

# Turning possibilities into realities

**Maquoketa-based nonprofit group ensures people with disabilities have opportunities.**

**BY JOHN KRUSE**

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MAQUOKETA, Iowa — For Sheena Eickert, being able to find work is about more than just making a buck. It also is therapy.

The Preston resident holds multiple jobs, including working at a recycling center, sewing pet products and providing janitorial services.

Staying busy gives her a steady income, but it also helps her manage her pervasive developmental disorder, which can cause anxiety and depression.

While working, Eickert is happy and content, she said.

For the past 16 years, Imagine the Possibilities has made sure she always has had opportunities.

"I'm glad that they do what they do," Eickert said. "I enjoy working."

Eickert is one of 550 people with disabilities in Iowa who are served by the nonprofit organization based in Maquoketa, which delivers services to people with physical and mental disabilities.

"We want them to achieve the greatest level of independence that they possibly can," said Chief Administrative Officer Jeff Morris. "We want them to achieve at their highest level of capacity."

The organization's roots in the area stretch all the way back to 1973 via DAC, or Developing Alternative Choices Inc. In July 2016, DAC, Midwest Opportunities Inc. and Imagine the Possibilities merged after the privatization of Medicaid.

"It was a game changer for how we operated," Morris said. "We wanted to make sure that we were still able to best serve people without the costs falling on their shoulders."

Today, the organization works throughout Iowa and employs about 750 people. Morris said the organization's roots in Jackson County are a testament to Iowa's small communities



**EILEEN MESLAR • Telegraph Herald**

Sheena Eickert (left), of Preston, Iowa, practices a straight stitch Monday at Imagine the Possibilities in Maquoketa, Iowa. The nonprofit provides services to people with disabilities.

creating large nonprofit endeavors.

"It's not uncommon for high-quality organizations to be found across rural Iowa," Morris said. "There are problems that must be addressed everywhere."

The organization continues to expand its services.

This summer, Imagine the Possibilities opened its sewing operation. The employment program hires people with disabilities to sew pet products, including toys and beds, which then are sold locally.

The program's creation follows the organization's decision in December to raise the pay for people working in their employment programs to the general state minimum wage. (The law allows people with disabilities to be paid lower than the standard minimum wage in some circumstances.)

Robin Nims, employment services director

for the organization, said the sewing program eventually will employ about 25 people.

"It helps them in life and gets them integrated into the community," Nims said. "For many of them, it helps with their mental health as well."

Eickert said the sewing program has quickly become one of her favorite jobs.

"I like it a lot," she said. "It's been fun to learn."

Morris foresees more growth of the organization's services in the future.

"We are continuing to look at areas of support for service that we could be adding," he said. "People with disabilities exist, and we feel strongly about their position in life. We feel they should be given the opportunity to achieve."



**Robin Nims**