



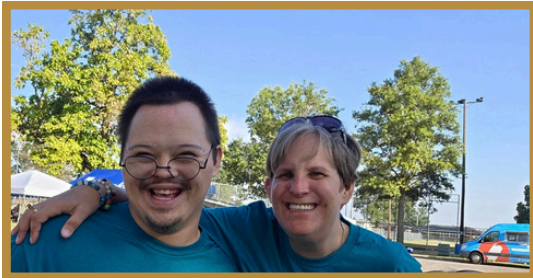
Possibilities

Fall 2026

A ROYAL CELEBRATION



20TH ANNUAL COMMUNITY LINK
BUDDYWALK®
national down syndrome society®
EDUCATE | ADVOCATE | CELEBRATE
SEPTEMBER 19, 2026 🏰 BREESE, IL



The heat didn't stop the *Royal Celebration* at Northside Park in Breese for the 20th Annual Community Link Buddy Walk on Saturday, September 19. Over 1300 noble members of the community registered to celebrate all individuals with Down syndrome and other developmental disabilities. We are thankful to announce that \$175,000 has been raised to-date to support the participants and mission of the organization. Thanks to the families, teams, businesses and community who gave generously for the great success.

There were many activities and events held throughout the day to highlight individuals' talents and keep Buddy Walkers busy. The karaoke party and fashion show started the celebration. The sacred walk through the streets of Breese was at 10am, then Buddy Walkers could enjoy food and drinks provided by our food trucks and friends at Excel. UNCOMN provided a craft tent and yard games, there was crown decorating, cookie decorating and so much more.

To every person who walked, volunteered, cheered, or showed up - thank you! You are the reason this event is so special.

FRIENDSHIPS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Meaningful connections are at the heart of what we do. Through friendship, encouragement, and shared experiences, our staff help participants feel valued, supported, and connected to their community.

Nich and Liz

Nich and Liz share a special bond that is impossible to miss. Although they have only known each other for a few months, they have already created countless memories and built a friendship that feels like it has been years in the making.



Their connection has grown naturally through their shared interests, plenty of laughter, and willingness to try new things. From coffee and ice cream to outdoor adventures and cracking jokes, Nich and Liz always seem to find something fun to enjoy together. They frequently stop by Scooter's for coffee, where Nich loves trying their fun and creative drinks.



Nich is a proud new resident of our Germantown CILA, where Liz also works. Over the past few months, they have built their bond on trust and common interests. Liz says that spending time with Nich feels more like spending time with a friend rather than working.



When asked what she appreciates most about Nich, Liz describes him as someone with a kind heart and great sense of humor. He loves helping others, trying new things and making people laugh. Nich appreciates Liz for many of the same reasons- he thinks she is funny and loves that she is always up for a new adventure.

Together, Nich and Liz have formed a special friendship that brings plenty of laughter, encouragement, adventure, and joy to their days.

Brandon and Evan

Brandon and Evan seemed to click right away. Brandon has attended Community Link Day Program at Metro for about year. He spends most of his time in Club 61 with Marcus. But with his outgoing, social butterfly personality, it didn't take long for Brandon to find his way to Evan.

Brandon loves helping others and being part of whatever is happening around him. He's a big fan of Fox 2 News, karaoke, jokes, and especially enjoys opportunities that allow him to get out, connect with others, and be part of his community.



Every morning when Brandon walks through the doors of Community Link, he drops his stuff off in his room and heads straight to see Evan. Their day begins with a big hug and knock-knock joke, one of many that they will share throughout their day. What started as a simple morning routine has grown into a special friendship filled with laughter, connection and plenty of smiles.

When asked about Brandon, Evan describes him as a ball of joy with an infectious energy. Brandon has a way of seeing the best in everyone and in everything he does, and that positive spirit is one of the many things that makes him so special.

Evan also has a unique ability to pick up on body language and notice even the slightest changes in the people around him. That special awareness has helped him develop a strong connection with Brandon. Even though Brandon's speech can sometimes be difficult to understand, Evan is able to communicate with him in a way that goes beyond words. He understands Brandon on an emotional level and recognizes what he is trying to express, creating a connection that is truly special.

Over time, Brandon and Evan have developed more than just a friendship - they've created a brotherly bond. Their connection is a beautiful reminder that friendship is sometimes just a hug, shared laugh, a knock-knock joke, or simply knowing someone understands you.



Friendships like these are a wonderful example of how meaningful connections can grow from everyday moments. Your kindness allows friendships to blossom, filled with trust, laughter, new experiences, and plenty of memories along the way.

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The Heart Behind the Walk



**HSHS St. Joseph's
Hospital**

"It gives us the opportunity to come together as a community, celebrate the unique gifts and abilities of every person, and remind one another that everyone deserves to feel seen, valued, and included."

◦ *Mandi Ennen*



**DigitalArtz
Design Center**

"Taking part in the event was a reminder of how much strength there is when we show up for one another, and I'm so glad I stepped up to be a part of my first Buddy Walk."

◦ *Kaela Harbaugh*

2026 Top Buddy Walk Teams

Thank you to all of our amazing teams and team captains! You are the heart of the walk and we are happy that you are part of our Community Link family.

Willa's Wonders
Bradford National Bank
Alex's Allies
Colin's Crusaders
Go Peg Go!



Paula's 56 Friends
CILA THRILLA
Clinton Manor
East Side Shenanigans
FCBBANKS

"We love to participate in the Buddy Walk because it brings our family and friends together to raise funds for a great cause!"

◦ *Kathy Gonsalves*



Colin's Crusaders

Bradford National Bank



"We have tremendous respect for their team, their mission, and the positive impact they create every day. Because Local Matters, we are proud to partner with organizations like Community Link that help make our communities stronger, healthier, and more connected."

◦ *Randy Alderman*