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WKU breaks ground on new residential program for adults with autism

AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com 50 min ago



Speaking at a groundbreaking ceremony Monday for a new, two-year residential program designed to help young adults with autism join the workforce, Western Kentucky University President Timothy Caboni described the need it is expected to meet.

Despite one in every 59 people being diagnosed with autism, Caboni said, “at age 21, the services to support these individuals become limited or they cease to exist.”

“LifeWorks at WKU is a remarkable, great next step in supporting our Kelly Autism Program students and others in our region,” Caboni said, describing a program that will focus on promoting independent living, securing employment and community engagement for people on the autism spectrum.

During the ceremony, Caboni was joined in making remarks by Joe Dan Beavers, president and CEO of LifeSkills; Ron Bunch, president and CEO of the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce; and Mary Lloyd

Moore, executive director of the Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex at WKU.

Moore said the LifeWorks program is beginning at a critical time for the Kelly Autism Program, which is housed within the CEC.

“Many of the participants in the Kelly Autism Program, founded by Linda and John Kelly, are reaching age 21 – a time when services are severely restricted,” Moore said.

“All graduates, particularly those with (autism spectrum disorder), require support after graduation. Fact: 85 percent of college graduates with ASD are underemployed or unemployed, compared to 2.1 percent of college graduates in the general population at all educational levels. We have an opportunity to address an unmet need.”

That’s where LifeWorks comes in.

Through a partnership with Wabuck Development, a development company based in Leitchfield, LifeWorks will provide accommodations for up to 26 people.

The groundbreaking Monday began a project to renovate apartments located at 1328 Adams St. that is slated for completion by spring of next year. LifeWorks will launch with six residents next fall.



Through the program, residents will work for an employer of their choice and be matched with a mentor for support. They'll also get instruction in navigating work and personal relationships and participate in group activities together, Moore said.

A typical day might include morning classes, afternoon job placement and coaching and personal time in the evenings with planned group activities on occasion.

The program could also provide learning opportunities for students studying social work, communication disorders, psychology or counseling.

“In addition to serving individuals diagnosed within the autism spectrum continuum, LifeWorks at WKU could also serve as a national model that can be replicated,” Moore said.

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WKU announces new program for young adults with autism

Aaron Mudd

Education reporter. Covers education and related issues, focusing primarily on the Bowling Green and Warren County public school districts and Western Kentucky University.

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