

Inside:

- Vodec Celebrates Valentine's Day Across Locations _____ Page 1
- Vodec Olympics Brings Winter Spirit to Omaha _____ Page 2
- Building Skills and Confidence Through Cooking Club _____ Page 2
- Developmental Disability Awareness Month _____ Page 3

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Vodec Celebrates Valentine's Day Across Locations

Last month, Vodec locations came together to celebrate Valentine's Day with events designed to bring connection and meaningful engagement to the individuals we support.

At our Council Bluffs location, consumers and students from our different programs gathered on Thursday, February 12, for a festive Valentine's Day dance. The room quickly filled with energy as consumers lit up the dance floor with their amazing moves. Our employees took time to transform the space for the occasion, building a kissing booth where they handed out Hershey Kisses and creating a soda bar where Valentine's Day-themed sodas were handcrafted. This created a fun and welcoming atmosphere. Everyone enjoyed spending time with friends and celebrating together.

Music, laughter, and great company made this Valentine's dance a memorable event for everyone involved at the Council Bluffs location.



At our Omaha location, the celebration took place on Wednesday, February 11. Consumers once again embraced the spirit of the event. They enjoyed an afternoon of music, dancing, and connecting with one another. The menu featured hotdogs and themed

Valentine's sodas, and employees did a great job decorating and adding to the festive feel of the event.

Meanwhile, Urbandale hosted a daytime celebration filled with interactive activities. Consumers decorated cookies, played bingo, created Valentine's-themed crafts, and exchanged cards with one another. The event offered opportunities for creativity, social engagement, and shared experiences.

While each location celebrated in its own unique way, the purpose remained the same: to create meaningful opportunities for connection and community.

Events like these support social skill development, encourage friendships, promote creativity, and build confidence. They also provide structured opportunities for consumers to practice communication, teamwork, and community participation in a fun and supportive environment.

At Vodec, celebrations are more than just events on a calendar, they are intentional experiences designed to foster belonging, joy, and personal growth. Valentine's Day was a wonderful reminder of the importance of connection and the value of creating spaces where everyone can celebrate together.



Smiles were everywhere as consumers celebrated Valentine's Day together in Urbandale.

Millard YATP Teachers Tour Vodec Development Center, Exploring Opportunities for Young Adults

Teachers from the Millard Public Schools Young Adult Transition Program (YATP) took a field trip of their own recently, spending the morning touring the Vodec Development Center in Omaha. Located at 7110 F Street, Vodec welcomed the team for an inside look at the programs and supports available to young adults with diverse abilities as they transition into greater independence.

Leading the group was Tricia Gillett, Principal of the

Millard Young Adult Program and Project SEARCH, along with several YATP teachers who work daily with students preparing for adulthood.

The tour was hosted by Kellie Katelman, Vodec's Day Program Manager and a longtime Special Education teacher. Katelman guided the team through classrooms, activity spaces, and skill-building areas while sharing how Vodec partners with individuals and families to support personal growth, employment readiness, and community



engagement.

Throughout the visit, teachers were able to see firsthand how Vodec's day services emphasize practical life skills, everything from communication and social development to vocational training and community participation. The group discussed how Vodec's approach aligns with the goals of Millard's Young Adult Transition Program, whose mission is to prepare students ages 18–21 for meaningful adult life.

The tour also sparked conversation around future collaboration and how community resources like Vodec can help bridge the gap between school-based services

and long-term adult support options.

"The visit offered Millard's YATP staff a clearer picture of the opportunities available to their students beyond graduation," said Katelman, "and strengthened the partnership between two organizations deeply committed to empowering young adults."



Vodec's Day Services Manager, Kellie Katelman, poses with teachers from Millard's Young Adult Transition Program (YATP) during their visit to explore services and opportunities at our Omaha location.

Vodec Olympics Brings Winter Spirit to Omaha

Consumers and employees at Vodec's Omaha location recently came together for a day of fun and friendly competition during the Vodec Olympics, an event inspired by the excitement of the Winter Olympic Games.

The celebration began with an opening ceremony, where consumers participated in a spirited walk through the building to kick off the day's festivities. The ceremony helped set the tone for a day centered on teamwork, participation, and celebration.

Throughout the morning, consumers competed in a variety of winter-themed activities designed to encourage movement and engagement. Events included snowball toss, broom bowling, and air hockey, each offering participants the opportunity to test their skills while cheering one another on.

In the afternoon, the group gathered for an award ceremony. This recognized participants for their

enthusiasm, effort, and sportsmanship throughout the day. The celebration continued as everyone watched the official opening ceremonies of the Winter Olympics, connecting the day's activities to the global event.

Events like the Vodec Olympics play an important role in supporting the individuals served by the organization. Beyond the fun and excitement, these activities help promote social interaction, teamwork, physical activity, and confidence building. They also provide opportunities for consumers to engage with peers, celebrate accomplishments, and experience the sense of community that is central to Vodec's mission.

By creating meaningful experiences like the Vodec Olympics, Vodec continues to foster an environment where individuals can connect, grow, and celebrate their achievements together.

Building Skills and Confidence Through Cooking Club

At Vodec, learning can happen in many ways, and sometimes it happens right in our kitchens. Our Cooking Clubs continue to be a favorite activity for consumers, offering a fun and hands-on way to develop skills that extend far beyond preparing meals. And as an added bonus, the experience ends with something tasty.

This past month, consumers in Council Bluffs worked together to make a taco casserole, following recipes, measuring ingredients, and learning how each step comes together to create a finished dish. Activities like this allow participants to practice important life skills such as following directions, teamwork, communication, and time management.

Cooking also helps build confidence and independence. By learning how to prepare simple meals, consumers gain practical skills they can use at home and in their daily lives. Preparing food can foster a sense of



Above: Kourtney cooking ground beef
Right: Rhonda (Right) and Jennifer (Left) showing off their delicious creations



accomplishment and pride, while also encouraging healthy habits and self-sufficiency.

Beyond the technical skills, Cooking Club creates opportunities for social interaction and collaboration. Consumers support one another, celebrate their successes, and enjoy sharing the meals they have worked hard to prepare. These shared experiences help strengthen relationships and build a sense of community.

Supporting Programs Like Cooking Club

Programs like Cooking Club are helped through the

generosity of supporters who believe in creating meaningful opportunities for the individuals we serve. Donations help provide ingredients, supplies, and materials that allow consumers to participate in hands-on learning activities like these.

If you are interested in supporting programs like the Cooking Club and helping us continue to build confidence and independence for our consumers, you can find the donation link on our website. Together, we can continue creating opportunities for growth.

Wear Orange in March and Recognize Need for More Support for Employment and Housing Opportunities for Persons with Developmental Disabilities



Steve Hodapp
CEO

Orange is the official color of Developmental Disability Awareness Month. March is Developmental Disability Awareness Month. So, wear orange in March to recognize the

month and spread awareness about challenges and successes of persons with developmental disabilities.

DD Awareness month is led by the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD). There are lots of successes as more persons with developmental disabilities experience more inclusion in their communities and more non-disabled people recognize the value and contributions brought to the table by persons with development disabilities.

There are challenges yet, though. The most recent unemployment rate among persons with developmental disabilities is around 7.5 percent according to U.S. Dept. of Labor data. This compares to 4.4 percent for non-disabled persons, also from the U.S. DOL. For youth aged 16 to 19 years old, the unemployment rate is 25.6 percent and 13.5 percent, respectively. So unemployment for adults and youth with developmental disabilities is higher than among the corresponding population.

There is a movement in the country to help persons with developmental disabilities achieve more first time and sustained employment opportunities in their communities. But, in this writer's opinion, the value of the employment is not valued equally as the support necessary to achieve employment. The Federal and State governments do not provide adequate funding for service providers who could help employment be achieved. This is why not enough providers are providing service in this

space and why those that are providing service are, for a great many, facing continual need to fund raise or otherwise supplement the expense of the service.

Another challenge is accessible and affordable housing. Being a part of one's community includes living in the community. However, the lack of accessible affordable housing is a crisis. "Across the nation, many people with disabilities are experiencing an affordability crisis. Approximately 4.8 million non-institutionalized people with disabilities who rely on federal monthly Supplemental Security Income (SSI) have incomes averaging only about \$9,156 per year – low enough to be priced out of every rental housing market in the nation.", according to The Arc. "The availability of affordable, accessible housing remains far less than the need, leaving far too many people with IDD institutionalized, homeless, or in 'worst case housing' (paying too much in rent to afford other basics or living in severely inadequate conditions)."

Advocacy groups like The Arc are working hard to create opportunities for rental or home ownership opportunities for persons with developmental disabilities. But again funding to create and sustain these opportunities is lacking. And we have to acknowledge that people who are non-disabled also have limited access to affordable housing due to income or housing availability.

So, I ask you to help spread awareness of these challenges and to advocate for support to overcome them. One way to do that this month is to wear orange through March. I'd like to see a lot of orange shirts, orange caps, even orange socks. I'll be watching.





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 committed to providing equal employment opportunities to all employees and applicants for employment without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, disability, genetic information, military or veteran status or any other characteristic protected by law. We adhere to all applicable federal, state, and local anti-discrimination laws. This commitment extends to all aspects of employment, including recruitment, hiring, promotions, and compensation.

Vodec is a private, non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation. Donations may be tax-deductible (consult your tax preparer for specific information about this).

We appreciate these generous donors.

- **Jeremy Dunkirk**
- **In honor of Austin Feinberg**
- **Steve Hodapp**
- **Availa Bank**
- **Knights of Columbus**
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- **Daron Kruse**
- **Andrea Smith**
- **Leslie Southard**
- **Miles and Crystal Havekost**
- **American National Bank**
- **Robert Livingston**
- **Stan & Lourie Thies**

Wish List

We invite you to contribute to our Wish List. Your donations will play a vital role in nurturing creativity among those we serve. For more information call 712-328-2638 Ext 113

- Art Supplies
- Craft Kits
- Board Games/Puzzles
- Baking Supplies
- Outdoor Games
- Journaling or mindful kits
- Movie Night Supplies

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:

Human Services Advisory Council (HSAC)
 Iowa Association of Community Providers (IACP)
 Iowa Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE)
 Iowa DD Council

Nebraska Association of Service Providers (NASP)

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

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

Wellpoint
 Iowa Total Care
 Molina Healthcare

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.