

# Didlake Day Support Program: Creating Opportunities that Enrich the Lives of People with Disabilities

The **Didlake Day Support Program** in Opal offers a world of possibilities to many of our community's adults with disabilities, including those with Autism, Down syndrome, brain injury, and other physical and intellectual disabilities. Opal is one of five Day Support Programs offered by Didlake, a nonprofit rehabilitation services provider based in Manassas that connects people with disabilities to employment and community engagement opportunities. Participants range widely in age, starting at age 18, with many continuing well into their 80s.

"We use the community to empower the participants," comments program service specialist Jackie Thompson-Walker.

"The focus is to integrate people into the community, where they can build real and lasting relationships with those they come in contact with during activities, such as volunteer work."

Didlake's seven-member staff provides support for up to 49 participants Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. until mid-afternoon. Some of the participants elect to come to the center just a few days a week, while others opt for all five days. The staff and participants put together a monthly calendar of offsite activities, including shopping, lunch outings, museum visits, movies or plays, visits to a gym, art classes, salon services, or volunteering in the community. The participants choose the outings they are interested in, confirming their preferences on a daily basis. Smaller group outings, known as community engagement activities, offer a 1:3 ratio of staff to participants, involving participants to a greater level.

Larger group activities, such as volunteering at Hope Heals Freestore in Warrenton, involve a 1:7 ratio of staff to participants. Participants hang donated clothing on hangers and organize them on racks.

"The warehouse is filled with chatter and laughter during their visits," comments store manager Jeri Petty. "We are proud to include the Didlake participants as part of our Hope Heals village of volunteers."

Other examples of their regular volunteer

opportunities are the food bank at Culpeper United Methodist Church, The Salvation Army, Mintbrook Senior Apartments in Bealeton, and ReStore in Warrenton.

They also go to the Senior Center in Warrenton, where they have lunch, work on craft projects, and interact with a larger group of people. Other favorites are the Wednesday Bible service at Culpeper Lutheran Church and Thursdays at "The Place," which is downstairs at the church. Here, participants can be socially interactive, work on crafts, watch movies, eat snacks, and sometimes enjoy visits from Paws for Seniors volunteers. They develop relationships with the volunteers, socialize on a one-on-one basis, and become part of a community.

In addition to community activities, Didlake offers onsite group activities that focus on individual wants, needs, and desires related to their goals and objectives. There are wellness-focused classes on exercise, nutrition and cooking, and health and safety. They watch educational videos, work on arts and crafts, and work in the computer lab. While they have numerous choices, participants are encouraged to interact with others to learn appropriate social skills.

Eligibility, availability of funds, and level of support are all considered and explored during the initial intake assessment. Didlake works closely with the Community Services Board to assist in the approval process. A person-centered plan is created by Didlake and the individual participating in the program, based on the participant's interests, and submitted to the state.

"Each person receives a waiver that determines their eligibility for funding," explains Jackie. "Didlake is generally reimbursed through a VA Medicaid Waiver, although some participants have a co-pay, and some are private pay."

This program makes a difference in the lives of the participants, staff, and everyone they encounter throughout the day. To learn more, visit [didlake.org](http://didlake.org) or call (703) 361-4195 x1307. 📞

~ Lynnette Esse



Didlake and Hope Heals representatives in the Hope Heals store