

why the Y

Dear Friend of the Athens YMCA,

July 17 is a special day for the Wages family—it's Koolen Awareness Day. This day shines a light on Koolen-de Vries Syndrome (KdVS), the rare genetic condition that affects their 9-year-old son, Grayson.

KdVS is caused by genetic changes that eliminate the function of one copy of the KANSL1 gene in each cell. Most affected individuals are missing a small piece of Chromosome 17, while others have a mutation within the gene itself. This rare multisystem disorder affects approximately 1 in 16,000 people worldwide and can lead to developmental delay, intellectual disability, epilepsy, and distinctive facial features. Additional challenges can include low muscle tone, heart or kidney complications, hip dysplasia, and skeletal differences.

For the Wages family, Grayson is nothing short of a miracle child and a blessing from God. After being told they could not have children, his arrival was a gift beyond measure. Since birth, his journey has required specialized doctors who understand KdVS and related health challenges. Grayson has faced obstacles such as hip dysplasia, wandering eye syndrome, and a recent epilepsy diagnosis—but through it all, he continues to overcome and defy the odds.

To raise awareness and celebrate Grayson's resilience, the Wages family has hosted a Kool-Aid stand every July 17 for the past three years. The stand not only spreads awareness of KdVS but also raises donations to support Grayson's extracurricular activities. In the past, the funds helped send him to ESP (Extra Special People) in Watkinsville. This year, the family expanded their efforts—raising enough for ESP camp **and** swim lessons at the Athens YMCA.



For Grayson, learning to swim is more than a skill—it's independence, safety, and joy. And for his family, it's another reminder of how the Athens Y embraces

children of all abilities, helping them grow stronger, more confident, and more connected.

The Wages family plans to continue their Kool-Aid stands every year on July 17, with pop-up stands throughout the year. With every cup poured, they share awareness of KdVS and help Grayson achieve his dreams. Together with the Y and their community, they prove that every child can shine—no matter the challenges they face.

This is whY the Y.

Shae Wilson
CEO