



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2024.** 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: _____

Program Title: _____

Program Category: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: _____

Title: _____

Department: _____

Telephone: _____ Website: _____

Email: _____

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____

Creating an Accessible Library by Offering Programs and Services for Neurodivergent Individuals

2024 VACo Achievement Award Submission – Chesterfield County Public Library

Executive Summary

Chesterfield Public Library has a number of programs designed to help neurodivergent people access and feel comfortable at each of its 10 library locations. Sensory hours, sensory kits and adaptive story time all provide ways for library customers to use the library while meeting their individual sensory needs. The library developed these services and programs collaboratively with library users, community members and local organizations to ensure that the library is welcoming and supportive for everyone with sensory needs.

Problem/Challenge

Chesterfield County organizes a Youth Advisory Board yearly to recommend a service project that benefits the county. Members of the board are high school juniors and seniors from around the county. Service projects are not chosen lightly; members spend time selecting a county department and researching and studying it before deciding what type of project will be of most help to the department. During academic year 2022-23, the Youth Advisory Board chose the library as its focus. Members heard presentations from the county's planning department, in-house library staff and various library departments. Board meetings were held at each of the 10 library locations in order to help members understand the unique communities served by each. The Youth Advisory Board ultimately decided there was an unmet need throughout Chesterfield Public Library for improved services for county citizens with sensory needs. Jordyn Krawjewski, a high school senior on the board, shared, "My brother has Down syndrome, so I've grown up with kids who had special sensory needs, and I've seen them not being met in many public places. So, it was important to me to bring that up as an issue to the board this year. We solved the problem, at least in part."

Autism Spectrum Disorders have become increasingly prevalent since 2000. Over 55 million people worldwide were living with dementia in 2020; that number is expected to double every 20 years. The rate of diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) has risen consistently for decades. While autism is not a reportable health condition in Virginia, the number of students with autism served by Virginia's public school system has risen continuously since 1998. Just over 27,000 students with autism were served in Chesterfield County during academic year 2022-23. More than 150,000 adults aged 65 and older have Alzheimer's in Virginia. Almost 10% of children in Virginia have a diagnosis of ADHD.

Description of the Program

After researching and meeting with library stakeholders, the Youth Advisory Board made the recommendation to develop a sensory kit with items that could help neurodivergent individuals be more comfortable when in the library. Recommendations by the board also called for larger projects, like building changes, that were not feasible due to budgetary constraints at the time; however, these suggestions were kept for future consideration of building construction or renovation.

At about the time the board was working on this project, staff at one location began to open the library for Sensory Hour, a specific time slot to welcome members of the neurodivergent community. The objective for Sensory Hour and the sensory kits is the same: to give library customers a space that accommodates their sensory needs and make the library feel more welcoming to neurodivergent individuals and families. Adaptive Story Time, which was developed later, built on these programs and shares this objective.

Development of the sensory programs started in the spring of 2023. Two library locations initiated a sensory hour session once a month, opening at 8 a.m., an hour before the library opens to the public. This creates an opportunity for those who are easily stimulated to use the library in a way

that works for them. Light and noise levels are kept as low as possible while staff do their normal opening preparations.

Sensory kits took a little more time to plan and implement. Each kit includes activities and objects that can potentially help reduce anxiety, frustration and resulting behaviors. Library visitors can check out a sensory kit to use at the library. The Youth Advisory Board researched different types of sensory needs and made recommendations for 15 items that should be placed in the kits, including pop-it sheets, coloring sheets and crayons, noise cancelling headphones, stress balls, weighted lap desks and eye covers. Chesterfield Public Library agreed to make kits available at all 10 library locations.

Although the library provided items and packaging for the sensory kits, Youth Advisory Board members assembled the kits together at a board meeting. Sensory kits were delivered to each library location shortly after all were completed. Library staff keep an excess supply of kit items to replace any that might go missing.

Staff at Clover Hill Library decided to take things a step further later in 2023 by partnering with Dominion Care, a mental and behavioral health care provider that specializes in autism, after seeing customers utilize both sensory hour and sensory kits. One of Clover Hill's regular customers is part of the leadership team at Dominion Care and was eager to partner with the library to develop an adaptive story time program that would allow families with neurodivergent children to participate in a Story Time specifically designed around their sensory needs. Throughout the next six months, Dominion Care would bring students to the library from their Richmond-based behavioral private school and show library staff how to provide story time in a sensory-friendly way. Librarians from other Chesterfield Public Library locations also attended these practice story times so they could replicate the program at their own locations.

Typically, registration for library Story Time sessions open three days before the program.

Registration for Adaptive Story Time opens two weeks in advance, and, upon registration, caregivers receive materials to help prepare their children and library staff for the program.

“Providing Adaptive Story Time registrants with a social narrative and a questionnaire that will help us tailor the story times to each child is one of the ways that we've made this particular story time unique,” says Clover Hill’s Assistant Branch Manager, Sara Mueller. Although planning began in 2023, the first Adaptive Story Time took place at Clover Hill Library in March 2024.

All three sensory programs have been marketed through print and digital materials as well as by word of mouth. Promotional pieces are ongoing, as the programs are ongoing. Library administration creates these pieces, manages digital marketing and provides printed materials to library locations for distribution to customers. Staff are able to reach various audiences by providing the print promotions during other library programs and outreach events.

Costs of development and implementation for these sensory programs at Chesterfield Public Library have been minimal. Aside from in-house printing, the library paid \$2,500 for kit materials, including some extra items to replace items as needed. Citizen Engagement and Resources (CER), the department that organizes the Youth Citizen Board, provided 10 plastic containers to store each library’s kit supplies. CER also provided six floor pillows that were given to some of the libraries.

Innovation: A Model for Other Localities

While Adaptive Story Time is designated for children aged 4 to 8 and their caregivers, both sensory hours and sensory kits are designed with people of all ages in mind. Librarians have shared information about sensory kits with caregivers and families that visit the library, and with an Accessibility Cohort that includes other libraries and organizations with a specific focus on connecting families of individuals with disabilities to resources, support networks and advocacy

efforts. This outreach is bringing more agencies together to help promote inclusivity throughout Chesterfield County.

Sensory programs at Chesterfield Public Library offer new services to the community that make the library more accommodating and welcoming. Additionally, by providing sensory kits, sensory hours and an adaptive story time, the library is responding to the spoken needs of its customers. The library will continue to track both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the use of all its sensory programs and adjust or expand sensory offerings as needed to meet the needs of the community. All of the sensory offerings provided by Chesterfield Public Library serve as a model to other library systems and even to other library locations within the county.

Supplemental Materials

Sensory Kit available at all library locations



Youth Citizen Board members packing the sensory kits



Social Media posts about various services and programs

Instagram

ccplva
Clover Hill Library - Chesterfield County Public Library

ADAPTIVE STORY TIME

Does your child have specific sensory needs? Are traditional story times too much stimulation? Enjoy stories, songs and movement specially planned for neurodivergent children at Adaptive Story Time. Thursday, March 14 at 9:30 a.m. at Clover Hill Library. Register today. [Link in Bio]

Chesterfield County Public Library
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Neurodiversity Celebration Week 2024 is all about inclusivity! Here at CCPL we are dedicated to making everyone feel welcome in the library – because everyone IS welcome here! Read our latest blog post to learn ways we celebrate neurodiversity throughout the year.
<https://buff.ly/3URhvh>

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Exciting news! Bon Air Sensory Hour is moving to the fourth Saturday of each month, starting Dec. 23, from 8-9 a.m. Join us for a welcoming space designed for individuals with sensory sensitivities, featuring a quiet and calm environment, dimmed lights, limited noise, and a variety of sensory items if needed.

Also, mark your calendars for Sensory Hour at Clover Hill Library, now set for the second Thursday of each month, also from 8-9 a.m. See you there!
#SensoryHour #InclusiveSpaces

SENSORY HOUR

Open to everyone.