

# SPECIAL OLYMPICS ATHLETES RECOGNIZED

On November 30 we held our first Special Olympics awards banquet since COVID. We usually hold this event every year but during COVID we were unable to have everyone together. Everyone involved in Special Olympics was invited and received a certificate for their hard work and dedication to our program. All of our athletes work so hard to be able to compete and this is such a small way of us being able to say "thank you".









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VILLAGE NORTHWEST UNLIMITED // WINTER 2023

# VILLAGE VOICE



## SPIRITUAL SERVICES AT VNU

There are many days when I am working that I find myself taking a step back and seeing how amazing and wonderful and awesome God is. In my opinion there is not a better place on the earth to see God in action every day than at the Village. I get a front row seat to this every day as the Spiritual Services Coordinator. You can't experience what we have the privilege of witnessing every day in very many other places. There is a pure, innocent, and deeply connected faith that is expressed in so many of our residents in so many different ways. We have multiple opportunities for them to express, learn, and grow in their faith.

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**•Bible Study-** We have traditionally held a Monday night Bible study that runs from September – April but our numbers had been decreasing over the year for many reasons such as work opportunities, staff shortages, and super cold weather. This year we decided to try moving our time to right after our program day, from 3:30 – 4:30. We started this in September this year and our attendance has doubled this year to where our numbers were 5 years ago. We average 25-30 residents attending every Monday with 3 volunteers helping out with leading small group discussions about the lesson. So far this year we've had lesson series called "Tastes Like Chicken", looking at different foods in the Bible, and "Bad Guys of the Bible", of course looking at some of the not well liked people in the Bible. It's been great to hear them grow closer to Jesus and share their very unique and powerful perspectives on the things we talk about. One of the most special moments I enjoy every week is hearing our residents pray for other residents' needs at the end of our meeting. They are some of the most honest, straightforward, and personal prayers that I have ever heard!

**•Campus Community Church-** We have a church service every Sunday afternoon at 1:00 in the Wansink Center commons that is specifically designed for our residents. We try to make it as much like church as possible. There are announcements, a time for singing, and a message that I share every week. We've been going through the book of Acts. The plan is to keep talking about Acts until we finish the book, which will likely be sometime the middle of 2023. The message encourages interaction and questions, which helps me to understand how they are processing the message. Anyone is welcome to attend!

## SPIRITUAL SERVICES CONTINUED

•Counseling- A big part of my job is meeting 1-1 with our residents and talking with them about any struggles, concerns, or frustrations they are having. It's a great honor for me to be that person who can guide them, encourage them, and support them as they work through things. I always make sure to pray with each resident after I meet with them because I can only take them so far, God has to do the rest.

All of these things and more happen within the Spiritual Services offering at the Village. We are truly unique in that we have such an emphasis on spirituality. So many places like VNU will focus on the physical needs of their residents (PT, OT, Speech, etc.) and neglect their spiritual needs. I firmly believe that if you neglect one's spiritual needs you are neglecting the most important and personal part of their lives. It's through teaching our residents about God and by incorporating God in every aspect of what we do that we can serve our residents in the best way possible. This face is never lost of me and it's because of all these things that I feel like the most blessed man at the Village because I get to see and experience them every single day.

## SUB-MINIMUM WAGE

July 1 is an exciting day in the history of VNU as it marks the anniversary of our organization 47 years ago! July 1, 2022, is also going to go down in the history of VNU as being the day that we no longer pay our residents below the Federal sub-minimum wage. We have been working towards this for several years, but the economic environment never allowed us to make the leap.

Historically, VNU used the Federal exemption under the Department of Labor's (DOL) Section 14(c) regulation that allows individuals to be paid below the minimum wage. As you recall, the current Federal minimum wage is \$7.25, which Iowa couples with, and was put in place back in 2009. In today's environment, that rate of pay does not come into play, as the market is much above that. However, step back in time eight to nine years when the market rate of pay was around \$8 to \$9 per hour for many entry-level jobs.

To help you understand how the rate of pay was established prior to July 1, 2022, assume that Tommy is disabled and receiving services at VNU. Every 6 months, VNU would have Tommy perform work similar to what he would be doing in the work setting and would time how long it took him to do this. Based on that, we would compare it to how long it took Barbara, a VNU staff person, to do the same set of tasks. If Tommy took twice as long to do these tasks, that means Tommy is 50% as efficient as Barbara, a non-disabled individual. From that, we would compute the hourly rate that Tommy would receive for any work performed. These hourly rates were obtained from area businesses once a year for a variety of tasks. In this example, we will assume that the market rate for that position was \$9.00 per hour, thus Tommy would be paid at \$4.50 per hour ( $\$9.00 \times 50\%$ ).

As you can see, there was a tremendous amount of work involved to arrive at the rate of pay. You can also see why we could not pay minimum wage at \$7.25 when the "economic benefit" was only computed at about \$4.50 per hour. With the market wages increasing substantially in the last couple of years, the math works and has allowed us to move to a rate of pay between \$8.00 and \$8.25 per hour. This is an exciting change for us as we would much prefer to avoid the "red tape" of the DOL's sub-minimum wage rules and are excited that our individuals can be paid above minimum wage.

As we move forward, we will monitor any changes in the Federal minimum wage and are confident that we will be able to adjust to the changes, as they will likely be phased into effect over a period of several months.



## 2022 STAFF PERSON OF THE YEAR

During the annual VNU Staff Christmas Party on December 1, 2022, Becky Klemme 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.

Becky began her career with Village Northwest Unlimited more than 44 years ago. She began working as a House Counselor at House 354. She met her husband, Mark, while working at VNU. Becky has worked in the campus homes, in the Community Service Department and in her current role has a Direct Support Professional in a community home. In 2021, Becky reduced her hours to part time after she and her husband "retired" to Spirit Lake. Becky continues to work at VNU because in her words, "I love the mission and the individuals served by the village too much to ever give it up."

Becky demonstrates the Village's mission of purpose, privacy and dignity through her commitment to the individuals served and wanting them to experience success and have opportunities to do things they will enjoy. Becky understood the need for community integration for those served by the Village, long before it became the new standard. She has provided choice and options to the residents of VNU since her first day at VNU. She is an outstanding staff every day.

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



## FRIENDS IN SECOND GRADE

We are all children at heart and sometimes we need some children to remind us of that. We have a long time relationship with East Elementary here in Sheldon and it's teachers. We often have residents volunteer at the school to sit with kids while they read to practice their reading skills. Even in the Summer we have residents volunteer with their lunch sack program. During the school year though, we have an extra special group come visit us here on campus. Once a month we have a group of second graders come to the Wansink Center to interact with our residents. They play games in the gym, read books in our leisure room and just about anything and everything in between. There have been so many friendships created and we hope that in the future these kids remember this experience and use these skills in their adult life.

