

Residents unite to create a place for those with disabilities



Creating their place

Alexandra Heck - For The Banner

Sara Magee connected with nine other women that had similar concerns for their children who have disabilities. All of these families had a common goal: to have a day program available for adults with developmental disabilities so they could lead stimulated and active lives. ALAS Dufferin, which stands for Active Lives After School, was launched in April. The program runs three days a week from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m, 51 weeks per year. They currently run out of the Masonic Lodge in Orangeville and have six clients ranging from ages 22-52.

Orangeville Banner

By [Alexandra Heck](#)

Sara Magee did not know what she would do with her daughter Sydney after she graduated from high school.

At 21 years old, she had graduated from ODSS's transitional program for developmentally disabled students and was spending her days at home.

She would stay home with her mom, watch TV and run errands with her. Sydney is non-verbal and requires supervision.

"There was just nothing available," said Magee, who was on long waiting lists for other programs in the community.

"We had to take matters into our own hands," she said.

Magee connected with nine other women with similar concerns for their children. Some had already graduated from the high school transitional program. Others had a few years to go.

All of those families had a common goal: to have a day program available for adults with developmental disabilities so they could lead stimulated and active lives.

ALAS Dufferin, which stands for Active Lives After School, was launched in April. The program runs three days a week from 9 a.m. to 4.p.m, over 51 weeks. They currently run out of the Masonic Lodge in Orangeville and have six clients ranging from ages 22-52.

ALAS takes clients swimming, hiking, horseback riding and much more. Once a week, the group goes to the grocery store and cook themselves lunch at the lodge. They do yoga, arts and crafts and even make trips Collingwood and Brampton. A van was donated to the group for longer outings and earlier this year, they were able to take a trip to the Toronto Zoo.

For Sydney, the program has given her joy and purpose.

“If you could see the difference in her...from sitting at home...to being excited again to pick up her backpack,” said her mother.

“It’s given her, her life back.”

For Beverley Young and her son Ward, both have found relief and freedom in the ALAS program.

Young is one of the co-founding mothers of ALAS. When her son graduated from ODSS in the same class as Sydney, she had to quit her job to care for him.

While she said that her son is fairly easy to care for, he does need constant supervision.

“He was going stir crazy,” she said. Ward was not having social interaction with anyone but his mother and older brother.

Now, she says, “He’s not as anxious about things.”

Some of his favourite days are those when he gets to go horseback riding. The group makes a trip out to Singing Waters Equestrian on Highway 10.

Mothers like Diana Mueller, whose children will one day need programs like this, are getting involved.

Mueller’s son is 15, and will not need the program for quite a few years, but it is reassuring to know that it will be available for him.

“I want him to have a fulfilling life,” she said, speaking about the importance of opportunities like these in the community.

“So that our kids aren’t forgotten and just left to sit around and do nothing.”

For more information about the program, or to make a donation, go to www.alasdufferin.ca