

# Loudoun Times-Mirror

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## Flash mob goes DYNA-mite

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A young man in a white t-shirt began to clap in front of the Dulles Town Center Starbucks at 5:20 p.m. on June 30. Within seconds, nearly 30 other young people joined him in a dance to Taio Cruz's "Dynamite."

While the crowds seemed to enjoy the flash mob, the dancers had a greater purpose for their performance. All of them were members of the Dysautonomia Youth Network of America, a nonprofit support group for young people who suffer from a rare nervous syndrome.

Dysautonomia occurs when the automatic nervous system quits working normally, either temporarily or permanently. Patients experience a wide range of symptoms, including fatigue, dizziness, physical pain and an inability to stand up straight. While cases can be more or less severe, individuals are usually diagnosed with the disease during young adulthood.

"People don't really know an awful lot about it," flash mob choreographer Matt Porter said. Porter, along with his wife Jami and DYNA coordinator Richard Dominelli, decided to capstone their annual "Summer Chill" conference for DYNA members with the flash mob.

The Dominelli family founded DYNA in 1999. It is the only group in the world dedicated to helping young people who struggle with dysautonomia. Besides the "Summer Chill" conference, DYNA offers an online forum and other ways for the young people to connect.

For a month before the conference, Jami Porter sent out videos showing attendees the dance steps. Many of them already knew what to do once they arrived at the conference from across the United States.

"The biggest challenge was getting out of our comfort zone," Matt Porter said.

The dancers practiced for five hours straight to get their timing right for the performance.

The Porters made sure that the young people took many breaks and created a choreography that would "keep the blood flowing appropriately," Matt said.

"It was pretty terrifying, but it was fun," 22-year-old participant Julie Richardson said. Richardson, a Herndon resident who attended Northern Virginia Community College for two years, was diagnosed with dysautonomia in 2008.

For her, DYNA provided a way to make friends and cope with the syndrome. When she took high school



Courtesy photo

**DYNA Youth Ambassadors attended this year's Summer Chill conference held by DYNA in Sterling. The ambassadors all have dysautonomia, a rare nervous syndrome that occurs when the automatic nervous system quits working normally, either temporarily or permanently.**

classes at home, she would go on DYNA's Internet forum every day.

The rising junior at Smith College still visits the forum about twice a week.

"One of the things about dysautonomia is it's an invisible illness," Richardson said. "Internally, we have a lot of struggles."

Both Richardson and the Porters appreciated how the event raised awareness about dysautonomia while providing DYNA members a chance to participate in a cultural phenomenon.

"They will be able to hold their heads up a little bit higher knowing that they can achieve a goal," Matt Porter said.