

# VITALITY REPORT

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



Loyd VanHooser, Editor



## From the Director's Desk

Dear Friends of the CEC,

After a very long eighteen months, I am delighted to report that we are in full swing at the CEC... back to face to face programming...as our society learns to deal with COVID-19. We are operating at full tilt, and everyone is grateful and motivated to be moving back to normal. You will find inspirational reports and 1st hand testimonials within this newsletter that tell the story of what we do at the CEC and why we do it. If you have questions, would like further information, or want to come and visit with us, please contact me. We remain grateful for your support and committed to making a difference in the lives of individuals, families, and communities. Please join us.

All the best,

Mary Lloyd Moore, EdD, CCC-SLP

Executive Director, Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex

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# Prewitt Family

by Katie Prewitt - Parent of Participants - Renshaw Early Childhood Center

Hello! We're the Prewitt party of four! I'm Katie, a local elementary school social-emotional teacher. My husband, Corey, is a full-time farmer and we have the privilege of raising our two daughters; Scarlett, a feisty five-year old, and our tiny four-year old miracle, Autumn. We entered the world of special needs parenting on July 20th, 2017 after having a totally normal and uneventful pregnancy. When our Autumn was born at only 4lbs, full-term and with a cloudy eye, we were immediately placed in the hands of several specialists, both at the Medical Center and Vanderbilt, where we learned Autumn has a very rare chromosome disorder, "Chromosome 6 Ring". She is one of 25 diagnosed individuals in the world within the past 40 years, so we learn who Autumn is on our daily journey through life with her. So far in her few short years of life we've learned Autumn is non-verbal, has congenital glaucoma (visually impaired) in both eyes, bilateral hearing loss, heart defects, as well as other challenges and diagnoses that affect her learning and typical development. We were initially introduced to the RECC and Big Red School by our amazing First Steps PT and Developmental Interventionist almost three years ago. Since having the invaluable opportunity to be a part of this community our family has not only been blessed by educators who are advocates for our daughter's education, but also friendships with other parents traveling similar journeys as ours. This experience wasn't just essential to our immediate family, but also to our extended family. My mother served as Autumn's caregiver while my husband and I worked, Although 'Nana' has a background in early childhood development, we needed reprieve and additional heads to bounce ideas off of for reaching Autumn's greatest potential. My parents play a large role in getting Autumn to and from BRS, and also in helping communicate Autumn's needs or challenges for the day.



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## Prewitt Family

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This amazing experience allows Autumn to blossom in an environment that is safe and inviting for her specific behavioral/social, academic, and physical needs. In addition, our oldest daughter, Scarlett, was able to attend classes as a peer model and this experience has forever changed the child, sister, and adult that she is and will be. Scarlett has shown more empathy and compassion to children and people with different needs than most adults I know. As a social emotional teacher, I pride myself on teaching children character development skills and the ability to have empathy towards others, but the experience Scarlett received at BRS will be an immersive life-changing event that I can't teach from a textbook. For this I am forever grateful! As a family we also value that each time we find ourselves in a season of life where Autumn can't communicate what she needs to help her, the teachers at BRS set out on a mission to solve Autumn's complex puzzle. I love being able to pick up the phone and call the teachers and know that I have educators in our ring helping to make her life at home and school the best it can be. I can think of one specific example, two summers ago at the start of COVID, the BRS teachers were still reaching out to support us at home through Zoom calls. Autumn was so excited to see and hear Mrs. Beth, and Scarlett commanded every ounce of Mrs. Beth's attention she could get! During this COVID summer, the excessive amount of time we spent at home together, out of care for Autumn's complex needs, caused us to develop survival techniques not conducive to the school setting, and overwhelming for me at home- such as pulling her hair out, continual crying, refusal to eat, and constant beating of her head on her crib or floor. Beth and the other teachers were absolutely amazing resources to help fight these new behavioral and sensory-seeking behaviors. They checked on us almost weekly and offered ideas that would help transition Autumn away from these unwanted behaviors.

One night, very late, I received a text message from Beth asking if she could give me a call. She knew we were in a season where Autumn wasn't sleeping- almost all night- and were up, so I gladly welcomed the calm, empathetic voice of Beth during our nighttime chaos. Beth said she'd be thinking about helping Autumn communicate her needs and wanted to talk to me about a program she learned about from a past conference she attended, and couldn't wait to tell me. There is no doubt in my mind that if your child walks into the BRS then each of those teachers is continually thinking of how to make your child's experience at BRS, and at home, meaningful for your whole family. Our children are what drive this team, our children deserve the best, and there is nothing better than a BRS experience. Next Fall, when Autumn joins the public full-time Kindergarten world and ages out of the BRS world we will leave reluctantly, with grateful and heavy hearts, but we will forever sing the praises of BRS, and the impact it has had on our whole family.

# Parent Socials

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

The Family Resource Program (FRP) wanted to provide a different experience for our parents to have the opportunity to focus on themselves as well as their children. We had a series of events for parents to participate in for the fall semester. Parents were able to come to parent socials to network, relax and learn in areas that benefit them as a whole. Our first parent social was a meet and greet with other new supportive agencies that provide services for the population that we work hard to serve. The second parent social was an opportunity for relaxation at “Be Happy Yoga” for some time to relax and meditate. The third parent social was an educational discussion that focused on “How to get my child to eat healthy”. Many parents have difficulty getting their children to eat more than one or two kinds of food. This discussion provided resources, and information to try new strategies to provide creative ways to intrigue their child to seek different foods.



# 15th annual LifeSkills Run/Walk for Autism!

by Laura Reynolds, MHA - Administrator- Clinical Education Complex

Plans are underway for the 15th annual LifeSkills Run/Walk for Autism! The event is scheduled for Saturday, April 23, 2022, and will include a 4 mile run, a 1 mile children’s run, and a 1 mile family fun walk. We are thrilled to be planning an in-person event, in conjunction with the Bowling Green Ballpark! We are also planning a sensory-friendly autism awareness baseball game to be held on Friday, April 22. Make plans to spend the entire weekend with us! Stay tuned for more details and be sure to follow the event Facebook page at LifeSkills Run/Walk for Autism for updates. If you are interested in being an event sponsor, contact us at [runforautism@wku.edu](mailto:runforautism@wku.edu).



Photos from previous years



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# Camp Big Readiness Comes to the RECC!

by Beth Schaeffer - Director - Renshaw Early Childhood Center

A driving goal of our work at the Renshaw Early Childhood Center is to prepare every child for school and life success. Expectations for the skills children enter kindergarten with have increased greatly. That coupled with the impact on learning brought about by the pandemic created an ideal opportunity for those children who would be entering kindergarten in the fall of 2021. The staff at the Renshaw Early Childhood Center worked with Donna Williams, a kindergarten consultant from the Warren County Schools, to develop a bridge for learning, connecting home and preschool learning and routines to a more rigorous, academic focused kindergarten preparation experience. Camp Big Readiness enjoyed an inaugural year with twenty-four students who attended a four-week program, two days, each week. Students were immersed in language, literacy, math and science. They enjoyed hands-on, minds-on experiences with letters and numbers and more structured routines and activities. Students were eager and active learners as they engaged in science activities that promoted critical thinking. They experimented with chemistry, physics and technology, making elephant toothpaste by creating an exploding chemical reaction and through basic coding activities, really having to think about how to get their mouse from point A to point B, C and D. Students followed recipes and made their own healthy snack each day, practicing the use of eating and food preparation utensils while following written step-by-step instructions. Camp Big Readiness staff was joined by graduate Communication Disorders clinicians who provided dynamic shared reading activities in every session, very tailored to support the unique needs of each student. At the end of the camp, families joined students in the classroom to see first-hand those activities, demonstrated by their children, that helped better prepare their child for school success. Additionally, each child received a readiness backpack, filled with materials and guidance that families could use at home to continue the learning from Camp Big Readiness. While there was very little doubt that students enjoyed this experience, the true highlight of the program was feedback from families whose child not only did well on the kindergarten readiness screener at their new school, but that they were really ready for a more demanding and rigorous learning opportunity as they entered kindergarten. This strong start to kindergarten is just the beginning of confidence and relationship building. It lit a fire for those young students who entered school ready to learn on day one and as life-long learners, always ready and thirsty for knowledge!

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# LifeWorks at WKU: The Julie & Gary Ransdell Living and Learning Community Ribbon Cutting

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

On September 23, a ribbon-cutting ceremony was held for the Julie & Gary Ransdell Living and Learning Community that houses the LifeWorks at WKU program.

“This is a special moment for Julie and me,” WKU President Emeritus Gary A. Ransdell said. “We are honored to have our names on this facility because this program will pave the way for the future success of the participants. This speaks to what we can do as a university community to change the lives of those within our larger community.”

The facility is named in honor of the Ransdells at the request of Mr. Bill Gatton whose initial \$5 million gift made the LifeWorks program possible. Mr. Garry Watkins and the Wabuck Development Company provided further support to renovate the apartment complex located at 1312 Adams Street in Bowling Green.

LifeWorks is Kentucky’s only living and learning transition program for young adults with autism and other learning differences. The LifeWorks Transition Academy is a two-year, postsecondary certificate program that empowers its participants to successfully transition to lives of independence, productivity, and employment.

Along with living in their own apartments, LifeWorks participants take part in coursework that aims to build the skills necessary for independent living, including how to navigate the workplace and their place in the community. LifeWorks focuses on helping each participant assess and develop their vocational skills and find employment in the community.

Those attending the special dedication ceremony included Julie and Gary Ransdell, WKU President Timothy Caboni, the LifeWorks board of directors and major supporters, representatives from the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce, University and community dignitaries, and the inaugural cohort of LifeWorks participants.

Quoted in a Sept. 24 Bowling Green Daily News article, Jacob Brennenstuhl, a participant in the program, said the living and learning community has helped him grow essential independent living skills and social skills.

“This program takes in people of all different skill levels,” said Brennenstuhl, who previously worked for Kids on the Block as a grant writer. “However, even when I had my career skills, I didn’t really know how to live on my own ... Opportunities to learn those skills were missed a lot.” “It gives you a taste of independent living,” without leaving you to fend for yourself, Brennenstuhl said of LifeWorks at WKU.

# Renshaw Early Childhood Center

By: Sarah Conder, MAE & Haley Joiner - Program Managers - Renshaw Early Childhood Center

For the fall semester, the Renshaw Early Childhood Center (RECC) has re-opened its doors to professionals within the community.



The RECC has welcomed back various multidisciplinary team members including first steps providers, board certified behavior analysts, registered behavior technicians, speech-language therapists, and educators within the school system. The Western Kentucky University nursing students have also returned to the RECC classroom for hands on learning and fun! The RECC staff is thrilled to have the classroom filled with various professionals all working together to engage the children in learning opportunities!

The RECC received a grant from the Council for Exceptional Children, Division of Early Childhood that allowed them to purchase the Handwriting Without Tears curriculum. Handwriting Without Tears helps young learners build essential skills for emergent writing and handwriting success. This curriculum nurtures writing automatically through direct, explicit instruction along with guided and independent practice. The children at RECC have been very engaged and have loved learning all about new letters and the way they are made! In the pictures to the right you can see some children making a letter 'O' using big and little curves. In addition, the RECC also received a grant from United Way of Southern Kentucky that helped them purchase the Creative Curriculum (toddler and preschool), Teaching Strategies Gold and Ready Rosie.





# Primetime

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



KAP Primetime is excited to be face-to-face this semester with a new format. We opened this semester with three groups focusing on pragmatic language, self-care and advocacy, and transitions. The 3 groups include a group for those with lower support needs, a group for children with higher support needs, and a high school group. The high school group meets on Fridays and focuses transition to their next step whether that be post-secondary education or vocational skills. The students are engaged not only with the material but are developing connections and friendships. We have seen huge growth in relationship building that we believe will be lifelong.

Our support team includes two amazing Graduate Assistants, a Masters level Psychology intern, 5 Communication Sciences and Disorders interns, and a social work program intern. Skills focused on this semester have included building and maintaining friendships, understanding and using humor, and using appropriate conversation skills. The self-care segment has been a great addition to our programming. The students have enjoyed learning and building skills that help to keep them centered and focused on the strategies that they can use to self-regulate. The smaller groups have been a huge success and are allowing relationships to build in a safe environment. We have all enjoyed watching the students grow and develop meaningful relationships with their peers.



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# FRP Internship Experiences

by Alexis Wilson and Hannah Brookshire - Interns - Family Resource Program



My name is Alexis Wilson (pictured top). Being an intern at the CEC, I have had the opportunity to work with Big Red School, Prime Time, Kelly Autism Program Circle of Support, and even other agencies outside of the CEC as we prepare for the PossAbilities Expo, coming up in March 2022. Though I am working with so many individuals within these programs, I have also been able to support many families through the FRP. The FRP is truly such an integral piece of the CEC puzzle because it encompasses not only the individuals we serve, but their families as well. I get to support the clients of the CEC within our programs, but I have been able to continually provide knowledge and resources for families in the community. I have thoroughly enjoyed being a part of the Family Resource Program and I'm excited to continue learning and growing as a professional social worker.



My name is Hannah Brookshire (pictured bottom) and I have been an intern at the Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex with the Family Resource Program for 4 months now. While interning here, I have gained so much knowledge about working with individuals who have developmental delays or disabilities, as well as interacting with parents. The FRP is the first entry step into the CEC. We do client intake orientation, in which we meet with the parents to discuss what resources they are wanting to receive from the CEC, as well as which resources in the Bowling Green area could be helpful to them. The FRP has come up with events to get parents involved with the CEC, each other, and taking time for themselves. We hosted an event at the Be Happy Yoga and Salt Cave for our parents to give them a way to relax and unwind. Just recently, we had a coffee hour and a speaker from BG Backyard Bootcamp came and spoke to our parents about how to get your child to eat healthier and try new foods. In addition, I have worked with other programs in the building such as Big Red School, which has helped me learn so much and I can see my passion growing for individuals with disabilities and this age group every day.

# Making Inclusion Work

by Caroline Hudson, MS, CCC-SLP - Director

- Speech Language Pathology Services

It wasn't that long ago when students training to be speech-language pathologists were primarily taught only how to provide services to clients in a one-on-one setting. This delivery model is known as "pull out services", and it can be an effective way to work on certain goals/objectives. However, the research is increasingly clear that the opportunity to work on new skills while observing and interacting with others of similar ages in a natural environment is best practice in many cases. This means WKU student clinicians need the opportunity to learn how to provide effective push in/inclusion services to participants in natural settings and that is exactly the type of hands on learning taking place at the Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex (CEC) this fall semester.

Student clinicians from the Communication Disorders Clinic (CDC) are pushing into the Renshaw Early Childhood Center's (RECC) toddler group on Monday and Wednesday mornings with the ultimate goal of sharing books with the young children in the classroom in fun and interactive ways. The secondary goals are to increase the children's word variety and to encourage use of word combinations. The toddlers are able to participate and learn at their own pace. It is developmentally appropriate for these youngest CEC participants to only be able to attend for short periods of time. Therefore, interactive story time is designed to meet the children's developmental needs and create positive emotional memories for books. The student clinicians are talking and singing about the pictures in the books and making the stories come to life through the use of animated voices and dramatic play time. In mere weeks book center has gone from a less preferred center in the classroom to a happy preferred place to play and learn. This special toddler reading time encourages interactions between children who are differently abled, and the student clinicians support those with difficulty communicating in ways that make the other children clearly understand their contribution.

In addition, student clinicians are also taking part in the Monday and Wednesday RECC preschool group by providing dialogic reading time with pre-selected books that connect to the RECC's fall theme of balls. The goal is to build the oral vocabulary, print awareness, and phonological awareness of each child. Before turning the page, the children are asked open ended questions to predict what is going to happen next or to come up with alternative endings to increase engagement and critical thinking skills. The clinicians are focused on providing intentional phonological awareness activities for the children by creating play based tasks with letters and letter sounds. For example, each child made a personalized coconut tree one session with alphabet letters. Guessing games have also been played with target vocabulary words like football, round, and bounce. The preschoolers are tactile learners, and they enjoy hands on activities. So, one session the children created and decorated their own round cookies out of playdough and on another day cheered like Big Red on an oversized bouncy ball to the "T-O-P-S" chant. Fun and learning are co-existing in this most natural learning environment at the RECC.



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# Making Inclusion Work

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Two student clinicians on Mondays and Wednesdays and three student clinicians on Tuesday and Thursday are providing social skills training in a group setting as they push into the Kelly Autism Program's Prime Time program. The clinicians are charged with teaching the school age children to interact appropriately with same page peers. This fall the clinicians are providing lessons about: giving and receiving compliments, reflective and active listening, greetings and introductions, starting conversations, maintaining and ending conversations, using humor, keeping friends, resolving conflict, apologizing and forgiving, body language and personal appearance. This group atmosphere is proving to be the perfect platform for the participants to build relationship with caring adults and be provided exposure to a variety of challenging real-world social situations alongside same age peers. The children are becoming more and more comfortable with each other and friendships are developing based on shared interests and newly formed social skills.

WKU students will form their knowledge, opinions, and beliefs about best practices based largely on the attitudes, words, and actions that they learn from professionals at internships and externships. The RECC and Prime Time are two inclusive learning environments at the CEC which are shaping the next generation of providers' attitudes and behaviors in a positive direction about effective ways to use inclusion to be more person centered while simultaneously helping participants meet goals and objectives.



# LifeWorks @ WKU

by David Wheeler - Executive Director - LifeWorks @ WKU

In August 2021 the LifeWorks @ WKU Transition Academy launched its largest cohort yet! Fall enrollment included 8 young adults (4 men / 4 women) – from across the state, including Adair, Jefferson, Nelson, Webster and Warren counties.

Those participating in the LifeWorks Transition Academy moved into the Ransdell Living & Learning Community in late August and began coursework and training in early September.

Since that time, the participants have successfully completed the initial eight (8) courses of the Learn4Independence® curriculum. Foundational courses covered the following topics: employment skills, forming relationships, personal finances, building community, safety, self-awareness, and identity, finding solutions, and independent living skills. Recipe & Cooking Presentations is a new participant requirement this year – and has been a wonderful addition to the programming schedule.

Outside the classroom, participants have been receiving consultation and training in their apartment as well as other community settings. Some LifeWorks participants have secured employment, and others in the job-search phase. The weekly schedule includes volunteering and service-learning experiences at various local nonprofit organizations and required physical fitness activities. New program themes this year include strengthening self-management skills, healthy lifestyle habits, and increasing personal accountability. An additional programming offering at LifeWorks At WKU is the Bridge Program. This unique option is for individuals who would like to enroll in one or more classes but not receive the additional services or reside in the Ransdell Living & Learning Community. We are currently accepting applications for the Transition Academy and the Bridge Program. To learn more about our services, the application process and financial assistance, please contact David Wheeler at (270) 745-4380 or david.wheeler@wku.edu.



# WKU Public Broadcasting Brinkley Student Employment Fellowship Program

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

Established in 2019, the Brinkley Student Employment Fellowship Program provides opportunities for WKU students with autism to learn valuable job skills and training at WKU Public Broadcasting.

The Fellowship program has grown substantially since its inception. Over the past summer, WKU Public Broadcasting participated in the KAP Summer Internship Program, providing three additional autistic students job opportunities in public television, radio, and engineering. Each student added tremendous value to the operations and were all hired as Brinkley Fellows this fall semester.

Currently, eight KAP students are employed at public broadcasting earning \$10 an hour and working part-time during the school semester. Five students are assigned to the WKU PBS television production crew, one is developing news content for WKU Public Radio, another is assisting in the engineering department, and one is monitoring the master control operations for public television.

The Brinkley Fellows continue to participate in WKU Public Broadcasting's current grant from the Corporation for Broadcasting titled, "Embracing Differences, Finding Strengths: A Public Broadcasting Model for Autism Inclusion." Each student provides feedback about their employment experiences to help public broadcasting develop guidance for other businesses and organizations to create their own autism inclusion hiring programs. After each student completes their first year with the Fellowship, they transition to traditional student employment, allowing for two new Fellows to be awarded employment opportunities. Each spring, WKU Public Broadcasting conducts an application and interview process to select two additional students to join the Fellowship. The next round of hiring will be conducted in the spring of 2022.



# A Word from a Student Worker

*by Jaden Harp - Tutor - Kelly Autism Program*

Whenever I interviewed for the tutor roll here at the Kelly Autism Program, I asked for any resources I could use to learn more about people with Autism and the struggles they face. I had never worked with students who faced these issues before. Johnathan and Nathan emailed me lists of resources to look over. However, reading about Autism does not prepare you for working with Autism. Nathan said in my interview, “if you have met one person with Autism, then you have done just that, met one person” and that has stuck with me for the entirety of the time I have worked in this program.

Whether it be in the one-on-one tutoring with students, the fun programs, or the social development sessions, the work here has made me fall in love with this job more and more. The students here have become people that I look forward to seeing every other day. I am excited to hear about their day and work through common struggles together. As a college student myself, I understand what kind of stress our students are under. Homework and time management are difficult tasks to maintain, but just as much as I help the students, they also help me. I have developed perspectives that I would have never considered before working at KAP. I can only hope that I have helped the students of KAP as much as they have helped me.

This program is amazing. I am going to be a future educator and I cannot value enough this job and the students who study here. I have learned to look at situations in a different view and learned to love the silly moments in an educational setting. We tell jokes, play games, and work hard together as a unit, and grow together because of it. I see my students around campus, outside of KAP and I am genuinely excited to see them. I love the relationships I have built here, and I cannot wait to make so many more.

To my fellow staff members, it is hard to be a student and a worker, but I hope you are being as fulfilled in your roll here as I am. To my students who may be reading this, thank you for learning with me and growing with me. I look forward to getting to know you more at socials, and in tutoring. To the parents that are reading this, thank you for entrusting us with your family. Thank you for raising such amazing young adults that take pride in learning and their relationships. Everyone involved in this program, from staff, to parents, to students are phenomenal and I could not have picked a better place to work.



# Move & Groove

by Hendrix Breakfield - LifeCoach - LifeWorks @ WKU

This September I helped put on the inaugural Move & Groove event in Bowling Green. This event was originally envisioned by my wife, Logan who has always had a dream of running her own camp that incorporated her talents in music. She and I identified the adult/young adult special needs community as a population that we wanted to target. We began planning and came up with an idea that we hoped would be popular.

We reserved Circus Square Park in downtown Bowling Green to set up in. Our goal was to combine music and adaptive movement into one event that would be inclusive and accessible for all attendees. We were grateful to have some wonderful partners including the CEC, Bowling Green City, and Bowling Green Parks & Rec. With donations we were able to pay individuals with different professional backgrounds to have a role in Move & Groove. This included musicians, a yoga teacher, and a fitness instructor. All of these individuals were asked to provide engaging, energetic, and adaptable 15-minute sessions that would take place back-to-back throughout the event. Having these 15-minute sessions was one way we hoped to include as many people as possible.

In addition to the main movement and music sessions we offered supplemental activities to the participants. Bead bracelets, tie dye t-shirts, and sensory sniffer stations were all set up and manned by volunteers. Folks were able to float between the movement sessions and the craft stations or just relax in the grass. The entire experience was designed to be relaxing while offering opportunities for inclusive engagement.

Obviously, this sounds like an excellent event but how did it turn out? Well, the volunteers heavily outnumbered the event attendees, but I would not call it a failure. If we had 1,000 people there I would not have wanted the event to have run any differently. I have learned that in upcoming years I need to spend a larger amount of time spreading the word and getting people to attend. Having a sunnier day wouldn't hurt either. All in all Move & Groove was a successful proof of concept and those who did attend all thought it was great. Keep a lookout for us going forward. Move & Groove will be back again for year two late next summer!





