

Nebraska Cares Creates Works of Art



(Above)- L to R- VODEC consumers Raquel Stewart and Samantha LeBlanc work on their mugs at It's Yours Pottery in Omaha.

"I'm going to make a cup for my mom for Mother's Day," said VODEC Cares Program consumer Matt Acolaste. Matt along with others from the Cares program visited It's Yours Pottery in Omaha to paint mugs and bowls as part of a Cares educational and cultural outing.

"Art provides a new method of expression for those who may have a limited ability to express themselves; creating art provides practice in creative problem solving and art improves an individual's self esteem. The joy for VODEC is witnessing individuals reach their full potential in community-based settings like It's Yours Pottery and the Hot Shops Art Center," said Services Development Director Daryn Richardson.

The arts are intellectual disciplines requiring complex thinking and problem solving, and it gives people with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to construct their own understanding of the world. "I

want to make society a better place and my art does that," said consumer Raquel Stewart about her work and community outings. VODEC consumers currently participate in many cultural activities throughout the metro area including touring various art and history museums, participating in this year's Hot Shops Open House with an Artists with Disabilities exhibition, attending music events and having artist from WhyArts? come into the programs to work on a variety of projects. "Working on art projects gets me gets me to lots of places," said consumer Norman Menrad.

VODEC is currently expanding its day programs to offer more opportunities within its programs for consumers to express themselves through art, music, writing, and any other art discipline the consumer would like to explore.

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From the Desk of CEO Steve Hodapp



A few years ago I started talking about the swing in national attitude about sheltered work. VODEC offers sheltered work in Iowa and Nebraska at three locations for over 300 consumers. This is the service which VODEC's founding families wanted for their family members with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/

DD). Now as then VODEC's sheltered work centers provide meaningful real work from local companies, and in a safe and caring environment.

But there is that national attitude. Sheltered work is now increasingly perceived as segregated. Those like VODEC who provide the service and the production work within it are accused of keeping consumers captive and of paying consumers cents per hour for their output. I want to be really clear here: VODEC does not keep consumers in sheltered work or any other service against their will. Also, VODEC does pay consumers for their output by meticulously following rules of the United States' Department of Labor's (DOL) Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), Section 14c. By following the government's rules it means a consumer whose output is more or less than 100 percent of 'norm' will receive compensation on a prorated basis.

And to be clear on another point, VODEC does not make money from consumers' output. We have great difficulty in getting real work in for them for which business customers' fees even cover the costs of the production component of sheltered work. Fees received to us for providing sheltered work service subsidize the production component.

But there's that national attitude now to consider. Regardless of VODEC's position about sheltered work (which is that we believe it should continue to be a choice in the continuum of services) the service is threatened on several fronts.

There is legislative and administrative activity to remove the FLSA's Section 14c, put in place in 1939 and which continues enabling a special minimum wage to be paid for output.

There is judicial activity which threatens sheltered work centers. In 2013 the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) ruled that because the Oregon Department of Human Services' funded providers were keeping consumers arbitrarily in

sheltered work with no or little effort made to train and encourage them for employment in the community, then sheltered work was a service which Oregon needed to shed. And in April 2014 a landmark settlement between the DOJ and the State of Rhode Island will effectively end sheltered work as a service within ten years.

Administratively sheltered work is targeted by the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS). CMS issued rules in January 2014 which became effective in March. The rules provide guidelines for states' plans for their Home and Community Based Services (HCBS). States have one year to submit their plans for approval by CMS. Cutting through the clutter and really over-simplifying the intended outcome, sheltered work as well as some residential service settings are deemed segregated. For sheltered work this likely means it will be history in five years or less, the time states will have to implement plans approved by CMS.

VODEC intends to be proactive. We recognize the handwriting on the wall. It says, "sheltered work has a limited life expectancy". So in our proactive way we are making plans for strengthening alternative services which will pick up the pieces after sheltered work.

One push as an alternative service is community employment. This is defined as when a private employer hires a consumer for at least minimum wage and for whom support in the job is provided by VODEC or a like provider. We have already begun to have our Community Employment personnel get certified through College of Employment Services via our membership in Iowa Association of Community Providers for greater skills and credibility. In fact several have certificates for Employer Development and for Job Coaching already. I am attending meetings conducted by a consultant hired by the U.S. DOL's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) in an effort to learn more about job development and job placement administrative strategies. We are also training some employees to be more knowledgeable about the impact of employment wages on disability benefits so we can help consumers make sound and reasonable decisions about community employment. Several of us are members of the national Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE)

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Programs like Cares and Elm provide consumers with the opportunity to go to places around the metro and try new things. "It is a great opportunity for the consumers to be able to learn and enjoy things in the community, such as the pottery. I feel it helps build self esteem, makes them feel important, learn more independence and helps advocate for other people in the community," commented Cares Day Program Coordinator Jennifer Lindly. Consumers also get ideas for their work from observances and holidays.

Recently they celebrated Johnny Appleseed

by baking caramel apples, learning about his love for planting trees and the impact on the community around them.

"At VODEC we have seen art improve the quality of life in many ways," continued Richardson.



(Above Left)- Consumer Aaron Fowlkes works on his mug.
(Above Right)- Consumer William Fenner adds green to his piece.
(Middle Right)- Consumer Norman Menrad shows off his bowl.
(Left)- Consumer Matt Acolaste works on the mug for his mom.

VODEC to hold Annual Blackjack Run

VODEC is once again partnering with the Council Bluffs American Legion Riders for a Blackjack Run on June 14th, 2014. Registration begins at 10am at the legion hall in Council Bluffs (716 S. 4th St.). Riders will leave the Legion at noon and travel a route through Southwest Iowa. The event will end at the Legion in Council Bluffs at 6pm with food and lots of prizes. Join us on June 14th and support VODEC!

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*This list reflects donations received between
4/11/2014 and 5/14/2014*

VODEC Partners with local Non-Profits for Mural Project

VODEC consumers have been working hard over the last few months on a mural project that has been installed at Tip Top Thrift Shop in Benson. Consumers worked with WhyArts? artist Lisa Kalantjakos in a series of four workshops exploring the idea of “Bridging the Gap” between the general public and persons labeled as disabled. Consumers were asked to express, through writing and drawing, how they want the world to see them. Not one of them see themselves as disabled but rather as friends, farmers, healthy eaters, hard workers, and much more. Their work was then combined with work from other participating organizations (Monroe-Meyer Institute, Ollie Webb, and Quality Living Inc.) into one cohesive

sketch created by artist Mike Giron. Mike is a muralist in the Omaha area and his work can be seen up and down Leavenworth Street and at Creighton University.

Once a final sketch had been agreed upon Mike translated the sketch from paper to parachute cloth that was then given to consumers to be painted. The final mural was then “glued” to the wall at Tip Top Thrift Shop. In celebration of the finalized mural and the partnership between the organizations, a street party is being held on June 6th from 6-8pm at Tip Top Thrift Shop as part of Benson’s First Friday Arts Events. There will be activities, music, and food and members from all the groups will also be on hand.



(Above)- One of the finished shapes that was cut out and placed on the wall at Tip Top Thrift Shop.



(Above)- L to R- WhyArts? artist Lisa Kalantjakos works with VODEC consumer Alfredo Gutierrez on the mural sketches.



(Above)- L to R- Artist Mike Giron works with consumers Josh Bartlett and Kasie Rafferty on painting the mural pieces on the parachute cloth.



(Above)- L to R- Consumers Cheryl Lux and Shontae Snaders work on their first sketches for the mural project.

VODEC Consumer Excels at Goodwill

“I really love working for Goodwill, it gives me a lot of experience and pride to know I am part of the workforce,” said consumer Michel’le McIntosh of her job at Goodwill. Michel’le is part of VODEC’s Employment Training Program. She has received job training through VODEC and Goodwill and was recently the first person hired by Goodwill through the partnership between the two organizations. “Michel’le is a real joy to have in our program. She comes to work and gives 100% everyday,” said Rhonda Wilcher, Employment Training Assistant.

While at Goodwill, Michel’le sorts clothing between men’s, ladies, and children’s clothing and gets it ready to be sold on the retail floor. She begins by putting all the clothing into color order and after that she sorts it by size from small to extra large. Once the clothing has been sorted she marks it with price tags and arranges it all onto racks and then places the racks on the retail floor for customers.

Michel’le’s current job title is Hanger 1 and

she has been completing three to four clothing racks in a day. That is above average compared to the rest of the staff and Goodwill has been very impressed with Michel’le.

Michel’le hopes to continue her job at Goodwill and increase her responsibilities in the future.



(Above)- Consumers Michel’le McIntosh with a completed clothing rack.

From the Desk of CEO Steve Hodapp

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and its Iowa and Nebraska chapters so we can stay on top of new trends in community employment. All of this will make our community employment a stronger program with more placement outcomes.

A second alternative service is day habilitation. At VODEC we have two day habilitation programs: Elm and Cares. The focus we believe will be on Cares for those consumers who choose not to seek community employment after sheltered work. One definition of day habilitation is where “. . . activities and environments are designed to foster the acquisition of skills, appropriate behavior, greater independence, and personal choice. . .” Section 441 IAC 78. So again being proactive we have added program space to Iowa Cares and are in the process of adding a state of the art teaching kitchen to augment independent living skills instruction. In recent years we have also updated and added to our number of vehicles to enable more frequent community outings. Additional vehicles also include some with wheel chair lifts for full accessibility.

I have been asked by some VODEC employees providing sheltered work service, including the production component of it, about job security as sheltered work becomes phased out. I understand the undertones in the questions. And my reply has been and is there will be increased need for good solid

services’ employees as day habilitation service grows and demand for community employment service increases. In my estimation VODEC will need more employees for these services because the number of employees to consumers will likely increase.

If you are a consumer in sheltered work service, or you are a family member of such a consumer, questions must be developing in your minds. Questions like “when?”, “how?”, “where?” come to my mind. In brief and in order: the ground work for transition out of sheltered work has already begun but it will be more apparent within the next couple years and likely fully completed by 2019. This will be done by working with consumers, their families and their funding representatives to help adapt to the next appropriate service following sheltered work’s demise. This will happen everywhere, not just at VODEC; there is no escape from the transition from sheltered work.

All this is evidence of VODEC’s flexibility and commitment to providing relevant services and services which will be funded. I don’t want to minimize it but it is just another change. VODEC has been of service since 1968. You don’t think this is the first time we’ve faced change in 46 years, do you? We’re all in the same boat and together we will be successful in the journey of transition. Stay tuned; more to come.

VODEC

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The mission of VODEC 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 a private, non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation. Donations may be tax deductible. VODEC is an equal opportunity employer. Applicants for services or employment are considered without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, or disability. We are a certified provider of day and residential services by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. We are approved by the Iowa Medicaid Enterprise to provide waiver services to individuals with intellectual disabilities, brain injuries and we are an approved habilitation service provider. We are a provider of Host Home services in Iowa and Extended Family Homes in Nebraska. We have accreditation from CARF for Community Employment Services, Organizational Employment services and Community Integration.



VODEC is a proud member of:

drichardson@vodec.org

For more information on VODEC services please contact Daryn Richardson or Michelle Nelson at 712-328-2638 or by email at



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- An applicant must meet the following criteria to be considered eligible for any VODEC service:
1. Be at least 16 years old for any vocational program
 2. Have behavioral needs within VODEC's scope of service
 3. Have medical needs within VODEC's scope of service
 4. Have transportation needs within VODEC's capability to provide
 5. Have adequate funding in place (including service hours authorization or private payment in place) for services being requested
 6. If applying for an in-home service, the applicant's home must meet basic health and safety requirements



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