Fall 2026

PreVAIL

Valley Associates for Independent Living, Inc.

Promoting self-direction among people with disabilities and removing barriers to independence in the community.



VAIL Luncheon Highlights & Memories

On Thursday, September 17, 2026, VAIL welcomed community leaders, supporters, and advocates to our Community Leaders Luncheon. This special gathering celebrated our shared commitment to promoting independence, accessibility, and inclusion for individuals with disabilities. Guests heard inspiring personal stories highlighting the positive impact of VAIL's services and the important role community partnerships play in empowering individuals with disabilities to live independently.

Attendees enjoyed a delicious lunch catered by Moe's while connecting with fellow community members, exchanging ideas, and exploring opportunities to further support individuals with disabilities.

The luncheon was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate accomplishments, strengthen relationships, and recognize the individuals and organizations that help make VAIL's work possible. We are grateful to everyone who joined us and continues to support our mission of promoting independence throughout our community!

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"The people at VAIL are on top of things. If there's ever an issue like recently, VAIL hopped on it right away."
-Michelle Hughes





Katie McGill Self-Advocacy

"In all my 22 years of using a wheelchair, I've come across a multitude of setbacks. However, I know I'm able to overcome those hurdles. With the help from VAIL and Paratransit, people with disabilities are working towards independence - whether that be in home or work. One change that I hope to see in our community would be engaging more with differently-abled people. We need people in positions of power to not only see us in a fleeting glimpse but to acknowledge and listen with compassion. Taking the time to lend an ear will be substantial in the evolution of accessibility. Making things attainable for people with disabilities will be a wonderful advantage for everyone and prove that there's hope in humanity. I want to help bridge the gap between people with disabilities and able-bodied people so we can all co-exist and have the same access."

QUOTE

"In a world of limitations, we're up to the task with the correct adjustments. Being different is what makes all of us beautiful!" -Katie McGill



Kathleen Gibson Medicaid Waivers



"For over 8 years, my family has worked with VAIL. We came to VAIL after another consumer directed services provider failed to meet its responsibilities and my son was at risk of losing services. Since that time, VAIL has been a consistent and trusting partner. They have helped us understand the transition of school based services, navigate complicated paperwork, identify available resources and respond to our questions as they arise. Their staff understand and know our local Shenandoah Valley community. They are well versed in the supports available to individuals with disabilities and they do not hesitate to help us when needed. This knowledge matters, especially when the General Assembly considers legislation that impacts people with disabilities. And when DMAS policies and procedures change, those changes can be confusing and can easily become barriers to care, education, and community living. VAIL keeps up with these behind the scenes and helps families mitigate unnecessary disruptions. Their staff is stable, knowledgeable, and responsive. Communication is always clear. Turnover is low which allows continuity with community living specialists and helps us not to have to repeat all of the medical history; all of the needs for the 100th plus time. When staff members do not immediately know the answer, they work to find it. And most importantly, they go to bat for us when advocacy is needed. Recently, our managed care organization terminated its service agreement and contract with VAIL, effective within six weeks. Initially I received a text message from the MCO of this and that they contacted another provider who agreed to accept the referral and advising us to expect a phone call from that provider. Needless to say, in the middle of my busy work day, this was very jarring. When I asked them for a provider list so that we could make an informed choice, I was told that one was "not available to share" and that each one would have to be asked if they were taking new clients. I did eventually receive a list of both consumer and agency directed providers. Of the four CD providers they shared and contacted, two have no facilitators serving Shenandoah Valley, Harrisonburg area, and only one in Hampton Roads that could immediately accept new clients in our area. There were six agency directed providers, with one indicated to have a long wait list and one who did not return their phone call. This situation raises serious concerns and alarms for my family and many others in our community. Removing VAIL, a stable, established facilitator who is serving our community and who also has a waiting list, creates service disruptions for the people the system is intended to serve. While managed care organizations have discretion of their provider networks, they are required to maintain provider adequacy and decisions affecting individuals with disabilities should include a careful analysis of continuity of care, local capacities, and the real world impact on individuals and their families."



Rockingham County Grad Class

VAIL services within schools

"In 2023, we had so many postgraduate students that we had to expand our program, which meant it had to look a little different. That year, we started a second postgraduate program in collaboration with DARS and VAIL. VAIL began coming into our classrooms to work directly with our students. Since then, we have expanded to three programs. Almost all of our students over the age of 18 are in one of these programs." -Sarah Fawley

As Mrs. Fawley mentioned, VAIL comes in once a week to work with our classes. -Megan Stratford
Megan Stratford: Gabe, what were some of your favorite classes that you participated in last year?
Gabe: Last year, I learned about budgeting and communication.
Megan Stratford: What did you like about the budgeting class?
Gabe: Spending and investing.
Megan Stratford: Learning how to spend and invest! What did you learn about communication?
Gabe: Making eye contact when people are talking to me.
Hailey Shull: Meredith, can you share some of the topics you learned about from VAIL staff?
Meredith: I learned job skills, including how to get a job, how to keep a job, and how to know if a job is right for me.
Hailey Shull: What was your favorite thing you learned from VAIL?
Meredith: Learning job skills and how to get a job.
Hailey Shull: How has working with VAIL helped you become an adult?
Meredith: It has helped me become more responsible.



Anthony Streiff

Home Modications

"When you have a disability or you have a lot of difficulties, you do a lot of wishing - wishing you could do this or wishing you could do that. VAIL answers a lot of those wishes and makes a lot of those wishes come true.

It's wonderful to be a part of VAIL. But outside of basketball? And this is most recent. I was doing some more wishing. And if you know me, I'm not one to ever ask for help. And I can give you examples. I mean, I've had sweat beads rolling off the forehead. I'll be in Food Lion and on that top shelf I will find anything and everything to grab and knock it off before I ask for help. And then do the the task of trying to catch it before it hits the ground. Alright, so I don't ask for a whole lot of help, nor will I let you know if anything's bothering me. I've lived in my own house now for over, let's see, 16 years. If somebody would come to my house, the first thing they would say is "this is not very ADA." I had a carport that I could back my truck under and I could get out of my truck and I'd made a ramp with my family. We had a ramp that went straight from the truck to the ramp and up. The ground surrounding the truck was uneven, consisting of dirt, and rocks, with no level surface. Trying to get to the bed of my truck, I had to wheel through divots, rocks, and I will not tell you the things I muttered to myself, you know, to either load up the sports chair or unload the sports chairs. It was making life difficult. In communication one day, again VAIL answering a wish, Gayl let it be known to me, "Hey, you know, I know, you came to the office today talk about basketball. But you know, hey, we happen to have some grant money here from Virginia and you're a homeowner, need anything done at your house?" Man, I don't know if she knows my eyes lit up like a Christmas tree, I said. "Yes, I do." Because if you ask, I'm going to tell you. But I wasn't gonna complain about it and tell people - that goes back to that not asking for help. Well, they got in contact with Mr. Shawn. Thank you. Shawn does what he does, got in contact with the right people. I will tell you that now at my residence, when I'm back up into my driveway, I have a full level concreted area all under my carport that when I get out of my wheelchair every night, every day, whatever, I man, I could dribble a basketball around my carport camp. Alright, I didn't ask for it. But VAIL made it happen."

> "When you wish for the rain you got to deal with the mud too. VAIL does a good job wiping the mud off of our shoes, wheelchair tires. They do a good job getting rid of that mud for us." -Anthony Streiff

Outdoor Adaptive Recreation

On July 10, 2026, participants enjoyed a relaxing day in nature during an Outdoor Adaptive Recreation outing to Crabtree Falls. The group explored a short, 500-foot paved trail to the base of the falls, taking in the beautiful scenery, peaceful surroundings, and pleasant weather. The outing provided a wonderful opportunity for socializing, with engaging conversations about travel, accessibility, service dogs, and personal experiences. Participants enjoyed a picnic lunch by the falls, complete with shared treats of cucumber soup and sour cream raisin pie. It was a memorable day filled with laughter, connection, and the beauty of the outdoors!

Participants also enjoyed two fun-filled days of outdoor adaptive recreation on July 21 and September 8, 2026! The group played wheelchair tennis on the new pickleball courts and adapted to the summer heat by moving into the shade for games of catch and softball using tennis balls. Both outings provided plenty of opportunities for exercise, stretching, reaching, and movement while enjoying time together. Most importantly, the days were filled with laughter, encouragement, shared experiences, and smiles. It was a wonderful combination of physical activity, friendship, and fun!

On September 25, 2026, participants enjoyed a beautiful, sunny day exploring nature at Augusta Springs Wetlands. Everyone completed the entire trail, taking in the peaceful scenery of the forest, pond, and marsh along the way. Highlights included spotting cedar waxwings and admiring the colorful yellow goldenrod and unique purple closed bottle gentian flowers. The outing provided a wonderful opportunity to enjoy fresh air, physical activity, and time together in nature. Following the stroll, some participants continued the fun with dinner at a Thai restaurant in Staunton and a sweet treat at Kline's. It was a lovely day filled with beautiful scenery, friendship, and memorable experiences!

If you have a physical disability and are interested in being active, contact Terri Bsullak at 540-460-3473 for more information about upcoming OAR activities.



Welcome!



We are excited to welcome a new face to the VAIL team - **Celia Harrison.**

I came to VAIL through a federal work study at JMU that partners students with local organizations based on their interests. I have grown up working with individuals who have disabilities, so I have become passionate about it. My favorite thing about working at VAIL is learning about the many different ways there are to advocate for and assist individuals with disabilities. I also enjoy being able to connect with people through VAIL. When I am not at work, I take classes at JMU, participate in student clubs, read, and hang out with friends. I have an orange cat named Bananas back in my hometown.



We are excited to welcome a familiar face back to the VAIL team - **Emily Rios**!

I'm currently a senior at James Madison University studying Communication Studies with a concentration in Public Relations. I was drawn to working at VAIL because I enjoy helping others and wanted to make a positive difference in my community. My favorite part about working at VAIL is getting to know the individuals I work with and helping students develop skills that support their independence. Outside of work, I enjoy spending time with friends and family, traveling, and staying active. A fun fact about me is that I've been involved in gymnastics since I was four years old!

We are excited to welcome a familiar face back to the VAIL team! **Jack Hotchkiss** has returned to VAIL, and we are thrilled to have him with us again. His previous experience and familiarity with VAIL's mission make him a wonderful addition to our team. We look forward to the contributions he will make as we continue supporting individuals with disabilities in achieving greater independence and inclusion in their communities. Please join us in giving him a warm welcome back!



2026 Exhibition Game

On Thursday, October 22, 2026, the VAIL Harrisonburg Cardinals kicked off the 2026-2027 season with an exhibition game against prominent local community members.

The event, held at Horizons Edge Sports Campus, brought together community leaders, local athletes, families, and supporters for an evening of friendly competition, teamwork, and community spirit. More than just a basketball game, the event provided an opportunity to raise awareness of VAIL's mission and the importance of promoting independence, accessibility, and inclusion for individuals with disabilities. The game also gives spectators and participants a chance to experience firsthand the skill, competitiveness, and excitement of wheelchair basketball.

VAIL extends a heartfelt thank-you to the VAIL Harrisonburg Cardinals, community players, sponsors by the Harrisonburg Massanutten, Rotary, Club, and Horizons Edge GM, volunteers, and everyone who helped make this special event possible. Your participation and support demonstrate the power of coming together to make a positive difference in our community.







Virginia Housing Modifications

Granting Freedom is a grant program for home modifications for disabled veterans and service members who have a service-connected disability.

Funds are available to renters or home owners and can be used to make a home wheelchair accessible, to install grab bars in a bathroom, or to make other modifications recommended by the VA that help eligible recipients become independent.

Applications for this program must be submitted by a Virginia Housing-accepted agent.
VAIL is a registered agent in Planning District 6.
Contact Shawn Abercrombie at shawn@govail.org for more information!

Granting FREEDOM
Virginia's Military Home Modification Grant Program

Schedule of Events

Nov. 17th	Board Meeting
Nov. 24-27	Closed
Dec. 24-25	Closed
Jan. 1	Closed
Jan. 18	Closed
Jan. 19	Board Meeting
Feb. 16	Closed
Feb. 20	13th Annual VAIL Arctic Dip

Get Ready for the 13th Annual VAIL Arctic Dip!

There are easier ways to support a great cause - *but where's the fun in that?*

How to Join the Fun:

- Register: Sign up to #DoTheDip and gather pledges from friends and family.
- Spectate: Bundle up and cheer on the dippers with your warm support!
- Do Both: Take the plunge and enjoy the festivities!

Registration begins November 25th
For more information and to register, visit: https://govail.org/dip/



February 20, 2027

Sun Retreats
Shenandoah Valley,
Stuarts Draft, VA

Heats begin at 11:00 AM

Wish List

A quick and easy way to support VAIL is by donating needed items. Some of these items you may already have in your home. Others you can purchase at discount stores like the Green Valley Bookfair or Ollie's.

- Magazines
- Adult Coloring Books
- Word Searches
- Crossword Puzzles
- Thin tipped marker sets
- Self-adhesive Velcro dots

Ways to Support VAIL

Scan the QR Codes to donate via PayPal or Venmo!

PayPal

venmo

Contact VAIL at:

3210 Peoples Drive Suite 220
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

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Find us on

https://www.facebook.com/ValleyAssociatesforIndependentLiving/

https://www.facebook.com/HburgCardinals

YouTube

https://www.youtube.com/user/govail

Instagram

https://www.instagram.com/valleyassociatesil/

Did You Know?

Have you heard the saying "One man's junk is another man's treasurer"? Well, that's actually true! Did you know you can donate your used toner and ink cartridges to VAIL and we can use those in trade for supplies from Staples? If you would like to donate your old ink or toner cartridges, contact inger@govail.org.

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