

November 9, 2023

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Best Buddies Article for CEC Newsletter – November 2023

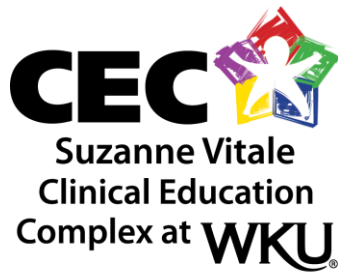
Best Buddies build friendships between people with and without IDD

Best Buddies has gotten off to a very good start this year. Best Buddies is a registered student organization at Western Kentucky which pairs student volunteers with buddies who have intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) to provide them with a friend or mentor. The organization is dedicated to ending social, physical, and economic isolation of individuals with IDD. It is an international organization with chapters in middle, high school, and colleges across the nation and other countries.

Buddy pairs are matched based on interests, personality traits, and experiences. Peer buddies are interviewed to determine which buddy could be the best fit for a deeply developing friendship. Peer buddies commit to contacting their buddy at least one time per week and hanging out with their buddy at least twice per month for special “buddy one on one time.” Each organization has at least one host site where the buddies receive services of some type and is considered their “home” organization. Here at WKU, we have three host sites affiliated with our chapter. These sites are **WKU Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex, the Buddy House, and the HIVE.** Each host site has a host site coordinator who assists buddies in completing applications for involvement, trouble shoot transportation or other issues, facilitate activities and friendships, and assist with matching buddy pairs. There are two advisors from WKU: Dr. Rheanna Plemons and Mrs. Leisa Hutchison.

This year, the WKU chapter has 184 members (includes peer buddies/college student, buddies/individuals with IDD, and associate members/those who are not paired) and 36 matches. Activities for the year so far have included the Match Party/Halloween Party, Step-Up for Down Syndrome Walk, participating in the WKU Homecoming parade, the SAE cookout as well as monthly organization meetings plus various activities that buddy pairs engage in together on their own time as buddy pairs. The annual Friendsgiving meal was held Nov. 17 at the Crossland Community Church.

Faculty Advisor Leisa Hutchison, was named one of the Champion of the Year campaign candidates for Kentucky last year and was able to raise over \$6,000 dollars to support Kentucky Best Buddies Chapters and their work. She and her mission partner, Ben Hutchison, who is her son and a Buddy in the Best Buddies chapter at WKU as well as her husband, David, were invited



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to attend the gala again this year and represent the WKU chapter while having fun and raising funds for Best Buddies Kentucky.

This year's leadership team includes Kylie Kays, president; Angelina Colmaneres, vice president; Madi Conn, secretary; Avery Harper, treasurer; Claire Cristopher, community outreach chair; Rose Smith, event coordinator; and Sara Prueter, creative relations chair. They are busy planning great events for the spring semester including the Fashion 4 Friendship Fashion Show which will be January 30th from 6-8PM at the DSU auditorium. Mark your calendars!!!!

If you or someone you know is interested in joining Best Buddies at WKU, please go to bestbuddies.org/join and complete the application. If you wish to be a peer buddy (college student who is interested in being matched with a buddy with IDD), you will complete the Peer Buddy role on the application. If you are interested in signing up as a buddy (individual with IDD), complete the form using the Buddy role. After completing this application, advisors and host site coordinators will be in contact regarding matches, etc. ***All members must complete an application every year, even if you were a member last year.*** If you have further questions or are *not* currently receiving services from one of the three host sites, contact Leisa Hutchison at leisa.hutchison@wku.edu.