

VITALITY REPORT

Experience a World Where All Individuals Flourish as Valued Members of Their Community



Loyd VanHooser, Editor

From the Director's Desk

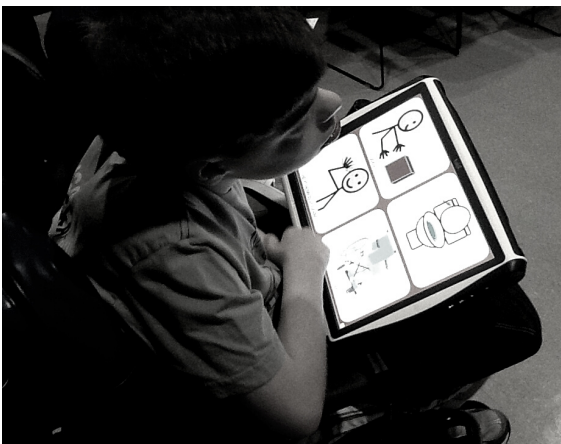
Dear CEC Family and Friends,

As we begin our summer programming for 2021, there is a palpable sense of eagerness and expectation that our world is turning the corner to a healthier, more predictable post-pandemic time. There is a sense of renewed energy and hope that the things we missed most of all during the last 15 months will once again be available: the joy of face-to-face communication and interaction, the lessening of the fear and loss of control associated with the pandemic, and the sense of purpose that partnering, collaboration and shared goals bring to each of us. We have indeed experienced loss during the past months, but cautious expectation is the mood of the day here at the CEC as we prepare to welcome our students and participants to an exciting summer of learning, growth, and fun. We continue to be most grateful for your support and remain committed to making a difference in the lives of individuals, families, and communities. Please join us.

Very best regards,

Mary Lloyd Moore, EdD, CCC-SLP

Executive Director, Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex



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A LOOK AT OUR
VIRTUAL EVENTS IN
2021

WHAT'S COMING:
PROGRAMS,
PARTNERSHIPS, AND
MORE...

CIRCLE OF SUPPORT - SUMMER PROGRAM

by Sarah McMaine-Render - Program Manager - Kelly Autism Program

This summer, the Circle of Support is piloting a summer internship program for several of our students. We have placed students at various internship sites and the Kelly Autism Program staff are providing supplemental courses in “post college life.” KAP is very grateful for our partnership with the following intern sites: WKU Public Broadcasting, TOP Prep, Bowling Green Parks and Recreation, WKU IT Department and LifeWorks at WKU. These programs not only provided an internship site but mentors to help our students navigate the work experience. KAP also partnered with Deanne Stanely and Jeff Hodges at the Academic & Career Development Center to provide different classes to our students. Students were able to complete weekly cooking classes and socials to practice hands-on social and problem-solving skills. One of our culminating events will be mock interviews with professionals from the Bowling Green community and beyond. Students are very excited about this new opportunity and we hope to make it a summer staple in the COS programming!



THE 2021 SPECIAL NEEDS EXPO

by Shannon Sales, Ed.D. - Director - Family Resource Program

Well, another Special Needs Expo strikes again! The CEC Family Resource Program assists every year with other committee members from various organizations throughout the area to provide quality resources for our special needs families. The committee worked hard to provide the best event possible, due to the circumstances at hand (pandemic).

We developed a hybrid model (virtual and in-person) to pull off this event and to ensure a quality service through a plethora of resources. It was held on Saturday March 27 from 9:30am – 3pm. The virtual portion was from 9:30am – 1pm, using a digital platform called Hopin where families could join from their homes. There were 79 different agencies/organizations that participated in that virtual space for families. We were also able to provide our fashion show, which included some AMAZING models for everyone to watch and enjoy. In addition, we had a meet and greet room from 12pm – 1pm that allowed families an opportunity to connect with others and potentially build relationships.

Our second portion of the event was scheduled from 1pm – 3pm. It was designed to allow time for our top sponsors to participate, interact, and provide in-person services with families from the Expo. There were four places that people could go which included the following: Numotion, BG Orthotics & Prosthetics, The HIVE, and The Kid Spot Center.

The Expo was a great event and we, as co-chairs and part of the committee, were very excited that it was a success. We are even more excited about the year to come as we believe it will be our best one yet!!! Stay tuned!!



14TH ANNUAL RUN FOR AUTISM

by Laura Reynolds, MHA - Administrator- Clinical Education Complex

When we began planning the virtual 2021 LifeSkills Run for Autism, we knew that COVID would require us to think outside the box – and we are so glad we did! Virtual events offer flexibility –an extended period of time allowed individuals to choose when they wanted to participate, rather than having to commit to a certain day and time. Many of us appreciated that, especially our college students, who did not have to get up early on a Saturday morning! Between April 5 and April 30, over 350 people participated by either walking, running, or biking in 13 different states and two different countries! We had a far greater reach than if we had been confined to a face-to-face event! We learned many things and decided that we may even keep a virtual option available for future events.

We had many friends that returned to participate as they do every year, but we also made some new friends. We met a mom (via telephone) supporting her son with a recent diagnosis. Her co-workers rallied around her in support and completed their four-mile walk together. Their company was so inspired by this, they decided to become sponsors for next year’s event! We look forward to welcoming them all in-person next year at the Bowling Green Ballpark! Our tentative date is Saturday, April 23, 2022, so go ahead and mark your calendars and follow our Facebook page for updates at LifeSkills Run/Walk for Autism.



IT'S THAT TIME, AGAIN

by Beth Schaeffer - Director - Renshaw Early Childhood Center

About this time each year, I feel a sense of apprehension, anxiety and inadequacy. It's the time of year that I celebrate the incredible successes of my preschoolers and prepare to send them on to a new and different experience, a new and different support system. Did I prepare them well? Am I realistic about their achievements and readiness? Will the teachers and therapists who will be receiving these children really understand their needs and provide the supports necessary for success? And most of all, how can I best support each child and their family as they move on?

Transition. A simple word that has many different meanings, all dependent upon one's perspective. There are those who view transition as an event, here today, gone tomorrow.

Change. From the familiar to the unknown. Often thought of as predictable and systematic. However, these things couldn't be further from the truth for the one experiencing transition and for this person's support system. As I received children from First Steps, I watched parents grieve the loss of therapists who knew their child well and became family. As the receiver of this new student, I've been responded to with anger, hurt, fear and uncertainty by frightened families seeking familiarity, trust and support. The language of special education in the schools is so very technical. The process, the acronyms, the forms and the players are all so very different, but pale in comparison to the feelings evoked, feelings of helplessness and worry.

As time passes and two-way communication is opened and valued, the trust factor grows. While there are bumps in the road, a support system develops and the student and family typically find themselves more secure in the new environment. But because one of the few constants we experience is change, it's not long until this child and family will be moving on, again, to a new and unfamiliar world.

I talked earlier about perspective and recognize that my perspective is based on my experience with the youngest learners. However, the longer I work in the education field, the broader my perspective has become. Parents of former students contact me year after year, asking my thoughts on next steps for their child. Asking how to get others to really consider their child's strengths and needs and inevitably talking about life after high school, asking me to attend as a support in IEP meetings. And with each annual review, I see parents grapple with the same anxiety and fears, worried that their child will not be understood or valued or provided the appropriate supports necessary for meaningful learning, independence and life success.

Cont...

IT'S THAT TIME, AGAIN

Continued from P.5

Transition never ends and neither does the anxiety that accompanies the fear of the unknown or that feeling of not being heard. It is not unusual for the feelings that accompany transition to mirror the pattern of feelings associated with the grief cycle (denial, anger, guilt, depression, fear and anxiety and acceptance).

Nancy B. Miller, author of *Nobody's Perfect: Living and Growing with Children Who have Special Needs*, describes a process for parents adapting to their child's diagnosis. The process the author outlines readily describes the stages many parents move through with each transition: surviving, searching, settling in and separating. The initial stage, surviving, refers to the shock, helplessness and numbness that accompany initial diagnosis or transition. The author describes this overwhelming stage as a focus on just putting one foot in front of the other. When a level of comfort develops, questions begin to take shape and there is a need for more information and resources and thus, the "search" is on.

As connections are made and one begins to better navigate this new world, a period of "settling in" begins. Plans emerge and a feeling of balance develops. Support systems grow and one begins to find peace within the new reality. From this stage, it is expected that "separation" will follow. Children may be doing more for themselves or seeking support from those outside the family. A sense of independence develops that looks very different for everyone. This could mean that a young child begins riding the school bus rather than the parent transporting or that an older student moves into their own home with other caretakers.

It should be noted that these stages look differently for each family and are likely visited repeatedly, with no predictable length of time in each stage.

Transitions aren't a simple step up to the next rung on the ladder. They can be emotionally fueled and can expend a family's mental, physical and financial resources. Transition planning requires a great deal of thought, evaluating, researching, meeting, discussing, disagreeing and connecting. No one knows a child better than those in the child's family and no one can be a stronger advocate for their child. Using knowledge of your child and working in tandem with service providers has the potential to make transitions safe and successful, therefore better preparing the child and family for the winding road ahead.



ART, IMAGINATION, AND FRIENDSHIP

By: Sarah Conder, MAE - Program Manager -
Renshaw Early Childhood Center

“Art is a place for children to learn to trust their ideas, themselves, and to explore what is possible.”

- Maryann F. Kohl



The Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex (CEC) was awarded the Arts for All Kentucky special Initiative grant in the spring of 2020. The mission of Arts for All Kentucky is to provide arts and educational programs that allow people with disabilities to fully participate. With this grant, educator and professional artist Andee Rudloff provided a variety of art experiences and opportunities to the children and families of the CEC. One art experience Andee provided was an outdoor chalkboard for the Renshaw Early Childhood Center (RECC). With this chalkboard, the young children who attend the RECC were given the opportunity to explore their creative expression. This chalkboard not only allowed the children to showcase their art abilities, but also opened the door for communication and opportunities to establish new relationships. The RECC reopened its doors for the first time this spring for face-to-face programming, after being closed nearly one year due to the pandemic. Upon reopening, it was evident that children were relearning how to communicate with their same age peers and foster new relationships. However, the outdoor chalkboard was one avenue that the children felt the most comfortable in exploring themselves and sharing those new experiences with their peers. So not only did Andee provide a wonderful art experience, she also provided a safe haven for children to come together, dive into their imaginations, and develop unique and unforgettable experiences with their new friends.



CIRCLE OF SUPPORT - GRADUATES

by Michelle Elkins, Ed.D , CCC-SLP - Director - Kelly Autism Program



One of the greatest joys at the Kelly Autism Program Circle of Support is being able to watch a student achieve a life-long goal, knowing that you played a small part in helping support them as they worked toward that goal. For students enrolled in the KAP Circle of Support program, that goal is graduation and a degree. This spring semester, five of our Circle of Support participants completed their college degrees. Two students received their Master’s degrees, two completed their Bachelor’s degrees, and one completed his Associate’s degree. Their majors included: economics, political science, foreign language, criminology, and interdisciplinary studies. In addition to our college participants, nine of our student tutors also graduated this semester. In celebration of their accomplishments, a small reception was hosted to honor them all. The entire CEC is proud of these students and look forward to following them as they begin the next steps in their lives. Congratulations to all the new graduates and best wishes as they begin their careers.



A WORD FROM OUR FAMILY RESOURCE PROGRAM INTERNS

by Lauren Burnett and Kelsey Harris



My name is Lauren Burnett, and for the past year I have been a graduate intern here at the Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex. I work under Dr. Shannon Sales in the Family Resource Program and my time here has been a monumental part of my growth as a social worker and as a person in general. Being a part of the Family Resource Program granted me the opportunity to be involved in the organization of the Special Needs EXPO and the Special Needs EXPO Fashion Show. This event allowed me to connect with special needs individuals in the community and I appreciate everyone who gave me the chance to get to know them during this process!

My name is Kelsey Harris and I am a social work major who got the chance to intern with the Family Resource Program for the 2020-2021 school year. This year I have learned so much from the FRP; not only about special needs individuals but about myself as well. I have learned to be confident in my knowledge of American Sign Language by posting videos on Facebook and providing ASL resources to any parent interested in learning about this topic. The FRP has also allowed me to put the skills I have learned in class to the test in real-life scenarios. That included leading intake/orientation meetings, observing a weekly group through the KAP program, participating in coffee hours, as well participating and leading a discussion during the 2021 Special Needs EXPO. Dr. Sales has been a great field instructor because she has pushed me to become the best social worker I can be.



AAC SUPPORT IN RECC

by Caroline Hudson, MS, CCC-SLP - Director

- Speech Language Pathology Services

The team of professionals at the Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex (CEC) is committed to supporting the communication and learning needs of CEC clients. We strive to provide the basic human right of communication while simultaneously teaching Western Kentucky University (WKU) students from a variety of academic programs how to support individuals in meeting their maximum potential.

An example of one of the many valuable hands-on learning opportunities taking place daily at the CEC occurred in the Renshaw Early Childhood Center (RECC) throughout the spring 2021 semester. Eight senior-level student clinicians from the Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD) department volunteered through their Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) course to learn how to create and implement AAC supports for students enrolled in the Renshaw Early Childhood Center (RECC), nicknamed by the children Big Red School. AAC included all tools used to communicate in addition to or instead of verbal speech. WKU student clinicians created and implemented the following AAC supports to help the young children in RECC have equal access to the curriculum, achieve emotional regulation, and be contributing members of the classroom.

Personalized social scripts: A social script is a narrative made to illustrate certain situations and problems and how people deal with them. These scripts can help children with communication differences understand social norms and learn how to communicate with others appropriately.

Transition markers: A transition maker is a personalized visual image that provides adults a motivating way to encourage children to check the class schedule to prepare for transitions.

Give me five retells: A give me five retell is a graphic organizer that helps children visualize or present information in an easy-to-comprehend way.

First-then board: A first-then board is a visual tool used to encourage a child to complete a less preferred activity in order to be able to complete a more preferred activity.

In-task schedules and texture schedules: These schedules were graphic representations of scheduled tasks and activities. They were used for breaking down tasks with multiple steps and ensuring children understand and follow classroom expectations.

Signing videos: Signing videos were created to provide a visual pathway to promote communication and learning for new information.

Visual supports: Visuals were created as needed throughout the semester and implemented to help the children grasp concepts and learn new vocabulary words by stimulating their imaginations and making abstract concepts more concrete during pre-teaching tasks and to promote carryover to natural environments.

Participation plans: Participation plans are written statements that help teams focus their efforts on teaching and modeling core vocabulary words. Core vocabulary is a small set of words that make up about 80% of what is said day to day.

Choice boards: Choice boards are a visual support that may include objects, photographs, icons, black and white line drawings or words, and are used by an individual to communicate a desired activity, item, location, etc.

LifeWorks@WKU Spring 2021

by David Wheeler - Executive Director - LifeWorks @ WKU

Spring Semester 2021 at LifeWorks@WKU has been fantastic for our participants and staff alike, despite the lingering inconveniences posed by the pandemic. This spring has been a time of rewarding and positive learning experiences, both inside and outside of the classroom. Those participating in the Transition Academy successfully completed course work focused on developing skills in the areas of employability, financial management, relationship building, and personal development. Also, each participant engaged in one-on-one training sessions in their apartment and other community settings. During the winter months, participants gained invaluable experience while working at the WKU campus bookstore.



Spring has brought about new, exciting summer employment opportunities for LifeWorks participants at the Bowling Green Ball Park, home of the Bowling Green Hot Rods. When not in class or at work, LifeWorks participants have continued to provide weekly volunteer service for a variety of local nonprofit agencies. Life at LifeWorks this spring has also included numerous opportunities for having fun – visiting each other’s apartments, preparing meals and streaming videos together, participating in game nights, and hosting our first fondue party. When asked about their most memorable time this semester, participants shared how much fun they experienced during the field trip to the Newport Aquarium and visit to neighboring Cincinnati.

We are so looking forward to our first LifeWorks@WKU summer session, and equally excited about the new cohort of LifeWorks participants who will be starting in August 2021. We are currently enrolling for the fall. There are spots remaining and financial aid is still available. Our goal is to make LifeWorks affordable for all individuals. Last year, 100% of our participants received financial assistance in the form of LifeWorks scholarships. To learn more about the Transition Academy or the Bridge Program (nonresidential, course work option), please contact David Wheeler at (270) 745-4380 or david.wheeler@wku.edu.

Conceptualizing an Alliance for Autism & Other Learning Differences

by Molly Swietek - Director of Public Relations - LifeWorks @ WKU



The Alliance for Autism & Other Learning Differences is a newly developed community partnership initiated by LifeWorks at WKU and the Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex. The Alliance hopes to unite the community around enhancing the lives of those with autism and other learning differences through various initiatives.

Beginning in March 2021, a small group of non-profit leaders, educators, and parents began meeting on Zoom to discuss and conceptualize the purpose and intent of The Alliance.

The group envisions individuals, families, businesses, organizations, local government, and service providers working together to create a more inclusive community. The primary goal is to enhance awareness, improve understanding, and increase acceptance of the neurodiverse population.

The Alliance's first area of interest is in developing an "Autism Friendly Business Community." The initiative would focus on identifying area businesses, stores, restaurants, tourist destinations, etc. willing to partner with The Alliance to learn more about autism and other learning differences, and to enhance their engagement with the neurodiverse population as valuable customers, employees, and community members.

The work of The Alliance would be to equip the business community with the knowledge and tools necessary to recognize, support, engage, and communicate effectively with the neurodiverse population.

While still in the early stages of development, the idea of creating a community-led initiative to educate the broader public on autism and other learning differences has gained favorable traction. The fundamental premise of The Alliance is to serve as a "hub" for uniting the community in creating a more inclusive society.

CIRCLE OF SUPPORT - DATING AND RELATIONSHIPS GROUP

by Peyton Collins, CSW - Mental Health Counselor - Kelly Autism Program



As we end another successful semester here at the Kelly Autism Program, I remain in awe of the resilience and determination shown by our college students. COVID-19 has certainly taken an emotional toll on everyone and it has created new areas of stress and anxiety with which many of us may have been previously unfamiliar. Our college students have, without a doubt, struggled in their new environment this semester. However, through the various challenges in our new world they have also utilized their resources and coping mechanisms as budding young adults. While COVID-19 may have logistically slowed us down as a whole, I am reminded that there are still lessons to be learned and knowledge to glean.

This semester, we were fortunate to host a Dating and Relationships Group for those interested in improving their knowledge of those unwritten social norms in the world of dating and courtship. We covered various topics such as emotional control, handling rejection, practicing positive self-talk/ confronting distortive thoughts, and how to tell if another person is as equally interested in you. Conversations were, for the most part, led by the students and tailored to their needs and interests. Each week, students returned and shared their experience in practicing a skill learned from a previous group session! I cannot express how powerful the comradery and unity was for all those involved! We are all very eager and excited to continue this group work next semester as we delve into dating, relationship building, and other mental health-related topics!



Volunteerism @ LifeWorks

by Hendrix Breakfield - LifeCoach - LifeWorks @ WKU

LifeWorks Volunteering continues to go well, and as we move toward the fall and the arrival of the new cohort, we are working to have a long-term schedule of volunteer opportunities for the participants to plan for and look forward to.

Our most recent list of volunteer partners includes:

- Lost River Cave
- BG Parks and Rec
- Warren County Humane Society
- The HIVE
- HOTEL Inc.
- L&N Railpark and Train Museum
- Top Crops
- Mammoth Cave
- Hope House Community Store
- Hope House Transition Program
- WKU Surplus



LifeWorks participants have made strong vocational connections through their volunteer experiences. One of the participants was even offered an internship based on the relationship she built through our time volunteering. With COVID-19 restrictions easing more all the time, the number of volunteer partners we work with should increase. LifeWorks participants give their input on where they would like to volunteer, and we work to make it happen. I look forward to the expansion of opportunities available to our participants and am so proud of the foundation laid by our current cohort.



