



## AFFIRMING LOVE FOR KIDS WHO CHEW

**Macomb/Moline, IL-** Western Illinois University School of Engineering, in collaboration with Director Kit Evans-Ford, researched, designed and helped produce a Chewelry line, **AUTISTIC & LOVED, LLC.**

Chewelry is jewelry that is chewable. This can be worn in necklace or bracelet form and is a way to prevent individuals from chewing on harmful items like pens, toys, shirts, themselves etc.

Evans-Ford, a mother of two children, Imani and Justice, who at ages 3 and 4 were diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, wants to help break the stigma around autism by celebrating the beauty of autistic children and their brilliant uniqueness.

After months of advocating for her children, and watching them face challenges caused by anxiety, Evans-Ford's children were accepted into the Applied Behavior Analysis Program at Balance Autism.

"Going to Balance Autism daily, I would watch the kids go in and out. As one who studies and teaches on culture and diversity, I noticed that the children being served came from a diversity of backgrounds," said Evans-Ford. "This triggered something in my brain and heart, maybe even my soul to start a chewelry line that celebrates the diversity of autistic children and their families."

Ford competed in a pitch competition earlier this year. One of the judges was a Small Business Development Director and Business Advisor Ann Friederichs. After hearing Ford's story and chewelry innovation, Friederichs connected Ford with WIU Engineering Faculty Assistant Justin Scott.

"Over the past year, our department has been working closely with Kit on these design efforts through 3-D imagining, compression molding, silicon grades and professional production of the product. It seems efforts are beginning to pay off," said Scott.

Evans-Ford is grateful for part WIU played in the research and development of these products and has high hopes for the future.

"The impact is great. Justin used his mentorship and expertise to put me a step ahead by teaching me the engineering behind my jewelry pendants. I am now and will always be, more aware of the work I do with AUTISTIC & LOVED, as well as the manufacturers I work with," said Evans-Ford. "I Am excited to create my own jewelry line. I hope you will journey with me as I celebrate my children and so many other children in the world who identify as AUTISTIC & LOVED."

**AUTISTIC & LOVED** jewelry are now available at [autisticandloved.com](http://autisticandloved.com)

For more information on the Engineering department visit, [wiu.edu/qc/engineering](http://wiu.edu/qc/engineering).

