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First public library for neurodiverse opens at LifeWorks

IZZY LANUZA izzy.lanuza@bgdailynews.com

May 24, 2023

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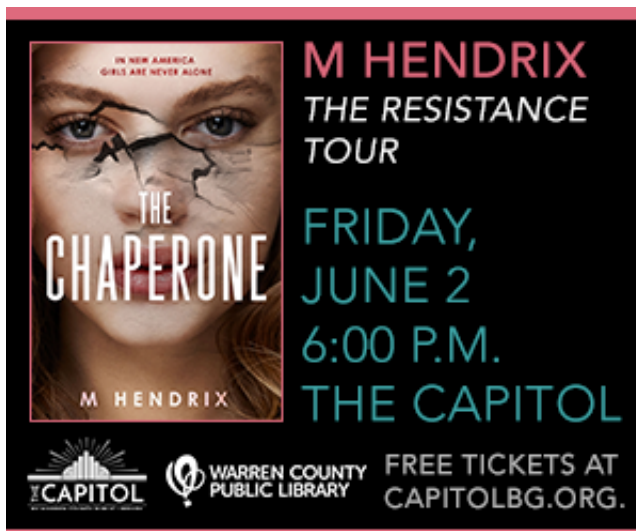
Graves Gilbert Clinic CEO Chris Thorn peruses through books in the new WKU on Tuesday.

PHOTOS BY Grace Ramey/grace.ramey@bgdailynews.com

The first library dedicated to the neurodiverse population in Kentucky opened Tuesday morning at LifeWorks at Western Kentucky University through a partnership with the Warren County Public Library.

“We're Kentucky's only transition academy for young adults with autism, focusing on helping transition to independent living and employment,” said David Wheeler, executive director at LifeWorks. “We have an amazing program here, amazing staff and some amazing participants.”

The new satellite location is a fully operational library with books, DVDs, magazines, audiobooks and online resources including access to streaming apps. Other items are also available at the branch, such as cake pans in the shape of a ghost or high-heel, along with plant seeds, to serve the residents in the LifeWorks program.



WCPL aims to make resources more accessible to participants living on the LifeWorks campus.

“Everyone should have access to services. We've asked ourselves at the library, ‘what does that mean for our community here’ and the reality is it's not just providing ... great facilities,” said Courtney Stevens, the WCPL director. "It's also saying we're going to be out in the community and we're going to start to structure library services, information services, in a way that everyone can be receptive to them.”

Currently the satellite location is only open to those participating in the LifeWorks program, but WCPL plans to expand the effort.



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“I can't tell you how proud we are that we have libraries that are not just meeting children's needs or just our elderly service needs but for literally everyone, access for all,” Stevens said.

Earl Willis has been hired to work as the full-time librarian at the satellite location. He has been working with WCPL for over 20 years.

“There's two reasons why I'm excited to be here. One of them is that I get to introduce people to the library. I get to show people that the library is more than just books – it's programming, it's hands-on, it's resources. The thing I like the most is I get to be a mentor and encourage people,” Willis said.

Willis has implemented a social hour every week and has established a book club. This is not a typical book club though. There is not a specific book that everyone must read and discuss. Participants can read any book of their choice and discuss it during the club time.

“The most important thing is you're talking and you're reading and you're discussing things,” Willis said.

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