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Upcoming events celebrate Autism Acceptance Month

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Children race around Bowling Green Ballpark as they participate in the Children's 1 Mile Fun during the 16th annual LifeSkills Run for Autism on April 15, 2023.

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April is Autism Acceptance Month, highlighting both the challenges and triumphs of those across the spectrum and the people who support them.

Whether or not you or a loved one experience autism, there will be plenty of opportunity for involvement in the coming weeks.

The 17th annual LifeSkills Run/Walk for Autism is April 13 at Bowling Green Ballpark.



Laura Reynolds, an administrator for Western Kentucky University's Clinical Education Complex, said this will be her 10th year being involved and "it gets bigger and better and more fun every year."

She said there already are over 500 registered participants this year, many forming teams to join in together.

"That's my favorite part, all the work that goes into it throughout the year to prepare for the next event," Reynolds said. "That moment when the walk starts and everybody's walking together, wearing their T-shirts and being able to mingle with each other and the community – that's why we do what we do."

Registration is \$35 for adults wanting to participate in a 4-mile "Road Runners Grand Prix" race, a 1-mile walk or a 1-mile run.

Young participants can register for the Children's 1-mile Fun Run for \$15, or register with a paid parent on a walk for free.

Registration packets, including T-shirts and goody bags, will be available April 12 from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. in the lobby of the Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex, 104 Alumni Ave., at Western Kentucky University.

Registration is open now until the morning of April 13, with day-of registration available after 7 a.m. at the ballpark.

Details and payment can be found on Eventbrite.com by searching "2024 LifeSkills Run for Autism" with updates available on the event's Facebook page.

Following the event that day, LifeWorks at WKU will host an open house from 2 to 4 p.m. at 1328 Adams St., offering tours and information on volunteering and community partnerships.



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LifeWorks is a two-year living and learning program founded in 2019 for adults on the autism spectrum seeking employment and independent living skills.

“We are very proud of what we do here,” said Program Director Hendrix Brakefield. “Having that transparency and having that opportunity for people to come in and vet it with their own two eyes just does a lot for our beliefs, our philosophy and our mission.”

He said the event is a chance to spread awareness of their work and connect potential volunteers. In addition, the organization is always looking for business owners interested in employing and working alongside participants.

“There’s autistic individuals that would make great employees and great community members, but if you aren’t familiar with that population, you might misinterpret or misunderstand,” Brakefield said. “These

individuals provide a real value and a real benefit to the places that they work and the community organizations that they interact with.”

Details on the event and program can be found on the “LifeWorks at WKU” Facebook page or at LifeworksAtWKU.org.

The 2024 PossAbilities Expo will return April 20 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. to Knicely Conference Center, 2355 Nashville Road, offering information and empowerment for those seeking and offering disability services.

Details and a schedule can be found at PossAbilitiesExpo.org.

Brakefield called the expo “amazing” and said it connects “service providers, information providers, advocates and families” to the things they need to succeed.

He added, however, it’s not all insurance policies and community support.

“There’s a lot of fun that goes on,” Brakefield said.

“Obviously, these tables have giveaways and things, but there’s a fashion show, there’s speaking presentations, there’s informational sessions for families, there’s great food that’s on site – it is a big event.”

Like the LifeSkills Run/Walk, Brakefield added the event has “exploded” and grows larger each year.

“We have people coming from all over the state and from other states,” he said. “If you are somebody who has a loved one with some sort of a disability or learning difference, it’s a really good place to go.”



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