



For Immediate Release  
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## **Didlake Partners with The National Conference Center and Loudoun County Public Schools to Provide Total Workplace Immersion Internships for Students with Disabilities**

Didlake® is proud to announce a new partnership with [The National Conference Center](#), Loudoun County Public Schools, the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, and Project SEARCH, to provide a 10 month internship program for students with disabilities in Loudoun County.

[Didlake](#), a not-for-profit providing opportunities for people with disabilities in Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia, is serving as the Community Rehabilitation Partner for Project SEARCH at The National Conference Center which started in August. This will mark the first year Project SEARCH is available to students in Loudoun County. Ten students are participating in the program representing 10 of the county's 15 high schools.

Project SEARCH, a national high school transition program, is a total workplace immersion program combining classroom instruction, career exploration, and relevant job-skills training through strategically designed internships. It includes long-term job coaching and continuous feedback from teachers and employers. "This is an excellent program to help young adults transition from being at home and in school to the real world," says Emily Meyers, Didlake Employment Specialist. "Being with the interns each day gives me a chance to see the progress they make as they gain career skills to obtain competitive employment and move toward independence. The students love it because they can try new things and make discoveries about themselves."

The National Conference Center, the first conference and event center in Virginia to serve as a Project SEARCH host, jumped at the chance to be a host site. "Our entire team at The National Conference Center and West Belmont Place are delighted to be involved with Project SEARCH," says Geoff Lawson, General Manager of The National and West Belmont Place. "We will be placing our participants in a variety of departments, such as Culinary, Engineering, Housekeeping, and Event Services. We can't wait for the program to start." The National Conference Center employs over 200 people and also works with Riverside High School in Loudoun County training youth in all hospitality functions.

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This will be the sixth year Didlake has participated in Project SEARCH. For the past five it served as the Community Rehabilitation Partner at Novant Health UVA Health System Prince William Medical Center in Manassas. Didlake will continue Project SEARCH at Prince William Medical Center in 2016-17, as well as at Bon Secours Maryview Medical Center in Portsmouth, where it began participating in 2013. At the completion of the internship, the students will be ready for competitive employment in the community. "Project SEARCH is such a great opportunity for everyone involved" says Meghan Stubbs, Didlake Program Manager. "It is amazing to see the intern's growth vocationally and socially from the beginning of the program to the end. It also brings all the partners together to walk along beside them in their journey."

Project SEARCH, which is funded by the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, began in Virginia during the 2009-2010 academic year. Since then, more than 700 students across the Commonwealth have gained valuable work experience and skills through their internships.

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#### **About The National Conference Center**

Located in Northern Virginia 12 miles from Dulles International Airport and 35 miles from Washington, D.C., The National Conference Center is one of the largest and most comprehensive conference centers in the nation. With 917 guest rooms and over 265,000 square feet of meeting and group function space, including the West Belmont Place catering complex with its 16,552 square foot ballroom, The National has become the nation's headquarters for productive meetings and West Belmont Place the hub for Loudoun County and surrounding area social functions. For information call [800-640-2684](tel:800-640-2684) or visit [www.conferencecenter.com](http://www.conferencecenter.com)

#### **About Didlake**

Didlake, Inc. is a not-for-profit corporation headquartered in Manassas, Virginia. It was founded in 1965 to create opportunities for people with disabilities through services that connect them to employment, education and the community. It provides contract business services for commercial and government customers and has won numerous awards for its facilities maintenance; packaging and assembly; and administrative services. The organization operates throughout the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area, in the Roanoke Valley, and in Greater Hampton Roads. It serves more than 1,600 people with disabilities annually. Didlake, Inc. is licensed by the Commonwealth of Virginia, accredited by CARF and proudly serves the nation through the AbilityOne® Program. Its partners include the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services and local Community Services Boards. For more information, visit [www.didlake.org](http://www.didlake.org).