



Home / Opinion / Our Opinion

http://www.bgdailynews.com/opinion/our_opinion/autism-program-at-wku-makes-big-difference/article_3f516d8f-bbb9-5d01-9686-5b1603788d47.html

OUR OPINION

Autism program at WKU makes big difference

Apr 12, 2018

No one but those who have autism, or the family members of children with autism, really knows how challenging this diagnosis can be.

Typically, children with autism struggle in social situations and in interactions with other children. This condition has to be extremely hard both on the child and the parents. Thankfully, there are some treatments that can be of some help, and there are places where children can go to be with other kids with autism where they can interact together.

When Bowling Green resident Amy Hardin's son, J.W. Hardin, was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder at age 4, he struggled to have a conversation and make friends. For J.W., the struggle was never academic, but in learning how to get along with others. J.W. Hardin, now 7 years old, has made a lot of progress.

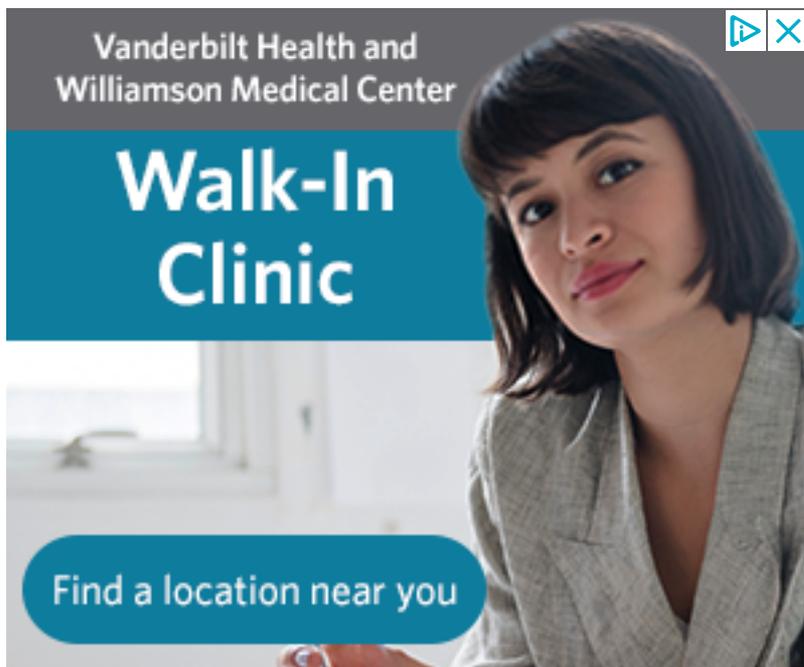
Hardin said J.W. previously didn't participate in activities he didn't like, and that her son used to kick or knock things over because it was the only way he knew to express frustration.

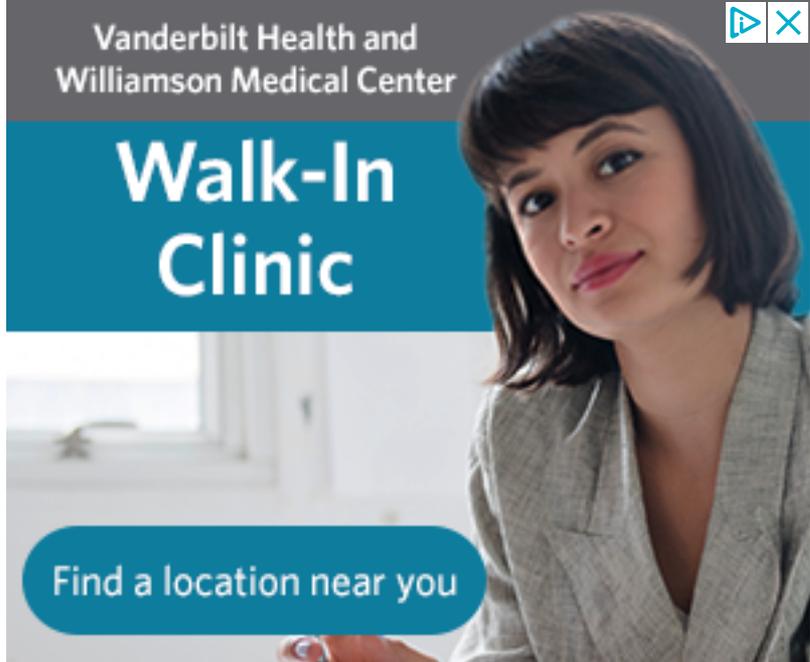
Thankfully, this has all changed for the better because of the Kelly Autism Program at Western Kentucky University and the Renshaw Early Childhood Center, which is also known as The Big Red School. Hardin and her husband, Mike, enrolled J.W. there and things really started to change for the better for their son.

After the staff started working with him in both individual and group settings, he made friends and joined in non-preferred activities. J.W. continued progressing when the time came to transition to the Kelly Autism Program.

Previously, J.W. would kick or knock things over because he didn't know how else to deal with frustration. Now, Hardin can actually see a tantrum coming and then watch J.W. calm himself down. He's learned how to say when someone's making him angry or to ask for a break.

Michelle Elkins, director of the Kelly Autism Program, said that's the goal for every child in the program.





“Everything we do is based on social language,” she said, adding that means children learn how to make friends. “With some children it’s their first friendship ever.”

Elkins stressed that children with autism are not incapable of communicating, they just need to be taught how through concrete strategies and skills.

Not only is this program very helpful with the children it serves, it is also very helpful with parents as well. Staff at The Big Red School offers advice to parents and connects with them on ways to help with their children’s autism.

This truly is a wonderful program offered by WKU. It’s challenging enough having autism or being the parent of a child with autism, but this place really shows hope and allows for these kids to interact with others and feel more at ease with themselves and control their emotions a little better.