

VNU Resident Receives Grant from Iowa Vocational Services

In November, VNU resident, Dakota received an \$870.00 grant from Iowa Vocational Services for updating equipment he uses for his Podcast business, The Dakota Show. Chantel from Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services worked with Linda Van Meeteren, VNU's Community Employment Specialist, to assist Dakota in receiving this grant and the funding for his new equipment. Funding through the grant enabled Dakota to receive a new soundboard, an "on-the-go" soundboard, two microphone stands, and two microphone cables, a pair of headphones, and new accessories and SD cards. It has been great to see Chantel and Voc Rehab be supportive of Dakota's Podcast business.

Dakota is a resident in our ICF/ID residential homes. Since moving to VNU last spring Dakota has continued to write, produce and host his Podcast, The Dakota Show. While dedicating a large part of his time to hosting his Podcast, Dakota is also working to expand his writing and has had the opportunity to have his writing featured in a few magazines. We are so proud of Dakota and all his hard work! Thank you to Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services for supporting Dakota and his talents and interests and partnering with VNU!



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VILLAGE NORTHWEST UNLIMITED // Winter 2024



Volunteering Continues to be Popular at VNU

VNU residents have been busy volunteering as well as college students taking time to volunteer with our residents. Campus residents at VNU had visitors from the Northwestern College Adaptive P.E. class. The class consisted of athletes who came to our campus twice. Once was to observe our residents, the second time the students set up activities for our residents to participate in.

Residents from VNU traveled to Sioux City to participate in the NAIA volleyball clinic. This clinic is put on by Special Olympics. The different college volleyball teams that make it to the NAIA tournament are involved in this clinic. Our residents enjoyed the engagement with the teams who helped host the event.

While VNU has had volunteers assisting with activities, we have had residents volunteering at various programs and organizations throughout local communities. Residents have held various food drives, helped sort cans, and other various activities! We are proud of the time our residents put into the community and appreciate their dedication to our local communities.



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Deb Middle Named Special Olympics Iowa Board Member

Village Northwest Unlimited is excited to announce that our very own Deb Middle has been elected to the Special Olympics Iowa Board of Directors. This is a great honor and we congratulate Deb on receiving this honor and representing VNU and Special Olympic athletes across Iowa on the Board of Directors.



Deb Middle has been involved in Special Olympics for 16 ½ years. Deb co-coaches with Sara Wolthuizen in 10 different sports. VNU offers basketball team, basketball skills, bocce ball, soccer skills, athletics (similar to track & field), softball team, softball skills, volleyball, pickle ball, and bowling. In June, Kathleen Rasmussen, Sioux City Knights Special Olympics Delegation Manger, asked Deb if she would consider serving on the Board. Deb’s initial response was, “I needed to check with my supervisor, Cheri Brunsting first.” After talking with Cheri, along with Barry, I agreed to be nominated with their full support, which I am very thankful for. Deb sent in a resume to the Chair of the Board of Directors. In October, she met with several of the Board of Directors and the CEO of Special Olympics Iowa and one other Special Olympics Iowa staff member for a meet and greet. On November 21, Deb was notified she had been elected to the Board of Director’s starting in January 2024 for a 3-year term. “I hope to be a voice for VNU Special Olympics, Northwest Iowa and smaller rural areas. Special Olympics Iowa has great staff that offer great sports and events for the athletes of Iowa and I will be available to help the staff with anything they may need from me,” Deb said. Deb talked about, “As I continue coaching VNU Special Olympics and doing my job responsibilities, I may be able to give them some insight from a coaches stand point or perspective from our athletes.”



We are extremely proud of Deb and for her dedication to our athletes and Iowa Special Olympics.

Nic Wielenga 2024 Outstanding Staff of the Year

During the annual VNU Staff Christmas Party on December 7, 2023, Nic Wielenga was honored as the Outstanding Staff of the Year. The Outstanding Staff of the Year Award is the highest honor awarded to a staff member of VNU. Recipients are nominated by their peers for this annual award.

Nic began his career with Village Northwest Unlimited in the summer of 2013 as a temporary summer staff at Northwest Enterprises (now the Summit). What Nic thought was going to be a temporary position prior to continuing his education has turned into a 10-year career. Nic has progressed through a variety of positions at the Summit including working as a Vocational Advocate and Service Coordinator. Today, Nic is a Community Program Supervisor. In his role, Nic is responsible for supervision of staff and individuals served in the vocational and day habilitation setting at the Summit.

In 2023, Nic has had an instrumental role in the organization’s transition from the old documentation platform to a new more user friendly software system. His understanding of state and federal regulations, as well as his knowledge of workflow and processes made him a key contributor to the successful implementation of the SetWorks Documentation Software.



When thinking of the Village, and our desire to provide purpose, privacy and dignity for all people, it is easy to see that Nic is a great asset to the Village. Nic has demonstrated the Village values in all his interactions with others. He works hard and is a huge part of the Village family