need (not to be confused with what they want), team members have considerable input. Input can be from a service funding perspective, a family/guardian preference, and a provider's representative about available capacity.

Now, all that being said, I want to thank consumers and their teams for choosing Vodec and the services we provide. I know there are other providers. And I know some consumers flit from one to another. But I know that when Vodec is an original choice or one after a 'flit', the choice is appreciated. All of you who participate in the informed choice process, I thank you and truly do appreciate that you accept Vodec as a premier provider.

*Steve Hodapp*



## Students and Youth Access Vodec Day Programs During Summer Break

Students with disabilities are benefiting from Vodec during summer break. Each year students participate in Vodec day programs while on their summer break from school. Participating in Vodec day programs have many benefits for the students, their parents or caregivers, and the school district as well. Various types of funding are available to pay for the program

“Approximately 60 students participate each summer,” says Steve Hodapp, Vodec’s CEO. “These students are participating in the same day programs that we have available year-round.” Hodapp explains any student 13 or older may participate. Parents can find out more information about how to enroll for the summer months by contacting Daryn Richardson, Services Development Director, at [daryn@vodec.org](mailto:daryn@vodec.org). Hodapp strongly suggests that students and parents who are interested in coming to Vodec during the summer should start applying soon, especially new students. “In some cases, the paperwork can take up to 30 days to process,” adds Hodapp, “We have found in some cases that parents or teachers waited too long to apply.”

Students who attend have a variety of on-site and community-based activities to choose from. These activities have a purpose. “Because the students who attend have disabilities, it is important for them to explore the community and try new things with support from our staff members. These activities range from trying new recipes in our kitchen, taking trips to various community attractions, and making new friends,” Hodapp states. Hodapp points out that some students lose lessons learned in school during the summer. Accessing the student program in the summer provides a solution. The program also helps parent by providing a safer alternative than staying at home alone.



Student services may be supported in a variety of ways as shown below:

### Self-Pay

The self-pay option requires a contract between Vodec and the person responsible for reimbursement of the service. For more information on this contact [daryn@vodec.org](mailto:daryn@vodec.org)

### Extended School year

Students on an individual education plan (IEP) can ask their school district for an extended school year (ESY). If the district determines that the student qualifies for ESY, Vodec contracts directly with the school district for reimbursement.

### HCBS Waiver

Some students may qualify for the Medicaid waiver. This is a program set up through Iowa Medicaid HCBS. Students who are on the Medicaid waiver should contact their MCO case manager to request the service.

Parents or caregivers who have more questions about funding availability, applications, or other questions surrounding these services should email Daryn at [daryn@vodec.org](mailto:daryn@vodec.org)



# Encouraging our Consumers to Speak Up

Steve Hodapp, CEO



One of the things we encourage our consumers to do is to self-advocate. We want them to speak up and express their feelings.

They need to express what they want or point out an injustice. Vodec's role is to help them learn how to do that appropriately. When a person is self-advocating, they need to know 'who, what, when, where, how and why'

- **WHO** are they advocating for and **WHO** are they advocating to?
- **WHAT** are they advocating for? What do they need, and are they distinguishing between a need and a want?
- **WHEN** is advocacy effective? This is when needs/wants are communicated assertively (different from aggressively) and there is a willingness to negotiate.
- **WHERE** should self-advocacy be done? Anywhere, really. But in the case of consumers, it's really important to self-advocate with their stakeholders and in their planning meetings.
- **HOW?** A person self-advocating should be free to state what they're advocating for. What about if a person is non-communicative? A stakeholder who is in tune with the consumer can understand the cues provided and translate them for others.
- **WHY** understanding self-advocacy is important is because it becomes too easy for others to make decisions which may be perceived as "in the best interest of the person" or as more cost-effective by the funder's representative or easier for the stakeholders.

Self-advocacy is a tool for enabling consumer choice. 'Consumer choice' is a term batted around for a long time. The concept sounds good until the implementation gets too challenging. What is consumer choice?



Above: Vodec consumers were among the hundreds of people who rallied in support of Developmental Disability Services at the capitol building in Lincoln NE last year.

This principle underscores the belief that an informed consumer is the best authority on what his or her service needs are, how these needs are best met, and whether these needs are being met appropriately. The consumer should be presumed competent to direct services and make choices - regardless of age, nature, or extent of disability - just as ordinary citizens are presumed competent to make all manner of decisions about their day-to-day lives. From [American Rehabilitation](#) Volume 24, Number 3 Summer Autumn 1998 Personal Assistance Services Part 1 of 2

Sometimes consumers need help with advocacy. They need us – you and me – and organizations representing them to step up and advocate. This is where the strength and volume of unified multiple voices is critical.

There was a recent example of this already this year when there was action to freeze federal assistance programs including Medicaid (yes, it was included). Medicaid supports programs which fund services that consumers participate in. Medicaid was quickly excluded from the freeze when advocates for Medicaid and the benefits and supports it provides sprang into action. That was powerful. But be prepared to advocate (again?) because the attack on Medicaid is not done, I'm afraid.

A current advocacy opportunity is to push back on the proposed elimination of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) Section 14(c) which



enables some employers to pay some employees with developmental disabilities (DD) what is referred to as a subminimum wage. A subminimum wage is really a piece rate payment for completed job tasks. Despite what the proponents of the elimination say, for some people with DD the perpetuation of 14(c) is a realistic way to be able to be employed.

There's also an opportunity to advocate for a fair and unbiased implementation of the Employment First movement. Employment First is a national systems-change framework centered on the premise that all individuals, including those individuals with the most significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) and community life. Under this approach, publicly financed systems are urged to align policies, regulatory guidance, and reimbursement structures to commit to CIE as the priority goal of day and employment services for youth and adults with significant disabilities. Source: U.S. Dept. of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy

Vodec currently operates in Iowa and Nebraska, and both states are Employment First states. Employment First is a worthy premise so long as

its intention does not include "all". That word captures people who may not be interested in competitive integrated employment. Refer to consumer choice, above. And then there is the "reimbursement structures". Federal and state funding is insufficient to universally support Employment First. And current reimbursement rates are not sufficient to support most CIE goals or milestones without a participating provider subsidizing the expense of providing the services.



Above: Employment training at the Omaha Development Center.

To wrap this up, please understand that when a consumer expresses themselves, they just may be self-advocating and should be heard. And when WE have an opportunity to advocate on their behalf, we should.

## Vodec Receives Commendations From Iowa Medicaid

Iowa Medicaid's Quality Improvement Organization (QIO) conducted a Certification Review on January 28, 2025, to ensure compliance with relevant regulations and best practices. The review involved evaluating policies, member and employee records, site tours, and other evidence to assess compliance with standards. The review resulted in a 3-year recertification, which is the top result. Moreover, the recertification noticed included some commendations as well.

The review, led by Andrea Smith QA Director, and both of Iowa's Services Operations Directors, Tina Hardy and Jeremy Dunkirk, included an evidentiary-based evaluation of materials such as related policies and procedures, member records, employee records, site tours, and other evidence.



"Once the review is completed, the state compiles with a written report within 30 days," reports Andrea Smith, QA Director. "We are deeply satisfied with the result of the review. Our goal is to receive a three-year recertification. This time in addition to the three-year recertification we received several commendations recognizing our excellence as a service provider."

"First, we are commended on the work of our Governing Board. Specifically, we are commended on the Board member diversity which includes family members of consumers,



the frequency and the thoroughness of the meetings.

Secondly, we are commended on the Quality Assurance plan. Specifically, the agency was commended for the thorough nature of our plan and its implementation. We are commended for the thoroughness of employee training,” Smith explained.

“We are additionally commended for our releases of information. Specifically, all releases are up to date, individualized and completed in their entirety. And finally, we are commended on our service documentation. Specifically the thoroughness and containing all required components,” Smith added.

## Matching Process Key in Successful Host Home and Shared Living Experiences

Making a good, thoughtful match between provider and consumer is the foundation of building a successful host home or shared living home at Vodec. “We have an extremely detailed, methodical process that supports consumers in selecting host home (HH) and shared living providers (SLPs),” states Tina Hardy, Services Operations Director for central Iowa. “Our process benefits the consumer and the HH or SLP. Our goal is to create a stable home environment which leads to safety and consistency for everyone involved,” adds Hardy. Vodec is very careful throughout the process of opening each new HH and SLP.

Vodec advertises on Indeed.com for potential HH or SLP providers. Applicants are vetted through a multi-tiered process which begins with a rigorous background check. Once this is completed, Vodec residential supervisors collect the information and look for a consumer that could be a possible match for the home. These determinations are based on personality and lifestyle trait, personal preferences, and the level of support required. Once the potential matches found an introductory meeting is scheduled. Members of the consumer support team as well as the potential HH or SLP provider are invited. The introductory meeting is the first in a series of opportunities for the host home provider and the consumer to build a connection.



Above, left to right: Lisa cuts the commitment cake with Greg while Barb Rickard, a Vodec Host Home Provider looks on.

These series of meetings can range from formal meetings at one of Vodec’s development centers, or informal meetings over dinner at a local restaurant. Eventually the consumer tours the home. At any time during this process the consumer or HH/SLP provider can exit the process. “We take making a good match seriously. All parties involved must be comfortable with HH/SLP arrangement,” adds Hardy. “It is a wonderful achievement when we reach move-in day. We know we have done everything to ensure a successful and happy outcome.





612 S. Main Street  
Council Bluffs, IA 51503  
www.vodec.org

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).

## Wish List

We are updating our development centers and are in need of an upgrade in activity options for consumers. They've requested the items listed here.

- Outdoor Basketball Hoop
- Full-Sized Pool Table
- Full-Sized Shuffle Board
- Air Hockey Table
- Waiting Room Chairs

Bean Bag Chair for Adults

[Find on Amazon](#)



To make a donation call 712-328-2638 today.

## We are thankful for these generous donors.

Donna Bush

Miles and Crystal Havekost

Andrea Smith

Jeremy Dunkirk

Steve Hodapp

Charities Aid Foundation America- in honor of Austin Feinberg

### 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

Have behavior which 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;  
Be at least 16 years of age for employments services;  
Be between 13 and 19 years of age for the Iowa Youth Services Program;  
NE Family Support Waiver eligibility is up to 21 years of age.

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

