

# ANNUAL REPORT

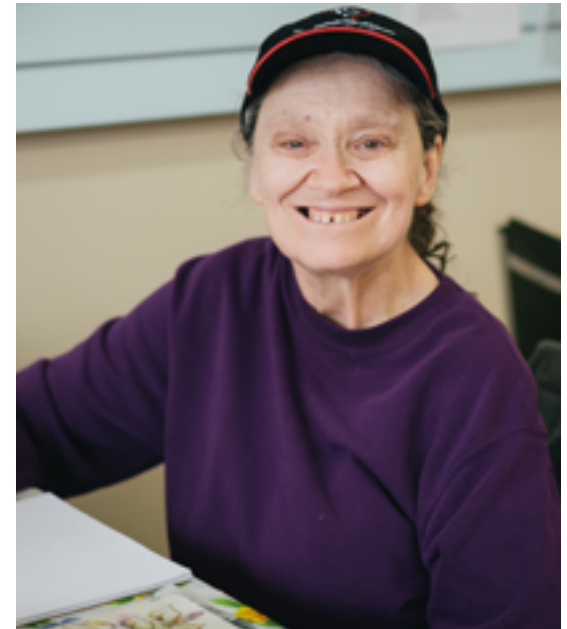
*2021 - 2022*

# LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

The past fiscal year continued to present significant challenges for Visions Of Independence (VOI) staff as they rallied to provide a high level of service for the people they supported. But, as the saying goes, where there's a will, there's a way. And our staff definitely had the will!

They met these challenges head on and pushed through, always keeping the best outcomes top of mind. As an organization, we were regularly shifting and trying to find

our balance in uncertain times. Flexibility was key. When there was an update or a change in government mandates, staff quickly adapted to the various and specific needs of the people. We incorporated technology as a way to connect, and staff covered shifts and worked overtime to ensure houses could stay open. Safety was also a primary concern, working in such close quarters. It was a constant juggling act, and VOI staff rose to the occasion,



pooling their resources and providing meaningful support, while keeping people safe and connected.

We're so grateful to everyone for the integral role they played in our organization and in our community, including the people supported by VOI and their family members, VOI staff and board members. We could not be where we are today without them. That's why when we discussed what to say in this year's Annual Report, we decided not to focus too much on the pandemic; instead, we wanted this book to be all about the people—the wonderful people we support and the dedicated people in our organization.

In the pages ahead, you'll read stories about service, commitment and resilience. Experience the importance of connection and in taking time to be with someone and really hear what they're trying to tell you.

Audited financial statements will be made available and published on VOI's website in September 2022. Please check back soon for updates.

See how our staff prioritized being sensitive and responsive to the needs and desires of the people they supported throughout their lifetime, advocating for them and helping them live on their own terms. And prepare to be inspired by people we supported, each with their own unique story to tell and experience from which we can all learn.

We hope you enjoy it!



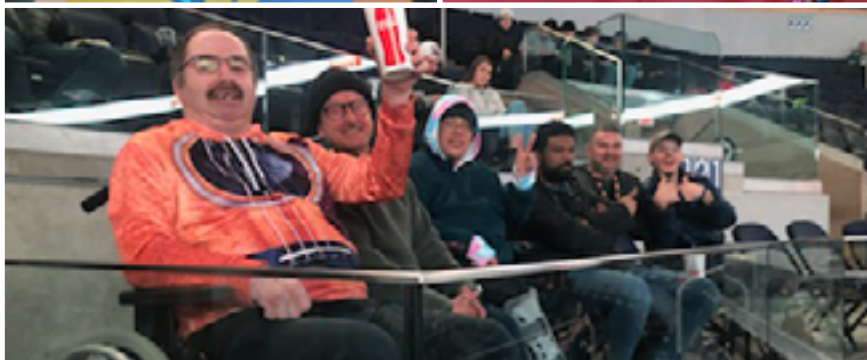
*Johnathan Bevan*  
President



*Jennifer Hagedorn*  
Executive Director

# MISSION STATEMENT

VOI provides personalized opportunities for people with diverse abilities to thrive.



# CORE VALUES

- We are open and respectful
- We are transparent
- We value people's strengths, abilities and knowledge
- We think outside the box
- We value people's experiences and perspective



# PATRICIA

There are certain people that everyone just wants to be around. These people radiate warmth and care and cheerfulness in all that they do. Patricia is one of these people.

“I go to church with her sometimes, and I see how much everyone loves her,” said Ruth, who became a Key Direct Support Professional in January and has provided direct support to Patricia for 15 years. “Little kids come running up to her and want to give her a hug. Teenagers want to play Uno with her. It’s amazing.”

Patricia requires some support with signing, though her big, friendly smile needs no translation.

“She’s always cheerful, even when she’s not feeling well,” said Ruth. “And she’s very caring. When she finds out someone is sick or someone’s parent has passed away, she always asks about that. She loves people, and all animals, too.”

Ruth said Patricia is extremely artistic, creative and full of ideas. She often draws or paints artistic pieces to give to people as gifts. “She’s always eager to be involved in people’s lives.”



*Patricia made a wreath at Hidden Talents, a retail outlet of VOI*

Patricia enjoys being active in the community as a volunteer with the Portage la Prairie Community Revitalization Corporation. Dressed in her safety vest and gloves, she cleans up litter within a nine-block radius as often as three times a week.

“Lots of people say thank you,” Patricia said.

She is also a dedicated volunteer at the Portage MCC Thrift Shop, where she sorts



games and puzzles. Patricia is meticulous at making sure no pieces or cards are missing. Ruth said Patricia always wants to make sure the job is done right at all times.

With everything she does, Patricia is attentive to the task at hand and requires minimal supervision. She has a cell phone and is conscientious about texting when she leaves home and then when she arrives at her destination. At home, Patricia does most of her own cleaning and takes great pride in being self-sufficient.

“I love living in my house and working as a volunteer,” she said.

Patricia also loves to cook and bake, and she enjoys sharing her creations with others. Her favourite thing to make is cabbage rolls, which she prepares from scratch.

Despite all the tempting food she prepares, there was a time when Patricia did not like the weight she had gained, so she joined TOPS (Taking Off Pounds Sensibly). She is extremely proud that she was crowned “Queen”—a title she received for losing more weight than others in her chapter and for keeping the weight off for more than ten years.

She also loves to travel and cannot wait to do more.

“I want to see the northern lights and the white bears,” she said.

In past years, Patricia enjoyed her February visits with Ruth to the Temple Gardens Hotel & Spa in Moose Jaw; she particularly loves the outdoor geothermal mineral pool. Patricia is not a fan of winter and likes to be warm.

And with her radiant personality, she makes things warmer for everyone around her, too.

# DEBBIE, DEAN AND STACEY

The name of the agency supporting them may have changed, but the game remains the same for Debbie, Dean and Stacey at their little house on the prairie in Austin.

The house was known as Pine Creek Community Residence, and though the amalgamation officially took place on April 1, 2022, VOI had already started putting systems and staffing support in place in the fall of 2021.

“They’ve all lived together in the house for quite a number of years. I first met them at the beginning of March,” said Julie, a Facility

Manager, who also managed two houses in Portage la Prairie.

“It was a lot of running around but also exciting to be involved in the amalgamation,” she said.

Julie said they had not had a manager in-house for a while, so some things were different for Debbie, Dean and Stacey, but overall, she said the transition was very smooth and they adjusted well to the changes.

Though the three residents had only known Julie a short time, their unique and



wonderful personalities already made a huge impression on her.

“Stacey’s probably got the best smile of anyone I’ve ever met,” she said. “He loves to be involved in conversations and to joke around. He goes to a program every morning then comes home and relaxes. And he loves cake.”

Dean is more a homebody, Julie said, and it can be challenging getting him to want to leave the house.

“He loves to watch westerns, old movies and TV shows like *The Waltons* and *Little House on the Prairie*,” she said.

As for Debbie, she is the total opposite.

“Debbie’s the social butterfly of the house,” Julie said. “She likes to be busy and involved with everything that’s going on. She also goes to a program every afternoon.”

The threesome goes to a friendship group at church once a week in the evening as well.

“At home, there’s also a gazebo, a swing and a fire pit so they have lots of things they can do outside, too,” said Julie. “And we can’t forget the resident cat, Cola; he’s like a member of the family.”

A special shout-out to  
**“the original six”** staff at  
the Austin house:

- Jolly Pearl Cupat
- Agnes Mercado
- Coralie Peters
- Glenda Sattler
- Destiny Sawatzky
- Lana Spelliscy

Thank you for helping to  
make the transition so smooth!

Julie said it’s been challenging trying to keep everyone busy during the pandemic, but they banded together and found fun activities to do.

“It’s been an honour getting to know them, supporting them and helping them live their lives,” said Julie. “Now that we’re trying to get back out into the community more, that will be a challenge, but VOI has done a really good job in helping those transitions along.”

# SARA

When you meet Sara, the words *joie de vivre* springs to mind.

With such enthusiasm and exuberance for the many activities she undertakes, you have to wonder where she gets all that energy!

Sara works at Season's Family Restaurant in Portage la Prairie four days a week as a dishwasher. She also cleans the bathrooms. VOI assisted Sara in applying for this position and supported her on the job for a short time. She has worked at Season's for one year, approximately.

"I like it a lot," she said. "It keeps me busy. Saturdays I have basketball. And Wednesdays I have off."

Sara spends her day off socializing with her friends at VOI.

"Today we did yoga, went swimming, had lunch and then played Bingo," she said.

Sara and her other friends at the program go on regular adventures around Portage la Prairie as well as in Winnipeg, such as a trip to the Manitoba Museum and go-kart racing



at Thunder Rapids Amusement Park.

Though there is a lot of a variety with the activities from week to week, each day begins with yoga and some form of fitness.

Being active is something Sara knows all about. The Special Olympian competed at

the summer and winter games pre-COVID, and she won a gold medal in basketball.

She also competed in track and field, field hockey and swimming.

She took many trips with Special Olympics throughout the province, in Canada and the US, plus some wonderful family vacations to the Caribbean.

“One thing you should know about me is that I love travelling,” she said. “And cruise ships!”

Her favourite travel destination was Miami, Florida, where she had fun in the sun on a Sea-doo, hanging out at the beach, swimming and shopping.

Sara is a big fan of summer, and enjoys spending time with her friends, camping with her sister and helping her parents with the sheep shearing on the family farm outside Portage la Prairie. She loves fall and Halloween but doesn’t care much for winter.

“Except for snowshoeing; it’s really fun,” she said. “And Christmas.”

Sara is one of those joyful people who loves so many things.

“I love taking selfies and colouring my hair.



Right now, it’s pink and purple streaks,” she said. “And I love to sing.”

When asked where she sings, she laughed, replying, “In the shower.”

In her down time, she likes to watch TV shows like *Friends* and *The Dukes of Hazard*. She also enjoys movies. Not surprisingly, her favourites are action movies!

# DARCY AND STEPHEN

For decades, Darcy and Stephen resided at an institution.

In July of 2021, it was home sweet home as they moved into a place of their own in Winnipeg with two roommates, Holly and Beverly.

Change is difficult sometimes, and it can take a while to get used to new people, situations and environments. Darcy, in particular, had a difficult time settling in at first to his new home. There are a lot of changes when people move into the community from an institution, including routines, people and food. Darcy may have not appreciated all the changes at first, but he has since settled in quite well and has gotten used to different people and food. The only time he doesn't eat is if he's not feeling well.

Stephen enjoys his space and indicates when he would like to be around people and when he doesn't. He joins in with his roommates at times, and other times he likes to be on his own. He appreciates company and hugs, sometimes.

“Both Darcy and Stephen use gestures, vocalization and facial expressions to communicate, so it was probably frustrating for them at first while the staff who supported them got to know them and understand their language,” said Angel, a Facility Manager.



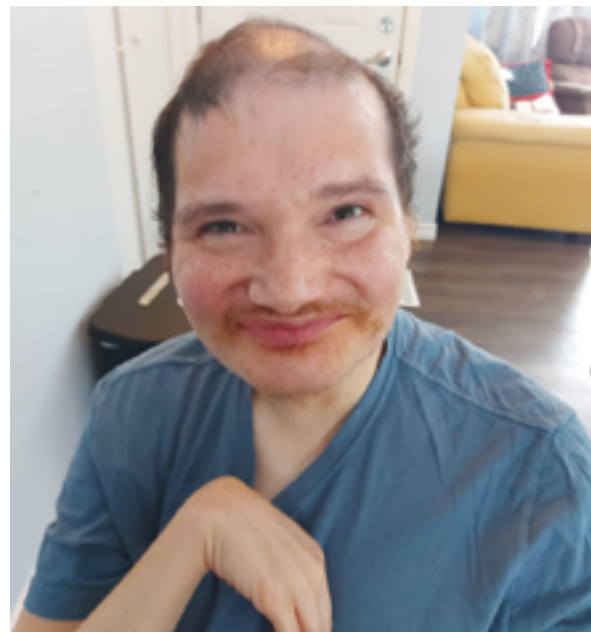
Where the gentlemen had lived previously always had locked doors. Darcy loves to be outside, and he will indicate he would like to go outside by moving his chair to the door, regardless of the weather.

The yard at their house is large and beautiful. The group has plans of BBQs and parties in the summer. It will be great to meet people they haven't had the opportunity to meet yet. Making friends and meeting new people is the theme for this summer!

Something that everyone at this house loves is music! They listen to all kinds of music.

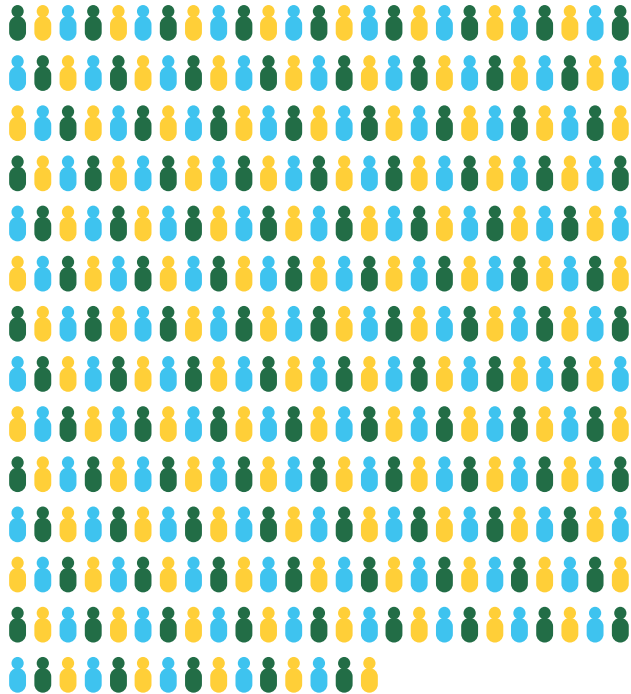
We're sure everyone will have a wonderful time together, experiencing everything their community has to offer!

Welcome Darcy and Stephen.



# AGENCY FACTS

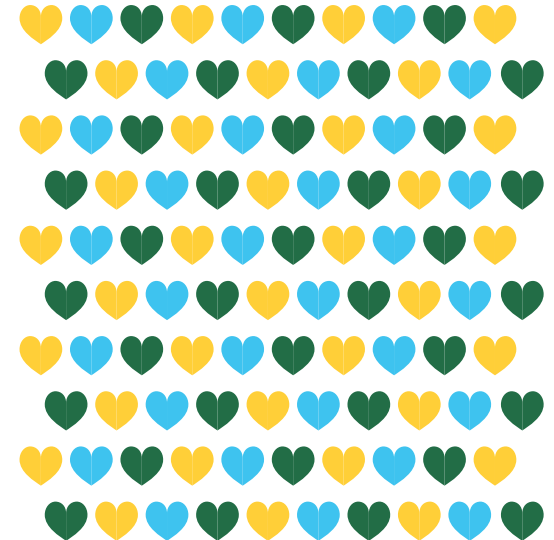
## 340 VOI EMPLOYEES



## 5 DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES



## 100 INDIVIDUALS



## 22 DIFFERENT HOMES



## SERVICES WE PROVIDE

- DAY & EMPLOYMENT SERVICES
- RESIDENTIAL SERVICES
- INDEPENDENT LIVING & RESPITE SERVICES

# IN MEMORIAM

There are those who come into our life for only a short while. And though we wish we could have known them longer, we feel honoured, and our lives are richer, for the time we did get to spend with them.

In 2022, we said good-bye to Nicholas, Gerald, Julia and Annette. They made a difference—in what they did and in who they were.

Their wonderful qualities—too many to mention—made us smile, laugh and cry. They left an indelible mark in our community, our organization and our hearts, and they will be missed.

Nicholas Bushenlonga  
*November 7, 1950 – January 28, 2022*

Julia Dobush  
*August 6, 1936 – May 8, 2022*

Gerald Choptiany  
*October 4, 1947 – May 4, 2022*

Annette Rondeau  
*August 22, 1945 – May 15, 2022*

# GERALD

Gerald took over the controls of the small plane and for one hour, the sky was his. And he loved every second of it.

“He loved airplanes and flying,” said Shannon, Director of Advocacy, Training and Development. “Especially the takeoff and landing, and flying over the water.”

Every second or third month, Gerald would charter a small plane at St. Andrews Airport, and—as co-pilot—he would fly around the Interlake.

“You could see how excited he was about it every time,” said Shannon. “It was an adrenaline rush for him.”

Shannon flew with Gerald for approximately five years and other staff went with him, too. Unfortunately, when he fell and broke his hip, it was no longer possible to board the small airplane.

Undeterred, Gerald and Shannon would grab some coffees at Tim Hortons then park at the airport to watch the planes take off and land.

While this was only one of many road trips

they took together, one of Shannon’s most memorable moments was early in their relationship at the house she had stepped in to manage. Gerald was living with Nick and Fred, his two roommates. She had known Gerald for about a week when, one day, he tapped her on the arm.

“He was pretending to box, so I tapped him back. We were just joking around, but I didn’t realize he was an avid wrestling fan. He tackled me to the ground and





folded me up like a pretzel!” Shannon said. “I tell everyone not to wrestle with Gerald because he’ll win.”

Gerald loved all kinds of contact sports, racecar driving and scary movies. If it was something that would get the heart racing, it was right up Gerald’s alley.

“Between the flying over water and the scary movies, I was totally taken out of my comfort zone,” said Shannon.

And Gerald loved people.

“Especially the ladies,” said Shannon,

laughing. “Nurses, bank tellers ... he wanted to give everyone a hug. He was extremely loving.”

Gerald cared deeply and felt loss intensely. Years ago, when he worked at Versatech Industries (now ImagineAbility) packaging camping supplies, he would take the bus there with his girlfriend. When she passed away, Shannon said his interest in working just wasn’t there as much. Gerald was also not quite the same after Nick became ill and passed away a couple of months ago.

Gerald battled with his own illness, which eventually progressed to the point that he was no longer strong enough to return home. He remained in the hospital where he could be kept most comfortable.

The staff members at VOI were honoured to help Gerald live the way he wanted—to the fullest. The sky was the limit for Gerald, and it was a place he loved to be.

*RIP, Gerald.*



# JULIA

There are all kinds of self-help books and videos with advice on how to know ourselves and get what we really want out of life. Julia never needed that kind of help. She already had it all figured out and knew everything she needed to know.

Julia knew how to love deeply and was loved in return by her many family, friends, roommates and extended family at VOI. She loved children and visitors, and her face would light up when people came to visit.

“She had a beautiful smile,” said Irene, Director of Services, who knew Julia for more than 20 years. “And a great sense of humour. She had a huge impact on a lot of people, and they will remember her.”

Julia’s former colleagues at Portage ARC Industries will remember how skilled she was at stripping and staining furniture. Julia retired in 2014 after 22 years doing work she enjoyed and excelled at.

Julia was a devoted caregiver and wanted to look after everyone, including staff. Julia bonded with everyone who came to live



with her at her houses, first in Portage la Prairie and then in St. Claude.

Julia definitely knew what she liked. She was a big fan of music, especially tunes by Elvis, Johnny Cash and Charley Pride. She also loved the music of Johnny Dietrich, a local singer, and would have been so delighted to know that Johnny performed at her funeral.

Terra, Director of Services, shared that Julia enjoyed her Diet Cokes, Cup O' Noodles and ice cream sandwiches. It became a tradition for Terra to bring ice cream sandwiches when she would come to visit. Terra also shared that some of Julia's favourite pastimes were playing cards, assembling puzzles, spending time with her seniors' group and checking out good-looking men. It was well known that Julia liked the gentlemen!

Julia loved looking after her cat, Bobby, who was with her till the end of her life. Bobby was a stray, and Julia jumped right in to care for him. She also enjoyed feeding her fish (perhaps a bit too much since it almost exploded!) as well as her bird. Julia made sure her bird, Polly, had lots of variety in his diet, including fruit, vegetables and, interestingly enough, chicken. Each night at 6 p.m., Julia would put Polly to bed, saying he needed his rest.

When her health declined, her doctor thought it would be best that she live her remaining days in a hospital. Julia was adamant that she stay at her home in St. Claude; she did not like hospitals.

"The staff team at St. Claude advocated with her and for her," said Terra. "Because that's what she wanted. And we wanted to see that her wishes were honoured—with dignity and respect. "

Julia passed away peacefully at her home, knowing she was surrounded by people who loved her.

"Julia always knew what she wanted," said Irene. "She was a strong self-advocate, and when she didn't want something, she made that clear."

Yes, Julia knew a lot. Perhaps most important of all, she knew that it was her life to live and made sure she got to live it on her own terms.

*RIP, Julia.*



## STAFF ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# SERVICE AWARDS

Reaching a milestone is something that deserves to be celebrated! VOI would like to formally recognize the outstanding efforts of the following staff members for their many years of exemplary service:

### 5 YEARS

Inderjeet Choong  
Uchenna Ezeigbo  
Ruby Gill  
Gagan Grewal  
Laura Hancock  
Mona Huertas  
Anthony Lagos  
Pauline Lagos  
Scott Morden  
Adekemi Opaleke  
Terry Pangman  
Nengi Shadrack  
Ana Wasyliw (7 years)

### 10 YEARS

Juliet Abella  
Novarian Cayetano  
Jashan Gill  
Corrie Hector  
Chinwe Ijoma-Nwosu  
Luz Libarnes  
Karen McGill  
Adetola Osifeso  
Joyce Prenevost  
Florence Ward  
Liesa Wiebe

### 15 YEARS

Shannon Harley  
Ruth Seguin  
Jani Witoski

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to our organization, our community and the people we serve.

# AMANDA

Amanda graduated with honours this past spring from the Disability and Community Support program at Red River College Polytechnic. Now she finds she has something she has not had in two years: free time!

“It feels weird,” she said, laughing. “Like I’m missing something. My weekdays were sitting at my desk from 8 a.m. till midnight, I would work all day Saturdays, and then if I worked really hard, I could take Sundays off.”

Despite her busy schedule as a single mother of two and full-time Senior Manager at VOI, Amanda committed to the continuing education program to gain more knowledge and understanding, which she said will help her do her job better with the people she supports.

“I’m so grateful to VOI for supporting me as a workplace student,” she said. “I have some great mentors and leaders. I never would have been able to pursue my education goals without the support I received from VOI.”

Amanda was promoted to Senior Manager



at VOI in 2021. She started as a Facility Manager in July 2015, where she helped transition three people from St. Amant Centre into one of the new homes. She started managing one home and then after two years, she started managing two.

In her new role as senior manager, Amanda shares her knowledge and applies her years of experience to support and mentor Facility Managers.

“I also go where I’m needed,” she said. “If there’s a crisis in a house or someone needs help, that’s where I go.”

Amanda said working at VOI is more than a job; it’s like having a second family.

“It’s been life-changing. I’ve had the honour of developing so many relationships,” she said. “The people we support, staff, direct support professionals—just so many different people.”

She said she has learned so many things throughout her seven years at VOI, but one thing that stands out is how each person she has supported has many gifts.

“And they’ve taught me how to really appreciate and look at things from another perspective,” she said.

As a believer in lifelong learning, one day Amanda would like to get her degree in Disability Studies.

“I don’t think my education journey is over yet,” she said. “But for now, my mission was to graduate with honours.”

Mission accomplished!  
Congratulations, Amanda!

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*“I’m so grateful to VOI for supporting me as a workplace student. I have some great mentors and leaders. I never would have been able to pursue my education goals without the support I received from VOI.”*

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# KATIE

The career path we choose can often be influenced by those close to us.

For Katie, a Direct Support Professional, she said her grandfather played a significant role in her decision to work with people living with disabilities.

“My grandfather worked at Manitoba Developmental Centre in Portage la Prairie his entire career,” she said. “He was very passionate about it.”

Katie also lives with ADHD, which she said also influenced her career choice.

“I think it’s helped make me very patient with people and want to help them, because I myself have had difficulty with learning,” she said. “And since it’s not a repetitive job, it’s always different and interesting, which is important for someone living with ADHD.”

Katie has been with VOI for seven years, initially supporting people in a home setting. Following a foot injury, she had difficulty walking up and down the levels of the house, and so in 2019, she starting supporting people full-time at the community services location



in Portage la Prairie, and she has been doing that ever since.

A key aspect of the community services is employment development and support.

“We often help a person find employment,” she said. “They usually start by volunteering, and we support them on-the-job for the first two weeks. After that, we may drive them to the job, but they do the job independently.”

Katie also leads group discussions, where

she teaches practical skills for employment, such as food and health safety and respectful workplace practices.

“We do a lot of volunteering in the community where they use these skills. For instance, we’ll work in the canteens and make lunches for the elementary school kids, and we’ll make Braille labels for audio books at the Portage la Prairie library.”

Katie said she is comfortable speaking about a lot of issues others may not want to speak about.

“I’ll talk about my ADHD, which is part of mental health. Many people we support also have mental health issues, so it’s something we can share and learn from each other,” she said.

As part of her own learning and to help others learn, she plays ASL videos that teach how to sign.

“When someone asks me why they need to know this, I explain that others in the group, maybe someone they’re sitting next to, communicates with sign language, and now they can talk to that person,” she said.

ASL training through VOI was created

originally as an opportunity to empower people like Patricia, who teaches others how to sign so they can communicate with her and other people (read Patricia’s story on page 6).

Katie said they also do music therapy, which before COVID-19, involved providing instruments to people if they did not have their own. One person, who loves music, has his own weekly concert where he plays for everyone.

“Everyone enjoys it, plus it encourages him to do something he wants to do and teaches him how to be comfortable, performing in front of an audience,” she said.

Katie said fitness is also a key part of the community services.

“We do yoga every day now,” she said. “It’s something people who are less mobile can do.”

Katie said while the activities vary greatly, they all work toward a common goal: helping people achieve whatever they want to achieve.

“I love building relationships with people, and helping them to be as productive as they can be.”

# RHONDA

When Rhonda first started taking her brother to the laundromat, it would often take him a long time to do his laundry.

“But it was *his* time” Rhonda said. “And it was *his* accomplishment, so it didn’t matter to me how long it took. We weren’t born running, right?”

Rhonda’s mother passed away 12 years ago, and her brother has lived with her since that time. Over the years, she has developed the knowledge and understanding of what is involved in caring for people living with disabilities, and she brings this experience into her role as Facility Manager.

“I grew up in this field,” she said. “So, I have the passion, the patience and the will to help staff understand what the people we support are going through.”

Rhonda began her career at VOI as a Direct Support Professional and just three years later, she was promoted to Facility Manager.

“It’s really opened my eyes,” she said.



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*“You have to be willing  
to adapt and to learn  
something new every day.”*

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“And you never know what a day’s going to bring. You really need to be flexible.”

She said how rewarding it is building relationships and trust with the people she supports, seeing their growth and then seeing growth in staff.

“I try to convey to staff that the people we support aren’t on our schedules; we’re on theirs,” Rhonda said. “Maybe it’s something we take for granted, like putting on a pair of socks. Even if the people we support look to us to do something for them, we have to let them do it, so it becomes *their* accomplishment, *their* milestone. And it might take a while, but when it happens, the staff members have that aha moment and get to see the faces of the people we support light up. These are the moments I live for.”

Over the years, Rhonda has seen many changes in the area of disabilities, so she works hard to stay current with training and learn about new developments.

Recently, Rhonda was provided a sponsorship to take the Disability and Community Support program at Red River College Polytechnic.

For anyone wanting to follow a similar career trajectory at VOI, Rhonda said it is certainly doable.

“You have to be willing to adapt and to learning something new every day,” she said. “But if you want it, you can do it.”

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so, I have the passion, the  
patience and the will to  
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the people we support are  
going through.”*

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