

# Knoxville Zoo hosts Kids Run

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Young runners took their places at the starting line at the Knoxville Zoo Saturday, as Covenant Health kicked off its Knoxville Marathon Kids Run.

About 600 runners signed up for the Covenant Kids Run, according to race director Jason Altman. Before the race began, the starting point was full of dancing and activities to get runners warmed up.

Upon completion of the first mile of the race Saturday, runners were met at the finish line with water, chocolate milk, animal crackers and sandwiches.

Kids will complete the final mile of the marathon March 28 at Neyland Stadium with the Covenant Health Knoxville Marathon.

As for the middle 24 miles — well, that's up to the kids. Each child received a mileage log at the end of Saturday's mile to track the middle distance of the marathon throughout the course of the next two months, Altman said. The miles can be logged as actual running, an hour of basketball or any other physical activity.

“What we're trying to do is instill the healthy habit of staying active in the kids,” he said. “If we can keep them active for two months of the year maybe that translates to them doing track, soccer, basketball. ... Plus we wanted to get the families involved.”

Kathryn Vinson and her two kids, Amelia, 4, and Ella Kate, 7, ran the first mile, and Vinson said that as a runner herself it's good for her kids to be able to run “on their own turf.”

“It’s so much better to encourage kids to get out and play and have a good time as opposed to sitting inside staring at the TV and eating,” Vinson said. “It builds morale ... Whether or not they win the race or not, it doesn’t matter. They’re just so proud that they get to do it and finish the race.”

For Gresham Middle School teacher Bryan Paschal, the need for kids to be active also rings true in the classroom. He said many health issues kids face could would not exist if a healthy lifestyle was maintained.

As the 2013 Covenant Health Biggest Winner, Paschal said he knows firsthand the benefits of getting healthy.

“My students watched me going from eating junk food to becoming healthy,” Paschal said. “Through the course of one year I lost 75 pounds right in front of them, and I think that made a big difference to them.”

Paschal said as students, living a healthy life makes children more engaged in learning and builds confidence inside the classroom.

“It just makes them better students and better people,” Paschal said.

Kids who were not able to run the first mile of the Kids Race can still register for the marathon at [knoxvillemarathon.com](http://knoxvillemarathon.com).

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