

2021 EVENTS

Run, Walk & Roll- September 25th

This event is typically held the first Saturday in June but we believe that by holding the event in the fall more people will be able to be fully vaccinated and there will be more time to ascertain that the trajectory of positive cases of the virus in the area continue to trend downward.

Independence Day Celebration- July 2nd

Keep an eye out for more information about this event.



DIGITAL VILLAGE VOICE

If you would like to sign up to receive your Village Voice newsletter via email just drop us a note and let us know you'd like to receive an email copy in place of your paper copy.

Send your request to kayceeo@villagenorthwest.org.



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VILLAGE NORTHWEST UNLIMITED // SPRING 2021

VILLAGE VOICE



SALUTE TO FRONTLINE WORKERS

Their selflessness hasn't gone unnoticed.

One year ago if you were a fly on the wall at VNU you would have seen many of our staff working together to produce cloth face masks to insure we had enough PPE to keep everyone safe and empty rooms at the Wansink Center and Summit buildings, which weeks earlier were full of staff and residents. You would have witnessed 291 fearless VNU staff continuing to walk through the doors of our residential homes and offices to ensure the very best care continued to be given to the 180 adults with disabilities we serve at VNU. Those fearless staff continued to show up month after month, even as the virus began to spread into our community. They cared for our sick and infected clients knowing they may be the next one with a positive test result. Our staff were subjected to repeated COVID testing, wearing bulky PPE and having to isolate or quarantine. It would be naïve to not recognize these challenges at work also impacted their lives at home. The dedication and selflessness of our staff throughout the pandemic has been amazing. Their grace and motivation has made a bad situation more bearable.

As the number of positive case counts continue their downward trends, we are hopeful for the future. However, in our optimism we must also acknowledge the sacrifices our staff have made to keep our clients safe. We wish our staff and all of the frontline workers who've kept the world moving forward during this unprecedented time our most sincere gratitude and thanks.



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A DOGS LIFE

Volunteer positions didn't go unfilled during COVID.

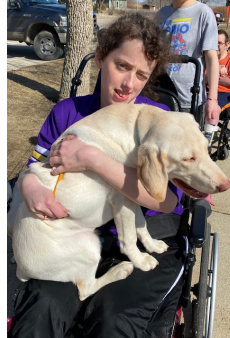
During a time when our clients can't be around many people, we actually saw an increase in volunteers on our campus and residential homes. Those volunteers happened to have tails, fur and enjoy a good game of fetch. Animals are something that have always brought joy to our residents, especially dogs. Brothers, Thor (yellow lab) and Odin (black lab mix), have become regulars in a few of the waiver homes and our Summit building. The boys even made an appearance in the VNU virtual talent show in February. A pop-up class in our Summit building was created to allow clients and the two dogs to interact. Clients are able to spend time playing fetch, teaching them commands and of course the two boys received lots of belly scratches. Micah Postma, a Summit



staff member, said, "The group was absolutely ecstatic to go and play with the dogs. One of the guys especially lights up whenever he gets to interact with an animal. You can tell how much they love to interact with both the animals and each other. I think the best part wasn't that they were playing with the dogs, but that they were doing so with their friends and could interact and enjoy the class as a group."

Atlas, a pure bred boxer, spent time in a few residential houses soaking up love and attention from excited VNU residents and staff over the winter. Atlas' owner, Kimberlee Swanson, a VNU staff, knows just how much the residents she serves love dogs. She said, "The best part of working at VNU has been getting to know the clients, and letting the clients get to know me. I've been able to bring Atlas in a few times and the result is all smiles for me, the clients and Atlas!"

For many residents, having dogs around reminds them of the dogs they grew up with. This can be a comforting feeling, especially during a time when their friends and families haven't been able to visit like normal. We hope our furry volunteers continue to visit us!



FEBRUARY FUN DAY

When January comes around each year, our staff and residents begin planning their skits and music for our annual talent show lovingly called Wacky Wednesday. Because we couldn't all get together in January this year, a February Fun Day was scheduled. Staff and residents were able to put together group acts to perform via Zoom. Although we would rather all be together, it was a great alternative to our usual talent show. One of the highlights, and a great way to end the talent showcase, was an original song written in Swahili, performed by a member of our staff.



POP-UP CLASSES

Pop-up classes began in November 2020 after almost eight long months of no formal day programming for HCBS clients. The pop-up classes allow clients to get out of their homes and join up with a "buddy" house. The idea of buddy houses was created to help residents socialize with more people outside of just their few roommates and house staff. Pop-up classes have included crafting seasonal gnomes, playing with dogs, making smoothie bowls, ceramic classes at The Gallery in Le Mars and a trip to the Okoboji Winter Games Kite Festival.



EMPLOYMENT UPDATE

As of March 2021, VNU has 44 clients in competitive employment as well as 26 in supported employment positions. Supported employment offers continued assistance from an employment specialist to maintain long-term employment. These employment numbers are only 12 less than February 2020, pre-COVID.

In an effort to make sure our clients are as safe as they can be as they go back to work, an extra effort has gone into teaching hand washing, personal hygiene, the proper way to use face masks and the importance of staying 6 feet away from the people around them. In addition to those things, staff have helped individuals follow any guidelines put in place by their employer before heading back to work.

"Our clients find purpose and Dignity in the work they do and look forward to earning a paycheck. Many VNU clients are back to work and most are seeing their hours coming back up to where they were prior to COVID. Our clients enjoy their work and are excited to get back to normal." said VNU Director of Operations, Justin Jonas.



VOCATIONAL SUCCESS

Lane was referred to VNU's Employment Services by the Iowa Department of Vocational Rehabilitation after he completed Northwestern College's Next Program. The Next Program allows individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities the opportunity to take specialized life skills classes and participate in campus life. VNU performed a Work Readiness Assessment with Lane at a job site in Orange City. The assessment allowed Lane a chance to demonstrate his work speed, accuracy and work endurance. After this assessment, VNU supported lane in the application process for a job at Sudenga's. Before going in for his interview, the vocational team helped Lane practice answering questions for an interview. Everything went well and Lane received the position and began working part time sanitizing work areas and building pallets. His team at VNU encouraged him to work up to full-time hours which allowed him to also get benefits.

Lane said, "The Village and my work supervisor continue to support me whenever I have questions. I'm continuing to learn and I'm proud of being able to achieve full time work."

