

VACO Award Nomination Nomination Summary

Abstract of the Program

Build-A-House is a four way partnership between Chesterfield County, Chesterfield County Community Services Board (Intellectual Disabilities, Residential Services), Chesterfield County Public Schools (Technical Center) and Chesterfield Alternatives, Inc. This partnership was developed to increase affordable and accessible housing for persons with disabilities while providing Chesterfield County students with real life work experiences.

The Problem/Need for the Program

For the last few decades a countless number of persons and entities have looked at the needs of Virginians with significant disabilities. Every survey has shown the need of housing as one as the most critical issues affecting people with disabilities in Virginia. Persons with severe disabilities living in Chesterfield County must try to live on less than \$675.00(SSI) a month while the average one bedroom rent is over \$715.00 a month. Permanent, accessible, safe and affordable housing is essential in achieving success in assisting individuals with long term disabilities to live productive and quality lives in their communities.

Description of the Program

The Build-A-House Project is a cooperative project through which students at the Chesterfield Technical Center construct homes on vacant County-owned land with Chesterfield Alternatives, Inc. funding the construction expense and the homes ultimately being used by Chesterfield County Community Services Board to provide affordable and accessible housing to county citizens with disabilities.

The purpose of the program is to provide real work experience for Chesterfield County Public School's Technical Center students. It also provides long-term permanent accessibility for individuals with disabilities at below fair market rent.

The first house was completed in 2010 with over 300 Chesterfield County students perfecting their skills in drywall, electricity, plumbing, woodwork, HVAC, carpentry and landscaping contributing to the completion of the four bedroom, 2,300 square foot single family home. It is now home to three individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Chesterfield County Alternatives, Inc. is a non-profit organization whose mission is to provide affordable and accessible housing to Chesterfield County citizens with mental and/or physical disabilities. They have worked closely with Chesterfield County for over 25 years in securing housing for individuals served by the services board.

In the past, the Chesterfield County Public Schools Technical Center had partnerships with various organizations to provide students with building experience. However these endeavors allowed the student only limited experiences. The partnership with Chesterfield Alternatives gave the students an opportunity to build an entire house under the supervision of a contractor.

Currently the second Build-A-House has broken ground and will be a 2,750 square foot home with five bedrooms with three bathrooms. Strategies will be used in construction that will promote a safe, accessible and comfortable home which will also reduce utility bills and protect the environment.

Use of Technology

The students had the opportunity to utilize the various technological equipment associated with each of their field of study.

Cost of the Program

The expense related to this project were mitigated due to the collaborative effort of this parties involved in the building of this home. The land was donated by Chesterfield County and labor was provided at no cost by the students as part of the students learning experience. The cost of the this universal design and accessible home was around \$250,000 which is about 33% less than a comparable house on the private market.

Results/Success of the Program

There were many successes as a result of this project. The first is that three individuals received an accessible and affordable home in the community in which they live. While they previously had a home, it was a multi level home which made it difficult to allow them to age in place and they now benefit from the design of the new home to meet their ambulation needs. A second success was related to the real life experiences that over 300 Chesterfield County High School students gained working on a real home. These students learned skills that provided real work experience from which they will be able to build a resume and/or apply to college. They also gained specialized experience working on an accessible home, met the individuals the home was designed for, and are able to better understand the needs of people with disabilities as a result of participating in this experience. Finally, through this process we were able to produce a home for one third the typical cost.

Worthiness of an Award

Our experience with Build-A-House has been one of collaboration and has been described as a win-win-win-win. The Community Services Board won- they were able to provide three individuals with a home where they can now age in place, with a design to better meet their needs. The Chesterfield Technical Center won they were able to provide 300 students with real life experiences in enhancing their technical skills while also teaching them about people with disabilities and their needs. Chesterfield County won as they were able to successfully rehabilitate some under utilized county land while supporting citizens with disabilities. Finally, Chesterfield Alternatives, Inc. won because they were able to produce a home for one third the cost they would pay in the typical construction market. This project not only educated over 300 students around individuals with disabilities and their specialized needs, thereby further enhancing community integration, education, and acceptance but it also had a real life outcome of a home.