

50 Years of Hiawatha Homes



Volunteer at Hiawatha Homes: Your time. Their joy. One powerful connection.

April 2026

Our volunteers make our day. They have from the very beginning.

Hiawatha Homes was created by the volunteer efforts of parents and community leaders who had a vision of what the ideal care for children with disabilities could be. Through their persistent efforts, the Hiawatha Children's Home was opened in 1976. Six years later, the Hiawatha Adult Home was established. The continued involvement of those individuals over the past 50 years has been key to the growth and success of Hiawatha Homes.

An early volunteer program for the Hiawatha Children's Home included a grandparent program, in which volunteers from the community served as "surrogate grandparents" to the children. The need for volunteers increased tremendously when Hiawatha Homes launched the annual Rochester Festival of Trees fundraising event. Volunteers helped – and continue to help – with set-up, tree decorating, planning of the various events throughout the festival week, and tree delivery. Volunteers even prepared the dinner for an early Festival of Trees opening night gala!

To honor and thank our 2025 volunteers, Hiawatha Homes hosted an appreciation breakfast on April 22. More than 60 of our volunteers attended the event. We had an opportunity to celebrate the many contributions of our volunteers this year, and to reflect on how fortunate we are to have such a dedicated group of individuals supporting our mission.

We value our volunteers not only for their tangible contributions, but for their fresh ideas and their enthusiastic spirit. We need individuals of all ages and with a wide variety of talents and skills. You could be a Hiawatha Homes volunteer!

Join the Board!

An effective board requires participants with a variety of skill sets. Your talents might be the missing piece to our success. With two boards to choose from, we can match your interests and talents to help you make the biggest impact.

Do You Like a Good Story?

The individuals we support do! Westerns, historical fiction, romance novels, mysteries, thrillers, science fiction, children's books – there is something for everyone, especially if you like to inject excitement and drama into the story.



Hiawatha Homes hosted an appreciation breakfast for our volunteers at Charlie's Eatery & Pub. Everyone from tree designers to board members to companions attended.



Come Jam with Us!

Music soothes the soul. The individuals enjoy all kinds of live music, from classical to country western; both individuals and groups, vocal (including sing-alongs) and instrumental. Our volunteer musicians perform for individuals in their homes. Christmas carols are always a favorite!

What's better than a sing along with friends? We say, nothing! Stop by and join us a song or two!

Be Crafty!

We have a number of wonderful artists here. Some of the activities they enjoy include coloring and painting pictures, making greeting cards, textile arts, making costumes for various events, and making holiday decorations for their homes.

Stepping Out

Social life is sooooo important to us all! The individuals we support enjoy getting out and attending community activities, including the Olmsted County Fair, RochesterFest, Festival of Trees, Disability Day at the Capitol, petting zoos, concerts, sports events, parties, movies, apple orchards, and pumpkin patches. It is helpful for the staff to have an extra set of hands on these outings – someone has to get the snacks and popcorn!

Wardrobes

With the change of Minnesota seasons closets need to be organized and updated. New shoes! New hair ribbons and clips! It is fun to have a friend help decide which clothes to keep, and to help pick out replacements. And girls (especially) always enjoy shopping for an outfit for a special occasion.

Do You Have a Green Thumb?

We are always looking for ways to beautify our patios and yards. The individuals we serve enjoy potted flowers and kitchen gardens, especially if they can help with planting, watering, and care.

Are You a Good Cook?

Our house staff always appreciate help with meal preparation. We all fall victim to food boredom. Everyone enjoys a something different from someone else’s kitchen.

Festival of Trees

Now in its 41st year, the Festival of Trees is the signature fundraising event for Hiawatha Homes. It has become a high point of the Rochester community holiday season. There are many festival volunteer opportunities, including decorating trees, helping plan and organize the Opening Night Gala, DiverseAbility Day activities, and the live and silent auctions. It is a busy, exciting week. We can’t do it without our volunteer elves!



Last year, students from Dover-Eyota High School, pictured here, helped design a tree during Festival of Trees. Festival of Trees is an excellent way to get a group of friends together to help a worthy cause. And have fun!

Finally...Everyone Needs a Pal

We all thrive with a healthy social circle that includes family, co-workers, and new and old friends. Our volunteers provide friendship and social interactions that are important to the individuals we support. We believe that the individuals also provide “warm fuzzies” to our volunteers.

There are so many ways to make an impact. And a little goes a long way. If one of these areas sounds like a great time, visit our website and fill out a volunteer application today!

I want to support 50 more years!

Consider becoming a monthly donor where \$50 a month supports Hiawatha Homes for years to come.
Mail to: 1820 Valkyrie Drive NW, Rochester, MN 55901

Our Story Begins With Home



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