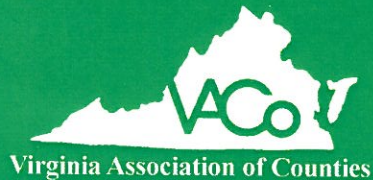


Recognizing the Best in County Government Programs!



2014 Achievement Awards



2014 VACo Achievement Awards

Deadline: June 2, 2014

Application Form

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 2, 2014.**

Program Information

Locality Orange County

Program Title Rapidan River Day: A Special Day for Our Special Friends with Autism

Program Category Parks & Recreation

Contact Information

Name Tim Moubray

Title Director

Department Orange County Parks & Recreation

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Orange, VA 22960

Telephone # (540) 672-5435 Fax # (540) 672-2311

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Signature of county administrator or chief administrative officer

Name R. Bryan David

Title County Administrator

Signature 

Call for Entries



OVERVIEW

Children affected by Autism Spectrum Disorders are an underserved segment of many localities populations. Due to their individual needs, they are sometimes unable to participate in recreational programs, events, leagues, or sports activities. With the increasing frequency of Autism over the past decades, this is challenge that many localities are experiencing, and solutions need to be developed. We believed that through partnerships with supportive local businesses and volunteers, this was a challenge that could be answered in Orange County.

We planned the event for June 22, 2013. Since this was our first program of this nature, we kept the program small, and served five children within our focus group. We served an additional four children who were siblings of the focus group. We offered this program at no charge. Since our department wanted this program's attention to be centered on the focus group, siblings were provided with alternative activities during key portions of the program.

Participants were provided with activities that included rope swings, obstacle courses, field games such as cornhole, tubing, and fishing. A crucial partnership with Rapidan River Kayak Company allowed owner Beth Seale to provide tethered kayak instruction for participants, which all enjoyed. During water activities, participants were partnered with a volunteer who stayed with them throughout the activity, which helped developed trust. Parents were also permitted to partake in the activities with their children.

Following the success of this program, we plan to make it annual event and increase the size of our participant group to accommodate more children. Our second Rapidan River Day is scheduled for June 21, 2014. After reviewing among staff and volunteers, many felt that this program made an impact upon both the lives of the participants as well as the providers.



CHALLENGE

Children affected by Autism Spectrum Disorders are an underserved segment of many localities populations. Due to their individual needs, they are sometimes unable to participate in recreational programs, events, leagues, or sports activities. With the increasing frequency of Autism over the past decades, this is challenge that many localities are experiencing, and solutions need to be developed. We believed that through partnerships with supportive local businesses and volunteers, this was a challenge that could be answered in Orange County.

SOLUTION

Following requests from citizens with children affected by Autism Spectrum Disorders, Orange County Parks & Recreation began to plan a recreational activity specifically geared towards them. Our department already had a strong working relationship with Rapidan River Kayak Company, with whom we had planned a few partner programs. Beth Seale, the owner of the business, also has a background in physical education and special needs, and was sympathetic to the needs of this group. With these pieces already in place, it seemed the natural program to develop would be something that involved the natural beauty of the Rapidan River and water activities that many children in this group had likely never experienced.

Rapidan River Kayak Company immediately offered their facility, equipment, and staff to help with the program at no charge. Their generosity made the planning of the program much smoother and virtually eliminated funding concerns. Since our department has limited staff but believed that one on one attention would be critical to the success of this program, we sent the word out to several colleges and universities with adaptive physical education, therapy, and counseling programs to find student volunteers. These volunteers would gain real world



experience working with special needs children. We were able to find three volunteers through these means, as well as other local volunteers.

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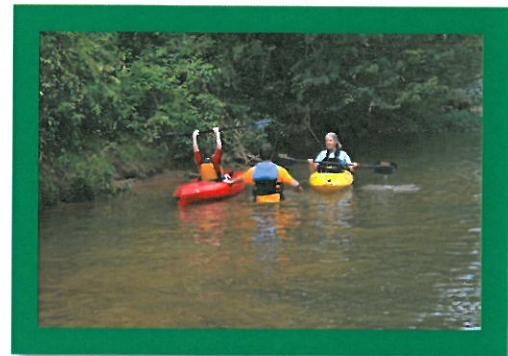
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scheduled for June 21, 2014. After reviewing among staff and volunteers, many felt that this program made an impact upon both the lives of

the participants as well as the providers. Feedback





from parents provided the greatest encouragement, with one parent telling Parks & Recreation staff that she needed to go home and take Tylenol since her face hurt from smiling so much. No negative comments were received.

MODEL

Since the increase in the prevalence of autism spectrum disorders is nationwide, other localities are likely faced with similar problems. Our department believes that this program can be a model for these other counties.

The first step is identifying the population. Thankfully, many parents are looking for programs that can include their special needs children, and this step is not difficult. Make a contact list of these parents when they stop by, and listen to the activities that interest them.

The second step is identifying sympathetic businesses and organizations to help. With the prevalence of autism, many citizens are likely to have relatives or friends that are affected. Our department found that they are excited and motivated to help with programs that focus on this population. It was this step (coupled with input from parent requests) that helped us determine that a water program was the best option. Our partnership with Rapidan River Kayak Company was an incredible asset. In other areas, a water program may not be feasible, but there are likely to be alternatives, and there will certainly be supportive groups. Make sure they are included in the planning, especially if they will be as involved as Rapidan River Kayak Company was for our program.

The third step is locating volunteers. We think that maintaining a one-to-one instructor to participant ratio was a huge factor in our success. Many colleges and universities offer related programs, and students are often willing to travel for firsthand experience and/or class credit. Some localities may have the luxury of nearby colleges, which will only help in terms of



recruitment. While these volunteers are great because they are interested in adaptive programs, don't forget local volunteers. Again, the prevalence of autism means that it affects the lives of many citizens, and many are willing to help.

The final step is the execution of the program. All volunteers and staff should be briefed regarding what to expect and what they will be doing. The key to this program was flexibility. While we had many planned activities, we did not force participants to stop an activity they were enjoying to hurry to the next. Participants were invited to try new activities, but could opt-out of any that did not interest them. A casual atmosphere went a long way to keeping the program enjoyable for participants and organizers.

