

https://www.bgdailynews.com/news/gift-to-help-lifeworks-continue-growth/article_cb557305-92c1-54f8-ac9d-3b990912f532.html

Gift to help LifeWorks continue growth

By DON SERGENT dsergent@bgdailynews.com

Nov 15, 2022



Cheetah Clean Auto Wash owner Jeff Fields donated \$100,000 to the Life young adults enrolled in the programs's Transition Academy.

Grace Ramey/gramey@bgdailynews.com

MORE INFORMATION



WKU cuts ribbon on new program for adults with autism

For young adults with autism, LifeWorks at WKU offers community

Blue Equity invests in Cheetah Clean

His company's success is allowing Jeff Fields to contribute to the growth of one of Bowling Green's newest and fastest-expanding nonprofit organizations.

Fields, founder and CEO of Cheetah Clean Auto Wash, was recognized Tuesday for his \$100,000 gift to the LifeWorks at WKU nonprofit that helps young adults on the autism spectrum make the transition to independence and employment.

"I was blown away by the (LifeWorks) program and felt compelled to help out," Fields said Tuesday at the LifeWorks campus on Adams Street. "There are many options in our community to have an impact, but this one is meaningful and specific.

"If there is a way we can help people have better chances in life, we should do it."

Helping those with autism has particular appeal for Fields, who said his family has been "personally affected" by the disorder. He said he began collaborating with Western

Kentucky University's Kelly Autism Program in 2015, providing autistic youngsters training on such job skills as greeting customers and washing vehicles.

Support of the LifeWorks Transition Academy – which opened in 2020 and began offering residential and training options for young adults with autism – was a natural for Fields.

“This is a unique opportunity for those with autism, focusing on transitioning them to independence,” he said. “It addresses a vital need in our community.”

Located in a renovated apartment complex behind the Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex at WKU, LifeWorks is indeed unique.

Launched largely because of a \$5 million donation from the late entrepreneur Bill Gatton, LifeWorks is the only program of its kind in Kentucky.

As a result, said LifeWorks Executive Director David Wheeler, the program is experiencing rapid growth.

“We started with two students, and we now have 19 in the Transition Academy,” Wheeler said.

Students live at the academy complex for two years, taking classes and learning vocational skills to prepare them for living on their own.

“We want them to be as independent as possible,” Wheeler said.

Partnerships with local companies like Fruit of the Loom, Service One Credit Union and Aramark have helped the academy provide real-life work experiences for students and have led to such growth that Wheeler expects the academy to soon reach its capacity of “25 to 30” students.

“We have people calling weekly from all over the country,” he said.

LifeWorks, though, is a nonprofit independent of the university and must rely on donations and the

tuitions and fees paid by students' families.

Families who would struggle to make those payments are the ones who will be helped by Fields and others who donate to the LifeWorks endowment.

"We look for resources like this to help families in need," Wheeler said. "We have an endowment now, but it's small."

His company's growth allowed him to do his part to make the endowment larger, Fields said.

A partnership with Louisville-based private equity firm Blue Equity announced earlier this year has fueled Cheetah Clean's expansion.

The company now has four locations in Bowling Green and one each in Owensboro and Shepherdsville. With support from Blue Equity, Fields expects more Kentucky locations and expansions into Tennessee and Indiana in the coming months.

*– Follow business reporter Don Sergent on
Twitter@BGDNbusiness or visit
bgdailynews.com.*

[Privacy](#) - [Terms](#)