

Achilles Receives Cigna Foundation Grant to Study Effect of Running on Autism

BLOOMFIELD, Conn., July 02, 2014 - A Cigna Foundation grant to Achilles International will help determine whether running holds the key to better mental and physical development for children with autism. The Cigna Foundation today announced its \$100,000 World of Difference grant to Achilles International, which has extensive anecdotal evidence showing that walking and running help people on the autism spectrum improve their emotional and physical health.

"Cigna wants to inspire, champion and celebrate people living on the autism spectrum, whether they're crossing a finish line or taking their first step," said Lisa Bacus, Cigna global chief marketing officer and president of the Cigna Foundation. "The Achilles program is an outstanding opportunity for Cigna to contribute to research on effective ways to improve health for children with autism."

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and autism are both general terms for a group of complex disorders of brain development. These disorders are characterized, in varying degrees, by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors. Symptoms usually start before the age of three and can cause delays in many different skills that develop from infancy to adulthood. One in 68 children in the U.S. is on the autism spectrum, a tenfold increase over the past 40 years. Half of children with autism are overweight and at risk for diabetes, heart disease, bone and joint problems, anxiety and depression.

"Achilles has more than 30 years of experience working with athletes with disabilities, and currently serves 8,000 children nationwide. Extensive research demonstrates the benefits of running, including weight loss, improved endurance, stress management, brain cell development and academic performance," explained Dick Traum, Achilles International founder. "Now our goal is to develop quantitative measures proving that running has beneficial effects on children with autism."

Children who participate in the Achilles autism program, targeted to begin in the spring of 2015, would come from public schools in the New York Metro area where there are existing Achilles Kids program that already offer an active running curriculum. At the end of the program, all participants will participate in a goal race - the annual Hope & Possibility Race held in Central Park, New York - which will help motivate children and validate success. Achilles will administer questions to parents and teachers designed to measure a series of health benchmarks before and after children participate in the program. Where possible, children will offer feedback. Cigna employees from many disciplines will help craft assessment questions, analyze data and advise Achilles on ways to use technology and measurements. Cigna volunteers also will serve as running guides for the children.

Cigna has a proud and long history with Achilles, including helping adults and children with special needs take part in the annual *Walt Disney World @ Marathon Weekend* and referring Cigna customers with long-term disabilities to Achilles to help them gain a sense of achievement through training and running in a race, important milestones in their recovery.

"If the Achilles autism program proves successful, this collaboration between Cigna and Achilles will be a valuable addition to the field of autism study and treatment," said David Figliuzzi, executive director of the Cigna Foundation. "We have the chance to be a tremendous help to families and health care professionals and to create a breakthrough in helping children with autism stay active, set goals and be healthy."

The Cigna Foundation established the new World of Difference grants this year to work with nonprofits that are improving children's wellness, senior care, women's health and health equity - which represent the four social priorities for Cigna's corporate responsibility platform known as Cigna Connects. Grant recipients are chosen according to Cigna's mission and opportunities to work with Cigna toward achieving meaningful change with measurable impact on health and well-being.

About the Cigna Foundation

The Cigna Foundation, founded in 1962, is a private foundation funded by contributions from Cigna Corporation (NYSE: CI) and its subsidiaries. The Cigna Foundation supports organizations sharing its commitment to enhancing the health of individuals and families, and the well-being of their communities, with a special focus on those communities where Cigna employees live and work.

About Cigna

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About Achilles International

Achilles International has been a leader in the field of disability athletics since its founding in 1982. Our mission is to enable people with disabilities to participate in mainstream athletics, particularly long distance running. This enhances self-esteem, improves health and fitness, and introduces people with disabilities to achievement. We have programs for wounded veterans, children with disabilities and people throughout NYC, the United States and worldwide. www.achillesinternational.org