



i embrace

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 **Dakota**Communities

december
2009 newsletter

we embrace



At Dakota Communities **WE EMBRACE** challenges and possibilities with creativity and passion.

Our challenges this year include the struggling economy and declining government funding for our services. We've received significantly less support from foundations and corporations this year because they have less money to give.

The state cut our funding by three percent, which amounts to a reduction of more than \$500,000 a year to meet the health, safety and community needs of the people we serve. Those needs are increasing sharply as people with disabilities live longer than ever before.

On December 2nd, the Department of Management and Budget announced a projected deficit of \$1.2 billion in the state's budget for the remainder of the 2010-11 biennium. This shortfall will further threaten funding for Dakota Communities.

Dakota Communities is responding to these challenges with creativity and passion. Our innovative approaches to wellness and healthy living can contain rising costs while adding quality of life for people with disabilities. We passionately embrace possibilities that focus on the potential of each individual. From the nurturing "power of pets" to the opportunity to skate with "women on wheels" we are excited to share with you the fullness of life at Dakota Communities.

Thanks for partnering with us to embrace both challenges and possibilities! Your gifts of time and money mean more than ever.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paula Hart".

Paula Hart
President and CEO

"If I were to wish for anything I should not wish for wealth and power, but for the passionate sense of what can be..."

– Soren Kirkegaard

Dakota Communities | mission

Dakota Communities partners with people who have disabilities to **realize their potential** in their lives and communities.

we embrace



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1 pet partners

A Tail Full of Love

In 2008, Dakota Communities introduced an instantly successful pet partners program for the people we serve. **Pet partners** allow people, regardless of their abilities, to experience love and acceptance through the company of an animal.

Animals are embraced for their ability to make people feel safe, comforted, and loved. When animals visit people with physical or mental disabilities, the benefits of their companionship are multiplied.

Studies show that individuals with disabilities tend to focus on themselves; animals provide a vehicle for healthy outward focus. When pet partners visit Dakota Communities homes, the people we serve watch, talk to, and talk about the animals rather than about themselves.

As studies suggest, our staff has also noted that pet partners:

Presently, **17 pet partners** visit **93 people** in Dakota Communities homes.

- **reduce loneliness**, depression, anxiety, and agitation;
- **increase smiles**, laughs, looks, and touches; and
- **increase social** and verbal interaction.



93 people nurtured with wags & kisses

"The sense of connecting with pet therapy animals is very apparent," said Jill Keller, Program Coordinator at our Dakota Communities Maple Grove home. "The ladies look forward to being able to talk to, kiss, and pet a non-judgmental living companion." The visits have also opened doors for people to develop relationships around activities that involve the animal, such as shopping for the pet, attending animal care classes, and learning to become pet partner volunteers.

Currently, 17 pet partners visit 93 people in our homes. In addition, one Dakota Communities employee graduated from the Delta Society Pet Partners® Program this year, and three more are in training. Our goal is to increase the number of certified Dakota Communities employee and volunteer pet partners that visit our home and bring the unique love and affection animals provide to even more of the people we serve.

"I like it when Jake visits because I get to pet and play with him. It makes my day better."

– **Troy** (pictured above)
who lives at a Dakota Communities home in Robbinsdale

"If I were to wish for anything I should not wish for wealth and power, but for the passionate sense of what can be..."

– Soren Kirkegaard

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rollergirls

Rolling

Merrily Along

People from six Dakota Communities homes joined seasoned roller derby girls for hours of roller skating fun in 2009. Several Minnesota RollerGirls were recruited by the sister of a woman who lives in our Poppler Home to host three roller skating events for the people we serve. The evenings were a rolling success.

After sharing dinner and lively conversation, Molly McCoy and her fellow roller derby girls skated alongside their Dakota Communities guests, offering assistance and encouragement as needed. Their enthusiasm and help were warmly welcomed. Following her first evening on skates, a woman served by Dakota Communities joyfully said, "I didn't think I could skate, but did you see how well I did?!" Whether in wheelchairs or on skates, those circling the floors of Skateville Roller Skating Rink were filled with laughter, smiles, and a great sense of accomplishment.

17
Sets of Wheels

RollerGirl Molly McCoy, (left)
with Michelle

When not participating in amateur roller derby events, Molly McCoy and the Minnesota RollerGirls donate their time and resources to support local charities.

"I can't wait to do this again.
It's a fun time."

— Dakota Communities Roller Skater

The Minnesota RollerGirls league was founded by the Donnelly sisters in August 2004 and has grown from 6 original members to a current roster of 80 skaters.

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growing strong

A Friendship

A Dogsled & Polar Plunge

In February 2009, Bill Spencer and Jason Fladager sat in a hot sauna in northern Minnesota before diving into an arctic lake for a polar plunge, a feat Bill recalls with particular pride. Bill and Jason were paired in July 2008 through Dakota Communities In-Home services. This program serves people with disabilities ages 22 months to 65 years in their own homes and communities. Since Bill and Jason were paired, they have pursued exciting adventures and healthy goals alongside one another.



10
pounds lost
many adventures gained

With Jason's support, Bill discovered a social group for people with disabilities that meets once a month to socialize and learn about healthy relationships. This past winter, Bill and Jason ventured to Camp Menogyn where, in addition to the polar plunge, they experienced cross-country skiing, hiking over the border into Canada, and mushing a dogsled for the first time.

Avid exercisers, Bill and Jason also joined the Ways to Wellness Program, a joint initiative between Dakota Communities and Woodwinds Hospital to help people meet their individualized fitness, nutrition, and weight management goals. Ways to Wellness is not just about losing weight; it is about **gaining** healthy lifestyle habits so positive changes continue for a lifetime. As a result of the program and Jason's partnership, Bill lost 10 pounds and gained a greater excitement and confidence in being involved in his community.

"Ways to Wellness is right for me. I have better self esteem and now I want to get out in the community more." — Bill

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beyond bowling

Dakota Communities Honored by ARC



Toni Boelter
Founding member of the Dakota Communities
Therapeutic Recreation Department

Dakota Communities was honored with The Boggs Mitchell Award during The ARC of Minnesota's Annual Awards Banquet on October 24. The ARC of Minnesota is a private, nonprofit organization whose mission is to support and advocate for people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities and their families. The award recognizes a chapter or community organization providing year-round challenging and inclusive recreational/leisure-time programs for people with disabilities.

Toni Boelter, a founding member of Dakota Communities' Therapeutic Recreation Department, accepted the award on behalf of Dakota Communities. During her 18 years with Dakota Communities, Boelter has worked to put into practice the organization's belief that people with disabilities should live, work, volunteer, and play alongside their families and neighbors. "Therapeutic Recreation is more than bingo and bowling," said Boelter. "It's creating opportunities for people to become active participants in their own lives and communities through volunteerism, sports, gardening, wellness initiatives, and the arts."

People served by Dakota Communities are not spectators; they are active and valued members of their communities.

Dakota Communities has created a host of inclusion initiatives in collaboration with groups such as The University of Minnesota's Landscape Arboretum, The Boy Scouts of America, Wilderness Inquiry, St. Paul Jewish Community Center, and the YMCA.

"We are proud and honored to be recognized with this award," said Dakota Communities President and CEO Paula Hart. "This is yet another indication of our commitment to creating challenging and rewarding opportunities for people with disabilities to be full members of their communities."

12 years of inclusive
recreation opportunities

7

power of many

M^Agical Evening

The power of one; the added power of a few; the immense **power of many...**

At Dakota Communities Creating Magic Gala on September 26, 2009, we presented the first annual Dreammaker Awards to honor people who have deep roots planted in service to Dakota Communities. The 2009 honorees continue to share their unique gifts, reaching toward the sky. Each exemplifies the power of one, the added power of a few and the immense power of many. Each musters their unique power for good in partnership with people with disabilities.



Kristen Johnson
Dreammaker Award winner
(Pate Family Award)

Dreammaker honorees:

- The Pate Family, **Family Dreammaker Award**, for their dedicated partnership as founders, volunteers, and philanthropists;
- Jen Gustafson, **Volunteer Dreammaker Award**, for her tireless volunteering and fundraising; and
- Sue Beasley, **Employee Dreammaker Award**, for her 30 years of loving advocacy and support of people with disabilities who live at Dakota Communities.

Our gratitude is deep.



Thank you to our 2009 honorees and everyone who attended and supported the gala. Generous gala support means that people living in 2 of Dakota Communities 32 homes have new accessible vans, which they fondly call, "The Transformers." What a perfect name because with your help, lives are transformed!

— Mary Harty, Chief Development Officer

We invite you to join your power for good in partnership with people with disabilities. Visit our website at www.dakotacommunities.org to volunteer, advocate, and give. Join us to create the immense power of many. **Thank you!**

In these economically challenging times your support means so much. Please make a gift at www.dakotacommunities.org or mail your donation to:

Dakota Communities
680 O'Neill Drive
Eagan, MN 55121

Gala 2009 Highlights

Dakota Communities
Creating Magic Gala Celebration



Total raised for mission after expenses: \$101,000

Total attendance: 300 guests

Total value to people served by Dakota Communities:
People with disabilities have opportunities to live a full life in community.



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