VOI Visions Of Independence

ANNUAL REPORT 2022 - 2023

LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

The past fiscal year saw many new developments at Visions of Independence (VOI), and we are pleased to have so much to celebrate.

The Board at VOI continues to be impressed with staff and their ongoing efforts to provide support to people in our community. We have seen how the staff teams learn from each other, and together, we learn from the people we support. VOI's role continues to expand as well to one where we build bridges and explore new ways to reinforce the value of the people we support in the community.

We greatly appreciate a generous one-time funding contribution from the Province of Manitoba, which will help us continue to do the work we do, to enhance the lives of the people we support. We are also extremely encouraged by the positive implications of the Province's wage increase announcement for staff working with people with diverse abilities. This is a testament to our industry's advocacy efforts and all that has been done to bring awareness and attention to such an important issue.



The pandemic exposed a lot of fragilities working in this kind of industry, and we are still in a transition phase of rebuilding, redefining, and seeking the new normal. Maintaining a balanced budget while maintaining quality of service continues to be a challenge. Though expansion is certainly on our radar, these past few years we have made a conscious and responsible decision to focus on solidifying the services we are providing and not expand too much or too fast.

Moving forward, rather than dwelling on ongoing challenges that face the marginalized community we work with, we want to really focus on strengths to build our community as an agency, using an asset-based approach. We know there will always be challenges, but if we can acknowledge each other's strengths, and know each other well enough to know what these strengths are, we can find solutions.

Audited financial statements will be made available and published on VOI's website in Summer 2023. Please check back soon for updates. We hope you enjoy this Annual Report that celebrates our progress as an organization, the important work of our staff, and the many contributions of the diverse people we support.



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



THE PEOPLE WE SUPPORT

PETER

When you're 65 and you have to leave the only home you've known since you were 10, it wouldn't be unusual to find the experience unsettling and even scary.

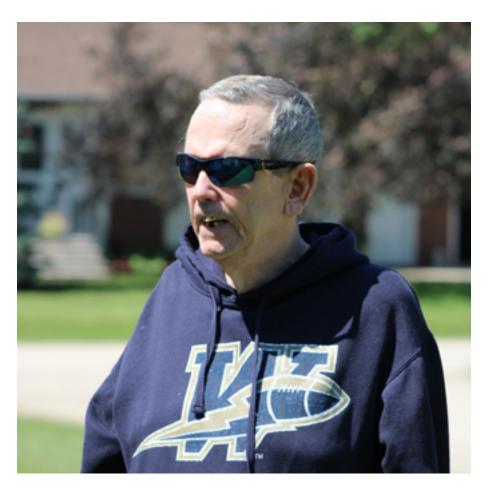
But not for Peter. In May 2022, Peter left the Manitoba Developmental Centre (MDC) in Portage la Prairie and moved to one of VOI's houses in St. Claude.*

"The move wasn't upsetting to him at all," says his sister, Barb. "He was just so accepting and adjusted right away."

As for Barb, her initial reaction to the move was quite different.

"I was so upset when I got the phone call that MDC was going to be closing and they were going to be moving people into group homes," says Barb. "I felt like that had been Peter's home for more than 50 years, and to move him was not in his best interest."

Barb made a promise to her mother before she passed away in 2004 to look after Peter and make sure he received the substantial level of



"The move wasn't upsetting to him at all. He was just so accepting and adjusted right away." support he needed as a person with diverse abilities, including losing his sight before he was 20.

"I'm the only one of our siblings who lives in Portage. And I dug my feet in so hard about the move. But I have to say it's the best thing that could have happened for him."

Barb is simply thrilled with the outstanding support Peter has received from the staff at VOI, particularly when Peter required multiple admissions to the hospital for a health issue.

"During all of those admissions, VOI staff ensured that someone was with Peter 24/7 as he would have no understanding of how to ring for help from a hospital staff." says Barb. "Absolutely, beyond a shadow of a doubt, I've got nothing but good things to say."

Peter's favourite activity at the house is listening to music, especially Johnny Cash and Elvis.

"He just loves music," says Barb. "He likes to listen to TV shows, too, but the shows he likes the most are the ones that have music in them."

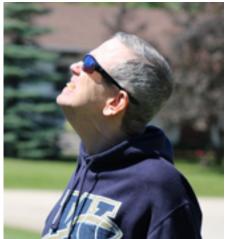
Peter also enjoys going to concerts, hockey games, the circus, and the fair.

"He likes the tilt-a-whirl," says Barb. "He also

enjoys going swimming. His routine is five times down the slide and then to the hot tub."

Peter's other favourite thing to do is eat.

"He loves everything," says Barb. "Especially chocolate cake and ice cream."



Due to his health issues, Peter's meals need to be pureed, but that doesn't affect his enjoyment of his food. Barb says her brother is extremely easy going.

"As long as he's got his music and his food, he's happy. He really doesn't get upset about anything – even with all his health issues," says Barb. "He's my hero."

* "In January 2021, the Manitoba government announced a 3-year plan to transition all residents at the MDC to alternative supported living arrangements in the community by March 31, 2024." Source: www.gov.mb.ca/fs/mdc

THE PEOPLE WE SUPPORT

RICKY

If you ask most people what their favourite hobbies are, they can name a few.

And then there's Ricky the Renaissance Man - he likes it all!

He loves dancing, listening to Johnny Cash and Kenny Rogers, going for long walks and rides in the car, and doing arts and crafts.

Being without sight, Ricky likes velvet art because it enables him to feel the textures and outlines of the print, and then he selects the colours he wants to use.

He likes to wear bracelets and will even wear a Slinky as a bracelet – so creative!

He also loves all things dinosaur, including all the Jurassic Park movies.

One of the outdoor activities he enjoys most is riding around St. Claude on his adaptive bike, which he shares with his housemate, Peter.

Both Ricky and Peter's favourite game is Bingo, and they also love the Obie, the interactive game console where you can project all kinds of



"He has a smile that just lights up the room."

games onto different surfaces.

Ricky and Peter moved together to St. Claude from MDC in Portage la Prairie last spring. Now 57, Ricky had lived at MDC since he was 23.

Initially, the transition was somewhat challenging

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for Ricky as he had to learn to navigate a new home. Staff would help by placing fabric in each room so he could feel the different textures and learn where his room was.

Ricky has since acclimatized and is enjoying life in St. Claude. He likes to get out into the community and talk with his neighbours.

He especially loves to go to Tallboys and is a big fan of their burgers and fries.

"Ricky is very expressive, and you can always tell when he's happy," says Amanda, Senior Manager. "And he has a smile that just lights up the room."

THE OPEN ROAD FOR ALL

Going for a bike ride on a beautiful, sunny day is truly one of life's greatest simple pleasures.

But when you're living with diverse abilities and are also without sight like Peter and Ricky, it's not so simple.

Last spring Peter and Ricky transitioned



to community living in St. Claude from the Manitoba Developmental Centre in Portage la Prairie. One of the benefits of living in their quiet neighbourhood is the wide-open spaces – ideal for bike rides.

Thanks to a generous grant from the Manitoba Marathon and United Way Winnipeg partnership, VOI was able to purchase an ASR 2011 adaptive bicycle for Peter and Ricky.

The highly adjustable bike was built according to certain specifications and included different accessories to accommodate Peter and Ricky, allowing them the freedom to ride.

And ride they did. As soon as the snow melted, the pair was off, loving the fresh air and exercise that comes with a good ride in the great outdoors.

"They really enjoy their bike and being outside," says Amanda, Senior Manager. "And it's a great way for them to get out and about in their community and meet their neighbours."

VOI is extremely grateful for this grant, which made it possible for Peter and Ricky to have the same opportunity to enjoy this favourite leisure activity as many other people do.



THE PEOPLE WE SUPPORT

PAUL

It's great to have a hobby but even better when it's good for the environment.

One of the many things Paul enjoys doing is recycling paper.

"He tears them into smaller pieces," says Amarjet, who has supported Paul for three years. "He loves the world."

Paul has five siblings and is originally from Sagkeeng First Nation. Most of his family still live there, and he will often go for a visit.

He is an extremely social person and loves to get outside and meet new folks.

Amarjet says that if anybody passes by, Paul will definitely say hello.

"I talk to people every day," Paul says.

Paul is very much the social butterfly in his Scotia Heights home, too, which he shares with his housemates Joseph and Michael. Paul moved to the house seven years ago from MDC.



"Paul is very much a social butterfly."

And being social himself, Paul likes to watch the TV talk show, *The Social*. He also really enjoys game shows, particularly *Let's Make a Deal*, as well as the *CTV News* 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. broadcasts.

One of his favourite leisure activities is five-pin bowling.

"I really like bowling and the lights," says Paul.

Paul is a big-time sports enthusiast and was rooting for the Winnipeg Jets this past season. He is also a big fan of watching baseball and throwing a ball around outside.

He likes action movies and going out in the community to do some shopping. He also enjoys colouring with markers.

He loves to eat many foods but has a definite favourite.

"Chocolate pudding!" says Paul.

Good choice, Paul!



THE PEOPLE WE SUPPORT

MICHAEL

If you haven't been catching up on what's happening in our province, you can always ask Michael.

"I like to watch the news," Michael says, as he proceeds to share his thoughts on the government, politics, and taxes.

In addition to staying informed about current events, Michael is also an avid sports fan. He enjoys watching the Winnipeg Jets and Winnipeg Blue Bombers at his home in Scotia Heights.

"I also like wrestling," says Michael. Some of his favourite wrestlers are Hulk Hogan, the late Randy Rhodes, and former Winnipegger Chris Jericho. Michael has a lot to say about the accidental death of Bret Hart and how sad it was. If you would ever like to learn all about the WWF, Michael is your guy!

Michael used to enjoy bowling but says he doesn't do it anymore because he's concerned that he'll fall.

"I like to go for walks too but it's hard to do in the winter with the snow," says Michael.



"I like to be cool. Summer's too hot."

Other than the walking conditions, Michael doesn't mind Winnipeg winters.

"I like to be cool," he says. "Summer's too hot."

Michael loves to listen to music, and he likes it loud! His favourite group is The Guess Who.

When it comes to food, Michael shows amazing discipline when it comes to avoiding certain foods, even though he loves them.

For instance, Michael really loves peanut butter and chocolate but says he tries to stay away from them.

"I go overboard and then I have problems."

Other foods he enjoys in moderation.

"I can't have more than 15 potato chips," he says. "If I do, like if I ate the whole bag, I wouldn't feel good."

Currently, Michael shares his home with his housemates Joseph and Paul. Michael is looking forward to a new Direct Support Worker who will be starting soon.

Making a House Feel Like Home for Everyone

What do you do when one person living in the house loves listening to loud music but the other people in the house don't want to hear it?

You call your trusted IT team and ask them to help.



Michael is someone who knows what he likes, and he likes things loud! Even though he was in his own room, the noise was disruptive to others.

"He didn't have a device, so it had to be paired with the TV, "says Rehan, VOI's Systems Administrator. "Getting that kind of headphones, especially for a TV that's not a Smart TV, was not easy. And some were very expensive."

Rehan and De Qiang, VOI's Junior Systems Administrator, did a lot of research and found the perfect headphones for Michael, which he uses regularly. It's one example of how making what seems like a small change can make a huge difference for everyone.

VOI'S RIGHTS AUDIT

ASKING QUESTIONS, MOVING FORWARD

VOI is committed to ensuring we protect the rights of the people we support at all times. This past fiscal year saw the creation of the Rights Audit: a 26-page document comprising 14 interviews with the people we support, staff, and support networks.

Michael, one of the people we support at a house in Scotia Heights, has been helping with interviews and asking questions for the audit, to help provide essential insight.

For example, one question asked was, "Do you have a key for your home?"

"This question may seem like a simple one," says Shannon, Director of Advocacy, Training and Development, "but it's much more significant. It's more than asking a person if they have a way to get in and out of their home; it's about ownership and acceptance and belonging."

Once the interviews were documented in the audit, findings were shared with the newly

created Rights Audit Committee, who reviewed the material and made recommendations.

The goal for VOI going forward is to have committees in place to review and make recommendations in other areas of importance as well, such as incident reports and training.



A CONVERSATION WITH REHAN, SYSTEMS ADMINISTRATOR

Now in a senior role, Rehan has been a part of VOI's IT team for more than four years.

Can you please explain your role, Rehan? What are some of the projects you lead?

I take care of all the IT systems, which include network management, creating custom solutions for our teams and departments, and communicating with vendors.

How many people does the IT department support at VOI?

Currently, we support around 320 users, including all the offices and houses, and some of our sister agencies we help from time to time, who are smaller and don't have access to the same resources or staff. When I first started, we had fewer than fifty devices, so you can see the actual growth of the physical IT infrastructure.

What was it like for your team at the beginning of the pandemic?

I had already started to prepare in advance because you never know what can happen; you need to have a plan A, plan B, plan C. We didn't know how long it was going to go on, like if it would be three months or six or longer, so I started working on solutions early; I had the groundwork ready. When everyone started working at home, the VPNs and devices were all ready to go. I set it up so even staff could access everything; they could even



print to the printer remotely. I mostly work remote, too. I installed a "back door" at the office, so I can be at the office virtually.

What are some of the challenges you're experiencing today?

We have virtual training classes - we call it "the Academy," which has about 110 videos for learning service- and industryrelated topics. The challenge is keeping up with all content that needs to be updated. We need to make regular upgrades to our systems too, like faster internet, which we need because everyone is online. With everything moving so fast and constantly changing, we need to use downtime to upgrade skills and learn new technologies for VOI and for ourselves as well.

What's the best part of your job, Rehan?

I like how every day is different and you have no idea what's going to happen, especially Monday mornings. Since I started, I don't think anything has repeated twice. I also like getting to see the difference we're making in the lives of others. In IT, we don't interact much with the people we support, so when we go to their houses, we can meet them – which is great – and it helps and makes more sense when creating solutions for them.

Can you share a favourite work story?

One of my best moments was when I was at one of the houses upgrading a computer from Windows 7 to 10. One of the people we support gave me a picture she had drawn for me. I like to tell that story to everybody, and I keep the drawing on my desk.

How about outside of work? What are your favourite things to do?

I love biking and shopping. Retail therapy!

What do you like to buy?

Mostly gizmos and gadgets – technology stuff. Although I've noticed now that I'm getting older, I'm buying more stuff for the home.

How about food? What's your favourite?

Donairs and burgers.

Thank you, Rehan!

A CONVERSATION WITH DE QIANG, JUNIOR SYSTEMS ADMINISTRATOR

De Qiang, who also goes by DQ, has been a part of VOI's dedicated and vigilant IT team since 2021.

Tell us about your role, DQ? What does a Junior Systems Administrator do?

My main role is troubleshooting small projects, which includes researching new features that we can implement for the houses and also assisting with printer, software, and computer network issues for Winnipeg, Carman, and Portage la Prairie.

Do you work remotely?

Yes, I mostly work from home, though depending on the project or issue, sometimes I'm at the office and houses. It's more of a hybrid.

What do you like best about the work you do?

I like helping make the processes easier and more comprehensible for everyone, either by improving automations or the programs that we create internally. And the team at VOI is amazing. I feel very comfortable working with them. I've learned a lot. too. Everyone is always smiling and there's communication. Everyone's treated like family and an important part of the team. I also share VOI's vision, and I like working to make life better for people with



disabilities and helping them be part of the community.

Do you have an example of that you can share?

I do. At one of the day programs, there was an issue with the Obie remote controller, and it wasn't functioning properly. As a result, no one could play their video games. When I fixed the remote, the person we were supporting was so thankful. Seeing him play and enjoy the game so much made me really happy, knowing I made a difference in that person's life.

Did you find the pandemic made your work challenging?

When I started at VOI, the pandemic was already underway, so some processes were already in place and people had adapted. Without as many in-person meetings, communication can be tricky sometimes. We need to continue taking precautions, but I do miss in-person meetings, too. It's not quite the same talking to someone through video.

So, when you're not working, what do you like to do for fun?

I also work at UPS in the evenings, but I have my weekends free. Sometimes I like to write songs, surf the internet, or watch some action movies. I don't watch much TV because my two nieces just took over my TV; it doesn't belong to me anymore.

How old are your nieces?

They're four and five.

That's pretty funny. And they live with you?

Yes, along with my sister and brother-in-law. I moved to Canada six and a half years ago from Mexico. I was the first one in my family to move here, and I recently became a citizen.

Congrats!

Thanks!

So, what do you think of Manitoba winters?

Actually, I like the cold weather. Maybe not when it's minus 40 but I do like winter. I don't like being hot.

What's your fave food?

Anything spicy!

So, you like hot food and cold weather?

Ha, that's right.

Thank you, DQ!

A CONVERSATION WITH MAKAELA, ASSISTANT MANAGER

Makaela is an Assistant Manager at VOI, leading a team of four staff members.

How long have you been with VOI, Makaela?

This past January was two years. I started at VOI as a Direct Support Professional (DSP) while doing my practicum for the two-year Disability and Community Support program at Red River College Polytechnic. There were four practicums, and I did three of them with VOI, so I was grateful for that. I moved into my current role after I graduated.

What does your average day look like in your current role?

I manage one of the day

programs, which runs Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. First thing in the morning, I talk to staff and together we plan a schedule for the day. I answer emails as well and try to hang out with the people we support as much as possible. I also try to help with lunches.

How many people participate in the day program?

As of June, we'll have nine, which is super exciting.

What are some of the activities you do in the community?

A lot of what we do depends on the weather. When the weather's not nice, we'll go



swimming, bowling, grocery shopping, and help cook lunch. But when it's a nice day, we'll go to the park, have barbecues, go for walks, and swim outside in the summer. We need to rotate certain activities because our van can only accommodate one wheelchair at a time, and currently, three of the people we support use wheelchairs.

What are some challenges you encountered when the pandemic was in full swing?

The biggest challenge was that we lost the ability to get out and do anything. I was a DSP then and most people I supported were not working. We went from being able to be out and about in the community to not going out or enjoying all the same perks as we used to. I wanted to be able to provide the best support for the people we were supporting, and it was hard to have to explain that what we used to do together we couldn't do anymore. It was taking away what was part of their everyday.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

I'm sure a lot of people would

say it's the people and honestly, it's so true. I'm very fortunate to have the opportunity to meet so many people all the time. I get to learn about different personalities, from the people we support to staff and administration, and the parents and caregivers. I like being able to make even the smallest of differences. And it doesn't feel like work; it feels like I'm hanging out with my second family.

Is there one work story that really stands out for you as particularly special?

That's a hard one, because fun and interesting things happen all the time. Every day is different so that makes it special and interesting.

What are some of your hobbies?

I really enjoy hanging out with my friends – just socializing. I used to play competitive soccer so maybe I'll join a rec league. I also really like watching movies.

What kind of movies do you like?

I'm obsessed with rom-coms and have been binging all the old ones. I wish they were more like they used to be. My boyfriend works in Calgary, so we've been doing the longdistance relationship thing for just over seven months now. Sometimes we'll put a movie on and just play it at the same time so we can watch it together.

What's your favourite thing to eat?

I love pasta. Anything pasta!

Thank you, Makaela!

VOI'S ACADEMY AND LEARNING PATHS

A workaround that works wonders

Necessity truly is the mother of invention.

COVID-19 required many of us to retreat to our homes and find new ways to work. VOI's virtual Academy was created to ensure learning, training, and orientation could continue, even though in-person meetings had been put on hold.

"Back in the early days of COVID-19, Rehan and another staff member in IT built a whole online learning platform for us," says Shannon, Director of Advocacy, Training, and Development. "I put PowerPoint presentations together and we recorded and uploaded the



content. It's everything that staff would have received in their orientation if we were training in person." There are 26 modules and 110 video tutorials to date. Examples of training modules include medication administration, goal setting, food and kitchen safety, and an introduction to the Vulnerable Persons Act.

Aside from learning and training specific to job functions at VOI, there is also a plan going forward to provide continuous learning opportunities about important topics such as diversity, gender bias, and Truth and Reconciliation.

Though many aspects of work life have returned to how things were pre-COVID, since VOI's efficient, cost-effective, and flexible virtual Academy for learning and training is a demonstrated digital model of success – or in this case a "module of success" – it's here to stay!

Setting staff up for success

Many of us can recall a job in the past where we had to start working when we weren't as ready as we could have been.

"I developed the Learning Path to ensure staff have the tools they need to do their job, instead of rushing to get the tools once they've already started," Shannon says.



The Learning Path has been in effect for the past year. For every person who is hired at VOI, Shannon creates a learning path, which is audited every three months.

"There's training that needs to be completed before staff can pass their probation or if they want to apply for another position in the organization," says Shannon. "It's a more organized process."

GRANT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The past few years have truly taken a financial toll on smaller non-profits organizations like VOI, and providing the people we support with recreational items that enhance their enjoyment and quality of life is often beyond our means.

On behalf of everyone at VOI, we thank the following organizations for their generous contribution to our programs. You have helped make such a difference in our community and in the lives of the people we support.

Social Enterprise Program Expansion

supported by: The Community Foundation of Portage & District (CFPD)

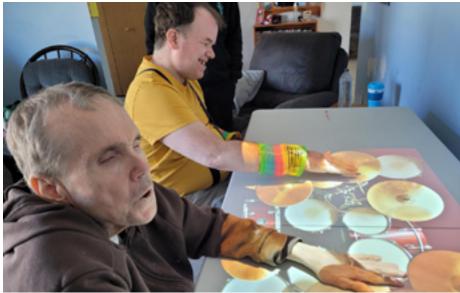
Generous support from CFPD enabled VOI to purchase a pop-up tent, ice cream freezer, milkshake maker, and hot dog rollers, which were enjoyed at various local community events. These life experiences provided the people we support with the opportunity to interact with others and feel included in the community.











Transitioning From Institution To Community

supported by: Manitoba Marathon Foundation and United Way Winnipeg Partnership

A generous grant from the Manitoba Marathon Foundation and United Way Winnipeg Partnership helped ease Peter and Ricky's transition to community living. With their support, VOI purchased an adjustable ASR 2011 adaptive bike, so Peter and Ricky can enjoy the great outdoors and ride around their new home in St. Claude.

Seniors Vitality Program

supported by: New Horizons for Seniors (NHSP)

Thanks to NHSP's kind support, VOI purchased three Obie highly interactive gaming consoles, which have been enjoyed by the people we support at our Day Programs in Winnipeg and Portage la Prairie and a house in St. Claude.

AGENCY FACTS



375 ACTIVE STAFF

IN MEMORIAM

This past year, we said good-bye to Wayne, Ivy, Paula, and Lorne.

They touched our hearts with their wonderful and unique personalities. We greatly miss their presence in our lives, and we feel honoured to have known them.



Wayne Csapso March 26, 1969 -November 24, 2022



Ivy Franklin May 31, 1940 – November 21, 2022



Paula Martin September 16, 1951 – August 17, 2022



Lorne Richmond *August 15, 1949 – August 14, 2022*

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SERVICE AWARDS

VOI would like to thank the following staff members for their many years of dedication and service:

15 YEARS Mary Wityshyn

10 YEARS

Nihinlola Afolabi Marvin Benorilla Ven Block John Blum Linda Boras Christine Funk Roselle Hermosura Si Oke Bose Osifeso Stacey Peirson Shay Perry Nicole Peters Gracielle Reyes

5 YEARS

Rebecca Afolabi Emilly Amuti Chris Asielue Mylene Bermejo Darcey Buck Fatimat Bukola Salami Tia Callihoo Angelica Catajoy Peace Chioma Ugwa Jolly Pearl Cupat Elizabeth Dela Rosa Angela Dubois Joylen Gellamucho Issa Koroma Lorna Laceda Glenn McMahon Helen Nlewedim Carole Notice Patricia Ann Oreas Rhonda Raback Divya Raj Theressa Ryland Marissa Santos Jennifer Stieler Sally Tutor

Thank you for your commitment to making our community a better place to live, and enriching the lives of the people we support and each other.

That you are here—that life exists and identity, That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.

- Walt Whitman

VOI Visions Of Independence

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