



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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# **HVAB, Acres Project partner to make Happy Valley more accessible to neurodiverse residents, visitors**

STATE COLLEGE, PA, May 5, 2025 – The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau (HVAB) and the Acres Project are working together to ensure that Centre County is more welcoming and accessible to neurodiverse individuals and their families.

Under the new partnership, The HVAB sponsored the production of 100 sensory comfort kits, part of the Acres Project's Sensory Friendly Centre County initiative. The bags contain items that have been specifically chosen to help individuals with a sensory processing disorder feel more comfortable when in public settings such as restaurants, entertainment venues or other establishments. Sensory processing disorders affect how the brain receives and responds to sensory input, which can make everyday activities challenging.

HVAB President and CEO Fritz Smith said the partnership with Acres Project will make sensory comfort kits available at more visitor/customer-facing establishments and will help create a more welcoming destination across the board.

"We applaud the Acres Project for the tremendous work the organization does serving neurodivergent individuals," Smith said. "With our commitment to fostering an inclusive destination, we saw a need to get more establishments, hospitality businesses in particular, to participate in the Sensory Friendly Centre County initiative."

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The launch of the expanded initiative coincides with National Tourism & Travel Week, May 4-10, and prior to Penn State graduation, a time when Happy Valley will see an influx of visitors, and summer trip planning is underway.

“This is an additional way we can help to improve the experience for a segment of our visitors, as well as for residents,” Smith said.

Acres Project Founder and Executive Director Bellamarie Bregar said she appreciates The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau’s interest in strengthening the Sensory Friendly Centre County program.

“Through this partnership, more businesses and organizations will be able to request comfort kits that can be given to guests/customers if ever needed,” she said.

Bregar said the sensory bags allow families to participate – or participate longer – in activities that they may not be able to due to sensory overload.

“They help reduce anxiety in stressful environments and help manage sensory overload that may end in meltdowns,” she said.

Along with the sensory comfort kit, a requesting business will also receive a window cling that makes it easy for customers and guests to identify them as sensory friendly establishment.

Each sensory comfort kits contains:

- Earmuffs for those sensitive to sound
- Coloring book, which promotes mindfulness and helps to pass the time while waiting
- Play-Doh, as squeezing this can relieve stress and stimulate tactile senses
- Fidget toys, which can help to self-sooth and regulate emotions

Hospitality businesses interested in a sensory comfort kit should email [LesleyK@happyvalley.com](mailto:LesleyK@happyvalley.com) or [JosiahJ@happyvalley.com](mailto:JosiahJ@happyvalley.com).

Community organizations interested in a comfort kit can contact the Acres Project at [theacresproject@gmail.com](mailto:theacresproject@gmail.com) or 814 777-1336.

The sensory comfort kits will also be available at the HVAB’s three visitor centers at 204 W. Beaver Ave. in State College; the Bellefonte Train Station; and the Moshannon Valley Heritage Center at 22 N. Front Street in Philipsburg.

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