

## WSU News

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# Wichita State students create accessible Halloween costumes for children with special needs

By Abigail Klein, public relations advisor



Wichita State students pose with Alyssa in her Elsa costume made as part of the Walkin' & Rollin' program.

Most children love trying on costumes this time of year, but for children with special needs, finding the right costume can be a challenge.

[Walkin' & Rollin'](#) is a non-profit organization out of Kansas City that provides wheelchair costumes at no cost. During the fall 2021 semester, members of Wichita State University's [GoBabyGo](#) program worked with the non-profit to help local children have a more thrilling Halloween.

GoBabyGo, sponsored by the Wichita State's College of Engineering, involves engineering students and physical therapy students who work together to modify off-the-shelf ride-on toy cars for kids with disabilities.

The suggestion to include the Walkin' & Rollin' program came from Jackson Truitt, a junior studying [aerospace engineering at Wichita State](#).

Jackson, a Kansas City native, had worked on the program when he was in high school. His late brother had muscular dystrophy and cerebral palsy, and finding a Halloween costume that was practical for him and his wheelchair didn't provide his family with a lot of options.

"Accessibility products don't usually involve things that are fun," said Jackson. "Walkin' & Rollin' makes the products more fun and accessible for the user and also makes them the center of attention in a really cool way."

Jackson pitched the idea to Samantha Corcoran, co-advisor of GoBabyGo and the instructor for the Accessible Design engineering class, and Nathan Smith, assistant educator and applied learning facilities manager, during the summer. They loved the idea, and Smith saw the inclusion of the program as a way to expand their services to the growing number of children applying for GoBabyGo.

"There is definitely a need to grow this program," Smith said. "We've identified 2,000 children who have mobility delays in Sedgwick County, and that's just how many have self-identified. I'm sure there are many more."

After receiving two applicants through GoBabyGo, Jackson began gathering two teams of seven at the beginning of the fall semester. He recruited students from multidisciplinary student organizations on campus. This included members of GoBabyGo, WSU 3-D Printed Prosthetics, and even a couple of members of the Wichita Society of Cosplayers. Jackson also received assistance from his high school teacher who had worked with him on previous Walkin' & Rollin' projects.

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Each costume was around \$250. The College of Engineering sponsored one costume, Skye's Helicopter from "Paw Patrol," and the second costume, personally sponsored by Smith, was Elsa from "Frozen." The

materials to construct the costumes included polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipes, pool noodles, insulation foam, spray paint, holiday lights and plastic used to make signs out of. Each team used what they thought would work best.

The costumes were ultimately designed to fit around the measurements of each applicant's wheelchairs, while also allowing mobility. The importance of the fun designs and mobility was another part of why Corcoran and Smith wanted to include the Walkin' & Rollin' program at GoBabyGo.

"Most of these people are going to be in chairs for their whole childhood, or the rest of their lives, and they can really miss out on a lot of that interaction and even if they put on a costume, the chair can disrupt the entire process," Corcoran said. "A program like this helps us do the same thing we do with GoBabyGo, which is to provide social interactions and mobility."  
Smith agreed.

"The number one goal is to make it more fun for the children, and to allow the children to socialize the way any other zero- to five-year-old is able to," said Smith.

Both teams were able to complete and deliver the costumes in time for Halloween. Candi Elizabeth, the mother of Alyssa, a four-year-old with cerebral palsy, was moved by the Elsa costume and was grateful for the team's hard work.

"I thought it was wonderful," Elizabeth said. "For it to be able to adjust to the chair, it's a really big deal." As for future projects involving Walkin' & Rollin', Jackson hopes the student involvement will continue to grow, as the projects involve a variety of academic disciplines.

"I would hope to see it grow with more costumes, and to be able to provide more for the local community," Jackson said, "It really is a well-rounded project. It gives engineering students an opportunity to serve any kid with disabilities in a really fun way, but it's also not just an engineering project, it's an art project, graphic design project and much more."