



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: County of Henrico
Program Title: Winter Wonderland
Program Category: Health & Human Services

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

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Title: Deputy County Manager for Community Affairs
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Program Overview

Henrico County Public Schools' annual "Winter Wonderland" is a student-led holiday event that offers connection and involvement for students with disabilities. The event began in 2019 when the planning and tourism marketing teacher at the Advanced Career Education Center at Hermitage began the program at Belmont Recreation Center, a facility owned by Henrico County. The partnership between Henrico County Public Schools and Belmont has been amazing as this event has grown each year.

The goal of the program is for students in the tourism marketing program to work with students who are part of the school division's integrated services program, who have disabilities that may include cognitive, physical, developmental and/or mobility impairments. The students come from various HCPS middle and high schools. The entire event is student-driven and involves games, activities, snacks, and this year even included live music by a student playing the saxophone. It is difficult to tell which students enjoy it more, the invitees or the organizing students. It is a win-win program for everyone involved during the holiday season.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

Henrico County students enrolled in integrated services programs face a variety of challenges — challenges that can be magnified during the holiday season. The Winter Wonderland program is a student-led and student-designed program that provides an inclusive event for these students to have fun, interact and participate in numerous activities. During the holiday season, there is a major need for this type of program for these students.

The teacher and students within HCPS' tourism marketing program saw a need for this type of program and used their partnership with Belmont Recreation Center to make it a reality.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

The program, based on inclusivity and a partnership with Henrico County, is worthy of a VACo Award. The integrated services students are a special part of our community and this unique event, prepared and planned by students, fosters interaction, leadership and positive community outreach. This program owes much of its success to partnerships among Belmont Recreation Center, Henrico County Public Schools and Henrico County.

How Program Was Carried Out

In 2019, the event planning and tourism marketing teacher at the ACE Center at Hermitage came up with the idea for Winter Wonderland. She, along with her students, wanted to provide an inclusive environment for a holiday gathering for students with disabilities across Henrico County. The teacher worked with Henrico County to find a location that could host the event and secured Belmont Recreation Center as a partner. Belmont is a historic recreation center owned by Henrico County. It is centrally located in the county, which makes the location ideal to easily transport students from various schools to participate in this event. The location is about 10 minutes from the ACE Center at Hermitage, the host school for the event.

The program began in 2019 but continues each year at Belmont Recreation Center. The purpose of the event is to provide a holiday social event for students enrolled in integrated services — students with disabilities that may include cognitive, physical, developmental and/or mobility impairments. Because of Belmont's location, selecting schools to participate in this event was simple. Each year the teacher looks for the schools that would benefit the most from this event. She considers enrollment, accessibility and conversations with teachers of the programs.

The uniqueness of the program is its implementation and planning. Since its inception, the program is fully designed and implemented by the students taking the Tourism Marketing course. Each year, a new crop of students is involved and the excitement builds. The current class always wants to go above and beyond what happened the year before.

While the program is fun for the students to lead, they gain much more than just a fun atmosphere. As well as leadership skills, they also learn empathy, compassion, caring and inclusivity. This program provides students the flexibility to create the program while requiring them to consider the design process.

At the beginning of each school year, the instructor talks about this program with her class. The students instantly become excited. They have the freedom to design games, activities and other entertainment options for the invited students from schools throughout the county.

For the 2023 year, students had a variety of activities, as evidenced in the photos and videos in Section 9. The students designed a game where players knock over cups standing on top of a holiday-themed structure they had designed. Each table had painting and coloring activities. There was also a game of musical chairs that featured holiday music. Lastly, one of the students in the Tourism Marketing course plays in his school's band; he played holiday music on his saxophone. This was a big hit and students even began dancing as he played.

This program has had success over several years but has not been nominated for a VACo award. It is certainly deserving. Each year the program continues to thrive and get more traction and excitement.

Financing and Staffing

The annual program cost is about \$100, which pays for the refreshments and supplies for the activities the students are implementing. A possible cost of replicating the program could be renting an appropriate site, but HCPS is fortunate to have a partnership with Belmont Recreation Center and Henrico County, enabling the event to use the facility at no cost. Similarly, other counties could also approach their recreation and community centers about space.

Program Results

Students enrolled in the integrated services program at various schools have a chance to be part of this event. The organizing students from the ACE Center at Hermitage do a fantastic job of designing activities that all students can participate in. They are also very encouraging to the students and play games with them.

Many of the integrated services students are not ready to leave at the end of the day. This program, as several students have stated, is their favorite part of the holiday season. Many of them have come back annually and it is a highlight for them.

The students in the Tourism Marketing course experience a wealth of takeaways from the program. They learn compassion, empathy, patience and how to work alongside students they would not have had the opportunity to work with if it were not for this program. In addition, they learn valuable leadership skills, implementation skills and project-based learning skills.

Brief Summary

Henrico County students enrolled in integrated services programs face a variety of challenges — challenges that can be magnified during the holiday season. The Winter Wonderland program is

a student-led and student-designed program that provides an inclusive event for these students to have fun, interact and participate in numerous activities. During the holiday season, there is a major need for this type of program for these students.

The teacher and students in HCPS' tourism marketing program saw a need for this type of program and used their partnership with Belmont Recreation Center to make it a reality.

While students in the integrated services programs get an inclusive celebration, students in the tourism marketing program learn compassion, empathy, patience and how to work alongside students they would not have had the opportunity to work with if it were not for this program. In addition, they learn valuable leadership skills, implementation skills and project-based learning skills.

Winter Wonderland Supplemental Material

Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KTJhZV8o1E>

