



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2021.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: County of Henrico  
Program Title: Day Services - staying connected through video and more  
Program Category: Health and Human Services

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Victoria Davis  
Title: Public Relations Specialist  
Department: Public Relations  
Telephone: 804-501-4933 Website: www.henrico.us  
Email: dav127@henrico.us

### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Brandon Hinton  
Title: Deputy County Manager for Administration  
Signature: 

## **Program Overview**

Adults with Developmental Disabilities have long benefitted from the routines associated with attending a center-based Day Support Program. The Hermitage and Cypress Enterprises programs have provided a consistent service for people living in Henrico, New Kent and Charles City counties for many years. In March 2020, the program was faced with closing in-person onsite and other community services in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. While even a short closure time was unimaginable, the continued closure was even more so. Within a month of the closure, plans were underway to provide supports to the individuals with developmental disabilities when they could not attend their program and for some, did not understand why. Staff developed innovative and creative ways to stay connected using a new YouTube video channel, Web-Ex calls, weekly calls for check-in and even new “drive-by” visits to allow for seeing familiar faces (even with face coverings) and providing activities to use at home. This innovation and commitment by staff allowed individuals to stay connected, feel safe and offer social options to help avoid depression and other behaviors.

## **Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality**

Individuals with Developmental Disabilities have historically been isolated from society. Henrico County opened their Day Services programs in the 1980s and have serviced hundreds of individuals to help them connect to friends and their community. Services have been offered in two centers and provide work options both in the center and community sites. Activities are provided to increase skills and help individuals become a vital part of their larger community. When COVID-19 closed County buildings, these individuals were left to be at home, feeling isolated and at times, despondent. Many did not really understand why they couldn't go to work/program every day. The County committed to keeping all Day Services staff working. The staff did the rest, developing ways to stay connected and ensure the individuals they served knew

that someone still cared and would be there to offer whatever support they needed to make it through these unprecedented times.

### **How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria**

When COVID 19 hit, many things in the world changed. One major change was the lives of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Many of their routines revolved around attending a day program for services during the “work week”. They did not have the option to “work from home”. Many were isolated in family homes and/or group homes.

The staff of Hermitage and Cypress Enterprises would not let that isolation continue. They developed an innovative approach and put it into practice. It was simple – connections made while at the program had to continue in this new world of social distancing. The use of media such as YouTube and Facebook were just one way. Delivering items to their front porches, their driveways and yes, even their front yards, demonstrated to the individuals and their families that they were not alone. The variety of ideas for themes of both videos and activities was wide-ranging and used both staff talents and the interests of the individuals we serve as the inspiration.

Feedback was strongly positive. One mother told us that both her sons loved hearing from us, and they watched the videos together, even though one of her sons did not normally attend our program. She told us that his program, never even contacted him during the shutdown. We were her lifesaver.

### **How Program Was Carried Out**

The staff responded compassionately and regularly. The objective was simple: keep in touch regularly with all 100+ individuals who had been attending the Hermitage and Cypress programs.

It started with simple words of encouragement. This impact of the pandemic was unlike anything that any of us had experienced. The individuals were stuck at home, and they were accustomed to a daily routine. Staff started with phone calls and in some cases, video calls. When it became clear that the shutdown would last much longer than a couple of weeks, staff realized that more had to be done. Staff began a weekly call to talk about what they could coordinate together to ensure that services were offered. Themes for the week were developed and pairs of staff volunteered to work on the ideas.

A YouTube channel was developed to inform, teach, connect and entertain people. During the weekly meetings, the themes were expanded to include what types of videos to produce. The channel was publicized in weekly phone calls, newsletters mailed to participants, and outreach on our Facebook page. People were encouraged to view and subscribe to the channel to enhance the site profile. Staff in the Mental Health and Developmental Services department were also encouraged to view and subscribe to the channel. In short order, the Hermitage and Cypress Enterprises site were official. There are currently 202 Subscribers and 175 videos with more being produced each month.

Themes emphasized many of the activities that were often used when in the center. Examples included a book club, cooking classes, craft activities, and information on self-advocacy. Staff created kits to deliver to people in a non-contact system. Videos were made to demonstrate the proper execution of the activity. Staff shared stories and demonstrations of activities that they could complete during their own leisure time, to help individuals see what they could try at home. There was a wide variety of videos to explore, and it was always available for watching whenever people had the time.

These activities provided an important connection to the day program. When it became evident that we might be able to re-open the programs with increased safety protocols, staff developed videos. Topics included wearing masks, social distancing, and proper hand washing, to name a few.

Work has always been a strong component in our Day Services, so the employment staff created videos to provide information on job searches and successfully maintaining employment during the Coronavirus pandemic.

In addition to the videos, the teams of staff developed ways to see individuals, especially those who lived alone or with families who indicated some struggles were occurring with the isolation. It started off simple – delivering the activity kits developed by staff. These kits included a marigold growing kit, a tissue-paper flower kit and a peanut butter/pinecone bird feeder kit, to name a few. Two staff came up with the idea of delivering a sign to each individual's house, which would stay in their yard during the day to really let them know how much they were appreciated – so “Hugs from Hermitage” was born. These signs with balloons were delivered in the morning with notes and activities. Staff then retrieved the signs each night to use the next day. Individuals were so excited to get the signs, their packets and loved the thoughtfulness of being appreciated.

Other drive-by activities were on a smaller scale, such as just dropping off “on-demand” activity packets or packets that included face masks to practicing wearing. A favorite was the “ice cream truck”. Each year throughout the summer, a local ice cream vendor would come to Hermitage twice a week so individuals could purchase ice cream or sodas. Staff decided to simulate that with a version of that visit. Hermitage purchased ice cream snacks and sodas. Routes were developed and split so that every person's house got a visit. Individuals were notified of the delivery dates and times, and the process began. Everyone in the house, whether it was a family

home or a group home, came out to visit with a socially distanced ice cream delivery. All enjoyed it!

As we partially opened the program, outreach activities have continued and will continue until we are able to get everyone back into the program. Outreach includes mailing of activity packets regularly. Weekly or bi-weekly phone calls and video chats have continued. And we have even continued with some YouTube videos.

### **Financing and Staffing**

The program's overall costs were minimal and incorporated into costs generally associated with the Day Services programs. Materials were either already available or purchased out of the existing Day Services budget. Staff costs were incurred but were already in the budget with the county's commitment to ensure no staff was furloughed during the pandemic. Many Day Services staff were re-deployed to help cover Group Homes and provided administrative assistance where needed. These activities ensured that staff had "work from home" during the shutdown.

The facility was "closed" for much of the time but continued to be used for some work assignments that needed to be done in the building. Staff used county vehicles for the delivery of items. These costs were also included in the existing budget.

Most staff utilized their personal cell phones to create the videos or used their county issued laptops for video calls.

### **Program Results**

An idea for outreach was created and implemented for the ongoing availability of people who attend Hermitage and Cypress Enterprises each day. Providing activities and continued video

and phone connection allowed staff to ensure the safety and well-being of individuals. This also provided a meaningful connection and support to families, many of whom had to make choices to ensure the individuals had care at home. Maintaining a presence for individuals to see their staff and even learn about them going through the same struggles enhanced the relationship between the staff and the program participants. It has been a trying time for so many people. The YouTube channel and other outreach activities created an additional outlet for the people who were home waiting for the program to reopen again.

- Started a YouTube Channel to remain connected with individuals we serve currently have 202 subscribers with 175 videos made by EDS staff. Many claimed this was a lifesaver for them.
- Staff contacted each individual regularly, averaging 75 contacts per week.
- Drive-by visits were initiated – Staff utilized over 130 man hours with 65 individuals per month dropping off activity packets, “Virtual Hugs from Hermitage/Cypress” signs, and “ice cream truck” style treat delivery - to name a few.
- With the program only partially opened, outreach activities have continued. Staff still connect weekly with those not attending, have invited them to visit friends using video calls, have delivered packets for holidays such as Christmas and Easter and have continued making YouTube videos for their enjoyment.

### **Brief Summary**

Adults with Developmental Disabilities have long benefitted from the routines associated with attending a center-based Day Support Program. The Hermitage and Cypress Enterprises

programs have provided a consistent service for people living in Henrico, New Kent and Charles City counties for many years. In March 2020, the program was faced with closing in-person onsite and other community services in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. While even a short closure time was unimaginable, the continued closure was even more so. Within a month of the closure, plans were underway to provide supports to the individuals with developmental disabilities when they could not attend their program and for some, did not understand why.

Staff developed innovative and creative ways to stay connected. These included over 175 videos posted to a new YouTube video channel, weekly calls for check-in, bi-weekly video calls using Web-ex and “drive-by” visits to allow for seeing familiar faces (even with face coverings) to drop off treats or signs and providing activities to use at home. This innovation and commitment by staff allowed individuals to stay connected, feel safe and offer social options to help avoid depression and other behaviors. As we slowly re-open, these outreach efforts will continue as part of our ongoing program activities.



**Day Services COVID-19 Shutdown – staying connected thru media and more**  
**Supplemental Material**

LINK to the Hermitage and Cypress Enterprises YOUTUBE channel:  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChkngjRauBD7ScYkBXOzfcw>

