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Utes, Cougars Team Up For Autism Awareness

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Utah Utes linebacker Devin Lloyd (0) and Brigham Young Cougars offensive lineman James Empey (66) greet each other after the game as BYU defeats Utah in an NCAA football game at LaVell Edwards Stadium in Provo on Saturday, Sept. 11, 2021. BYU won 26-17, ending a nine-game losing streak to the Utes. (Scott G. Winterton, Deseret News)

BY MICHELLE BODKIN

KSL Sports

OREM, UTAH- Once again, the Utes and Cougars put aside their differences on the field to help the community off of it. This time the focus was on autism with local non-profit, [Kids On The Move](#). Hayden Erickson, Devin Kaufusi, and Karene Reid from Utah teamed up with Kade Moore, Tyler Batty and Puka Nacua of BYU to bring attention to an underserved demographic.



Michelle Bodkin
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Always great when everyone can agree on important issues in our community. Story coming soon to @kslsports. #GoUtes #GoCougs ❤️💙



3:16 PM · May 10, 2022



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Diagnosing Autism

According to the CDC and [Autism Parenting Magazine](#), 1 in 44 children are diagnosed with autism in the United States. Utah sits just below the national average at 1 in 48 children diagnosed according to research released by the [University of Utah](#) in December of 2021.

Right now, the demand for treatment in Utah is high and families are having to wait eight months just to get a diagnosis on the spectrum to start treatment. This is why Kids On The Move held a job fair Tuesday afternoon with the lure of Utah and BYU football players, hoping to bring in applicants that can ease the strain on the system.

Meeting The Demand

CEO of Kids On The Move, Rachelle Rutherford, couldn't emphasize enough the importance of early diagnosis for the children and the families they serve. With the demand being high and not having enough staff on hand to provide the one-on-one treatment each child needs is Kids On The Move's biggest hurdle to overcome.

The image is a screenshot of an Instagram post from the account 'kotm_utah'. The post features a colorful graphic with three overlapping circles: a large red circle on the left, a large green circle on the right, and a smaller yellow circle at the bottom right. The red circle contains event details: 'Tuesday May 10, 2022', '11:30am to 1:30pm Open House', and the location 'Kids On The Move 475 Hospital Dr. Orem, UT'. The green circle contains information about a 'Free Lunch' and training opportunities. The yellow circle contains a contest announcement. A QR code is also present in the center. The post has 9 likes and a caption describing the event.

kotm_utah
1,435 followers [View profile](#)

kids on the move
empowering families, one child at a time

JOB FAIR

Free Lunch
Meet and take pictures with pro college athletes from BYU and the University of Utah
Learn about how to receive free on-the-job training to become a Registered Behavior Technician at Kids On The Move

Tuesday May 10, 2022

11:30am to 1:30pm Open House

Kids On The Move 475 Hospital Dr. Orem, UT
Parking will be available at the Intermountain Rehab Center, and the Geneva School Lot. Event held outside at address above.

RSVP at  and you're welcome.

Come at 11:30am to meet some of your favorite college athletes and enter to win BYU and U of U football swag!
Must be present to win.

[View more on Instagram](#)

9 likes
kotm_utah

Come to our job find event next week for FREE J.Dawgs, games, and meet your favorite college athletes!
Come learn about how to make a difference in a child's life by becoming a Registered Behavior Technician at Kids On The Move while interacting with PRO college football players Hayden Erickson, Devin Kaufusi, Karene Reid from U of U, and Puka Nacua, Kade Moore, and Tyler Batty from BYU 🍌

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“A child with autism typically needs 20-30 hours of therapy per week and the earlier that child receives therapy, the more progress they are going to make,” Rutherford said. “Receiving those services early, and trying to eliminate waitlists for families so they can receive the services they need is so crucial. A typical child with 30 hours- you might need two to three staff to meet those hours any given week. We want all of the children to receive the hours they need. That’s going to require more people being trained to provide services in the community.”

Kids On The Move is hopeful their event will help ease the load and provide more services to families in Utah having to navigate the intricacies of having a child with autism. Kids On The Move knows the job market is tight, but would like to see a variety of applicants from all ages and backgrounds apply. All Kids On The Move asks is applicants have a high school diploma and they can provide all the rest of the necessary training.

“Our goal for this event is to hire 20 RBTs (registered behavioral technicians),” Rutherford said. We will do all of the training, and put them through all of the certification which typically takes about two months. With the current amount coming in we could hire 30-40 employees a month and that would be what we would need to actually meet the demand that’s coming in our location.”

Family And Friends Connection

Utah tight end Hayden Erickson has a special connection to Kids On The Move. His dad, Ryan Erickson is their COO and so it only made sense for Erickson to volunteer his time and bring some fellow athletes along.

“Being able to use what you do and what you enjoy doing to benefit other people I think is awesome,” Erickson said. “It’s really nice.”

Erickson says he’s admired his dad’s work for a long time and has always been interested in helping when and where he could.

“It’s really cool just to watch because growing up I always took a special interest in helping out kids with special needs,” Erickson said. “It’s cool to see [my dad]

working in a field that is able to help on a bigger scale than just the chance I had to go to a school or even a smaller facility to help.”

BYU wide receiver Kade Moore agreed it was fun to get together with the Ericksons (longtime family friends) to do something nice for others. Moore was also into putting the Rivalry aside to focus on more important matters.

“Once you are off the football field we’re all the same,” Moore said. “We are all college kids and are trying to find our way in life to better ourselves. We all have that same goal in mind. When we are on the field obviously, we are on different sides but when we are off, I think we all just want to do what is best for others and try to be a good influence.”

Drawing Upon Other Life Experiences

Aside from Erickson and Moore’s obvious connections to Kids On The Move, a few other players from Utah and BYU took time out of their day to bring awareness to the autistic community’s needs as well. Defensive tackle Devin Kaufusi and linebacker Karene Reid joined their Utah teammate and wide receiver Puka Nacua and defensive end Tyler Batty teamed up with their BYU teammate in Tuesday’s event. All of the athletes present mentioned being drawn to volunteering due to other personal experiences they have had in life.



.@Tyler_Batty2, @AsapPuka, @KadeMoore11, @hayden7232, @k_reid41 & @devskaufusi teaming up for @kotm_utah. #GoUtes #GoCougs



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For Kaufusi, it was simply thinking about coming from a larger family and how stressful it would be to not get the help you need.

“There are so many kids and not enough helpers,” Kaufusi said. “We were all kids and I feel for them. I come from a big family and the idea of not having help needed as a kid is heartbreaking. I’m sure it’s hard for the parents as well. Anything we can do to help better their lives is something I want to do.”

Reid's interest in autism awareness stemmed from his experiences serving an LDS Church Mission in Madagascar where he says the special needs community was vastly underserved.

"There were a lot of kids that had special needs and struggled with different things," Reid recalled. "They definitely didn't have the help there, so to be able to do this in my local community means a lot."

When Nacua was told about the event, he says his first reaction was to reach out to fellow Cougars he knew had experience or desire to work with the special needs community.

"I know Tyler [Batty] has worked with some autism groups before and knew he would be a huge help for us," Nacua said. "I just wanted to get some of the guys I knew wanted to be involved with what we are doing here so it just all came together."

Like Nacua mentioned, Batty has spent a lot of time working in the special needs community, so hearing about an opportunity so close to home involving autism was a no-brainer for him.

"I know there is a large need for help in the special needs community here in Utah," Batty said. "I knew that prior, so anything to just help in any capacity that we can to use our platforms as student athletes I think is a great opportunity. I really enjoy working with special needs kids and so I was really excited for it."

Future Opportunities

Ryan Erickson could not have been more pleased with the student-athletes' willingness to jump in from both sides of the BYU/Utah rivalry. The need for more employees and volunteers is great for Kids On The Move. Erickson hopes the football player's example will get others in the community involved to provide more resources.



Ryan Erickson
@RyanErickson_11



@Utah_Football & @BYUfootball you have some first class athletes who care about their community and helping out kids with Autism! Thanks @hayden7232 @k_reid41 @KadeMoore11 @devskaufusi @Tyler_Batty2 @AsapPuka & 🙏 to @BodkinKSLsports & @kslsports



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“This event was about trying to get as many people here to learn more about our autism program and how they can help these kids,” Erickson said. “The BYU football players and Utah football players were super excited to come. The reason we had them here is because they care about kids. They care about helping out in the community, and they care about making sure people are aware about the needs children have.”

Kids On The Move will be hosting another, bigger community event on June 18th that will feature players and coaches from both Utah and BYU football. It will be a mile walk/run to raise awareness for autism and Erickson wants people to come out, meet some of their favorite football heroes as well as take the time to get to know the kids affected by autism in Utah.

“We’re going to have a Walk For Autism on June 18th and that’s going to be a great event,” Erickson said. “More BYU and Utah players will be there with coaches. We’re going to raise awareness for autism and try to gain some donations, and other things to help out those kids.”