

Upcoming Running2bwell 5K to feature two CATS runners

Tragedy led to action in the case of Keith Johnston, whose friend lost a son to heroin in 2015. On the heels of such a loss, Johnston started Running2bwell, a group of runners who open their group to others looking for help with their mental health or addiction recovery. Running2bwell currently has approximately eight groups who meet 1-2 times per week in and around the Akron area, including a group from CATS-Wadsworth. Two runners from CATS-Wadsworth are gearing up to participate in Running2bwell's upcoming Around the Beach 5k, demonstrating the exact journey CATS' wellness programs are hoping for.

Johnston said what separates Running2bwell from other running groups is they truly are open to anyone who would like to join. "Our group is particularly accepting and accommodating in that we accept all paces," he said. "If you're new to running or if you want to walk, we'll have someone walk with you. No one walks or runs alone. Even if you just want to sit on the bench and watch, we'll have someone do that with you as well. We're building healthy relationships and connections."

Running2bwell has helped over 700 people and that number is growing. The group averages over 130 participants a week, and newcomers are even given a free pair of running shoes after their third visit. But, Johnston said, Running2bwell isn't just about running, but finding folks you can talk to, relate to and help aid in social-emotional health and recovery journey. He added that exercising is a terrific way to accomplish these goals.

"There have been studies that detail what exercising does for the growth of your brain cells and the benefits to your health," Johnston added. "Being outside in the fresh air, communicating with other people and exercising each help with depression, lowering blood pressure and decreasing cravings."

The Running2bwell Around the Beach 5k takes place Saturday, Aug. 7 at 8 a.m. at the Munroe Falls Metro Park. The event is promoted as a "fun, beach-themed" event with music, fun activities, special prizes, raffle and awards donated by local businesses. Like with all Running2bwell activities, all levels of runners/walkers are welcome, and the public are welcome to join the race or simply buy raffle tickets on the group's website.

As Johnston says about the 5k, it's not about competing, but about completing. "What we're going after with the 5k is building the confidence people need to continue with their recovery," Johnston said. "To watch these folks cross the finish line, with everybody cheering them on, is amazing. For them to be able to say, 'I can do it. I *can* complete a 5k. I *can* recover.' That's one of our biggest successes."

To learn more about Running2bwell, or to register or buy raffle tickets for the upcoming Around the Beach 5k on Aug. 7, visit them at www.running2bwell.org.