

# Chilton Autism Network joins awareness event



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By JOYANNA LOVE/ Senior Staff Writer

In recognition of Autism Awareness Month, the Chilton Autism Network will participate in the Funky Fun Run at Faulkner University in Montgomery on April 14.

In the past, CAN had hosted a run of their own.

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“We decided last year that it would be better to combine our efforts, either with someone to the north of us or to the south of us because of the size,” Carla Easterling, CAN network leader, said.

She said the goal of the run is to raise funds for the Alabama Autism Society and to raise awareness for autism spectrum disorder.

Easterling said participating in the event was important because “it raises funds for us to be able to support more people and have more support and advocacy in the community.”

“One of the great things is every county leader is able to call the Autism Society to ask for funds for anything that

they may need in their community like supplies or if there is a family that we felt we needed to help with something that we could do that," Easterling said.

She said there are eight to 10 people from CAN already committed to participating in the event.

Participation in the 5K, which starts at 8 a.m., is \$35. Participation in the one mile Fun Run or walk, which starts at 9:30 a.m., is \$30.

Community members wanting to join in the efforts can register at [runsignup.com](http://runsignup.com) (<http://runsignup.com>) by searching for Funky Fun Run Montgomery or at Faulkner the day of the race.

In addition to raising funds to help the Alabama Autism Society, Easterling is looking forward to networking with leaders and members of other group leaders.

The Chilton Autism Network provides support to family members and caregivers of those with autism and provides referrals to services, such as recommending a pediatrician to assess their child for autism.

Easterling has a son who was diagnosed with autism when he was 6 years old.

After the diagnosis, Easterling said she began looking for other people in the same situation. She said a friend of hers was leading CAN at the time. Easterling said she found the group to be "very supportive."

Easterling became the network leader almost two years ago.

CAN is also involved in advocacy efforts. In 2017, the group contacted local legislators and raised awareness for the importance of passing House Bill 284.

"It was to provide coverage for medically necessary treatment for autism, including Applied Behavioral Analysis," Easterling said.

The group also had booths at local events to talk about the importance of the bill because if "we can enhance the success of the children and teenagers with autism in our community that helps the entire community," Easterling said.

This year additional funding has been earmarked in the state budget for the Department of Mental Health to serve those with autism spectrum disorder.

The bill was signed into law in May 2017. The law requires the treatment to be covered, but sets cost caps based on age and goes into effect January 2019, Easterling said.

She said even before the bill was actually passed, BlueCross BlueShield and UnitedHealthcare announced they would begin covering treatment for autism.

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