



we grow

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 **DakotaCommunities**
people with disabilities realizing potential

may
2011 newsletter



Dakota Communities partners
with people with disabilities to
realize their goals and potential.

mission

we grow & change



There's an old Irish saying, ***"You've got to do your own growing no matter how tall your grandfather was."***

This spring issue of our newsletter is all about **people with disabilities doing their own growing** – with the help and support of friends, families, volunteers, and employees. I hope you enjoy reading these stories about the many ways people at Dakota Communities are learning, growing and participating fully in life ... all on their own journeys to realize their goals and potential.

Growth often means change, for people and for organizations. Recently I shared the news that I'll be leaving Dakota Communities at the end of May to become President and CEO at Volunteers of America, the 10th largest social services organization in Minnesota.

When my daughter was four she said to me one day, "Mommy, I'm 'happy/sad.'" That is a good description of how I feel today. I am happy for the blessings of my six years at Dakota Communities, looking forward to the

challenges and opportunities in my new role at Volunteers of America, and sad to be leaving such a wonderful organization.

Anatole France once wrote, "All changes ... have their melancholy; for what we leave behind is part of ourselves." I am leaving a large piece of my heart behind!

I will continue to "cheer on" Dakota Communities from the sidelines, knowing that the organization will continue to **grow and flourish**.

Warmest regards,

Paula Hart
President and CEO

1 blossoming family

A Family in Bloom

The Minnesota Landscape Arboretum's "Culture and Cuisine" class brings life to Katie Cohen and her family in more than one way.

Katie lives at a Dakota Communities home in West St. Paul, and she is a long-time fan of the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. Her father Miles Cohen is too, and he praises the ability of classes to stimulate his daughter's five senses at once while she also makes new friends. He enthusiastically says, "You get hooked on the program – it has been very therapeutic for me, my wife and my son too."

Twice a month Katie and 28 other people supported by Dakota Communities visit the stunning site that includes over 1,000 acres of gardens, hiking trails, model landscapes, woodlands and wetlands. Arboretum Program Manager Jean Larson, who Miles credits with "making everything meaningful," gave us her perspective ...

What is the "Culture and Cuisine" class all about?

It promotes healthy foods, increases nutritional knowledge, and encourages social interaction. Each month a different plant or theme is chosen and the menu is determined by it. For example, in April our spring theme included "Easter Salad" with grapefruit, avocado, and papaya. The program allows people supported by Dakota Communities to gather and create a meal together – in addition to learning about where the food comes from and helping them make healthy food choices.

What is the history of the partnership between Dakota Communities and the Arboretum?



(Left to right): Cheri Cohen, Jean Larson, Katie Cohen, and Miles Cohen

Our relationship goes back almost 20 years – when Dakota Communities' founding family member Karen Pate learned that I was coordinating a program for the Arboretum and a new initiative began. We have done everything from traveling to the Chicago Botanic Garden with a group of people Dakota Communities serves, to growing crops for people to incorporate into their menus, to building raised flower beds at many of the homes. We continue to evolve with changing needs and interests.

What do you see as Katie's involvement in the program?

Katie is a wonderful asset to the "Culture and Cuisine" program. In addition to being a regular attendee, she brings her smiling personality

and enthusiasm to the group. She often helps in the preparation and definitely enjoys the products. It's a time for Katie and her family to come together, away from the hub-bub of their daily lives, to relax together and share a meal.

How does having her family there strengthen her experience, and how do you see them "growing as a family"?

I think it is wonderful that Katie's folks and extended family attend – it allows for family cohesion in an informal and non-contrived manner. Everyone needs to eat – and what a better way to bring family together than at the dinner table!

Visit the Arboretum at 3675 Arboretum Drive, Chaska MN 55318 or online at www.arboretum.umn.edu/

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personal growth

Tim finds his own way to grow

Tim was having trouble finding meaningful activities to do during the day. His quiet and reserved personality was not well suited to being around the large groups at a standard day program. Instead, he wanted to create his own schedule and pursue his interest in volunteering in the community.

Tim, who has developmental disabilities and lives in Apple Valley with his mother, began pursuing these goals with the help of Dakota Communities' In-Home services in 2007. The personalized program connected him to volunteer opportunities, and supplied the transportation to make them happen. Since then his confidence has grown by leaps and bounds.

He is proud of his many volunteer contributions, and enjoys knowing his choices help others in the community. Tim regularly cleans his church's windows and doors so that they sparkle, and he has walked dogs for the Humane Society. This January he began giving his time at the local food shelf. He says, "I like the people. I like helping people that are in need of food, and that makes me feel good."

By gaining confidence through giving back, Tim has grown in other ways too. He now exercises at the YMCA or outside when the weather is welcoming, and he has lost weight as a result. Through the "Culture and Cuisine" program at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum (see pages 1-2), he makes new friends and enjoys learning about healthy foods. He's even become more outgoing around large groups.

In addition to connecting Tim to community activities of his choosing, Dakota Communities' In-Home services help him with scheduling and daily living skills such as cooking. Like Tim, the In-Home program is constantly growing. It has developed from serving just one person in 2001 to supporting 85 people ages 9 to 66 years in their own homes and communities.

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

– Gandhi



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enrichment

The Magic of iPad
for People of All Abilities

When Apple introduced the iPad last year, the company declared the new device "magical" while skeptics rolled their eyes. Founder Steve Jobs recently said, "People laughed at us for using the word 'magical,' but you know what, it's turned out to be magical."

In an article about the ease of using an iPad, the Wall Street Journal's Virginia Postrel wrote, "Effortlessly, instantly, the magical alters reality with a tap of the finger."

At Dakota Communities the iPad's user-friendly touch screen is "pure magic" and a therapeutic marvel for people with disabilities. For Laura, who is twenty-nine years old and has Down syndrome, the iPad is much more than a technological toy. For Laura, who lives at our Dakota Communities Big Lake home, the iPad is a gateway to independence that allows her to listen to her favorite music, stay connected to her family and improve her dexterity.

With the touch of a screen, Laura downloads applications that are designed to complement her needs and abilities. She used to listen to her favorite country music stars on cassette tapes, CDs and MP3s on technology that someone else had to operate. Now Laura can independently download the music of Patsy Cline and Johnny Cash on the iPad she received last Christmas as a gift from her family and Dakota Communities donors.

Laura also looks at her favorite family photographs on her iPad and performs exercises that improve her hand-eye coordination.

Julie Peterson, Laura's Personal Advocate for almost twenty-five years, loves exploring the possibilities of the iPad alongside Laura. "You don't know what someone can do unless you give them the tools to try," Julie says.

Please join us as we explore what's possible with the help of technology. Your gift by check in the enclosed envelope or online through our website will help someone discover what they can do. Thank you for your generosity!

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growing independence

A New Home for
"Mr. Social."

As Jeff Goers' mother Kathy will tell you, her son is "Mr. Social." He loves meeting new people and has a real knack for remembering names and faces. Everywhere he goes, from church to the local fire station, people know him and are always excited to say "hello." Through his work at ProAct in Eagan over the past ten years, he has also established many close relationships.

This summer Jeff will make three new friends when Dakota Communities opens its 33rd residential home in the Twin Cities metro. After living with his parents for 33 years, he will move into his new place along with three other young men.

Jeff has a diagnosis that includes autistic-like behaviors. According to the Autism Society, autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability today. For Jeff, moving into a Dakota Communities home means he can live

with peers for the first time, and still receive the daily support he needs to be as independent as possible.

Jeff keeps his social calendar full with lots of community activities, something he is sure to continue when he makes his big move. On Mondays he delivers food to seniors through the "Meals on Wheels" program. He enjoys his regular basketball games with his buddies at the YMCA, but his real passion is being in the water.

"Swimming is what he loves to do," says his father Hank. Through his participation in the Special Olympics over the past few years, Jeff has even found a way to combine his love of socializing and being in the pool into one activity.

It's only a matter of time until "Mr. Social" settles into his new home. Soon after he does, his next-door neighbors will be eagerly saying "hello."



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sprouting volunteers

Growing friendships,
growing volunteersAt the Dakota Communities home in Cambridge,
Randy is always ready for a game.

Randy enjoys games like Uno and Yahtzee so much he was ready for a few new friendly competitors. And given his desire to help others as well, he realized a volunteer position at a local nursing home would be the ideal way to make some new friends while helping others.

With the assistance of his direct support professional, Randy has played board games at GracePointe Crossing nursing home every

week over the last three years. As Randy says, "I get to have fun doing what I love while I am contributing time to others." And the residents he visits are thrilled to have such an enthusiastic visitor.

Volunteer jobs are not always accessible for people with disabilities like Randy. Fortunately he found a volunteer position with an organization willing to make accommodations to capitalize on his strengths.



Fireman's Fund volunteers create new gardens at our 32nd Ave home in Plymouth

A volunteer is someone who gives his or her time, energy, and talents – and expects nothing in return. However, the benefits of volunteering are often enormous. The right match can help a volunteer connect to others and make new friends, reach out to the community, learn new skills or even advance a career.

At Dakota Communities we are fortunate to benefit from the many dedicated volunteers who have chosen to share their time with the people we support. Opportunities, both for a group or an individual, are available for you to share your passions with us as well. Just visit our website at www.dakotacommunities.org for more information, or find us at www.volunteermatch.com.

Many volunteer opportunities are available at locations throughout the Twin Cities metro area including:

- Arts and crafts
- Cooking
- Gardening
- Reading
- Scrapbooking
- Sewing
- Swimming

Through Randy's partnership with GracePointe Crossing and the support of Dakota Communities, he has expanded his social network and found a way to bring joy to others who look forward to his visits. He enthusiastically says, "Through my volunteer work, I have been able to make new friends."

More than just fun, friendships can "yield a multitude of long-term physical and emotional

health benefits," according to author Madeline Vann. She adds, "Maintaining positive relationships should rank up there with healthy eating and exercise as a necessary investment in your health." Randy and his close friends at GracePointe Crossing would surely agree.



680 O'Neill Drive
Eagan, MN 55121

phone | 651.688.8808

fax | 651.688.8892



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www.dakotacommunities.org