



Blue powder fills the air as the crowd surges forward, turning the awareness run into a spectacle of colour and purpose



Families gather under the shade after the race, as young participants proudly show off their blue-streaked shirts and smiles at the Ocean of Hope run

Blue for a Cause: GFH leads autism awareness run with Bahrain Road Runners

TDT | Manama

GFH Financial Group took centre stage yesterday as it partnered with Bahrain Road Runners to host the Ocean of Hope, a striking blue-themed colour run held at the Lost Paradise of Dilmun, raising vital awareness for autism as part of global Autism Awareness Month.

Marking the first major corporate social responsibility (CSR) event of the year for GFH, the initiative brought together families, special education centres, and community supporters in a show of unity and inclusiveness.

"The idea for the Colour Run came as part of our plans for April, which is Autism Awareness Month," said Sahar Qannati, Head of Corporate Communications at GFH Financial Group. "We had a few ideas as part of our corporate responsibility, but eventually, we came up with the Colour Run."

What set the event apart was its distinctive choice to go monochrome. "We're used to colour runs being vibrant, with all types of colours sprayed over runners during the marathon. But this one was different - we chose only blue, and that was for two reasons," Qannati explained. "First, because the Autism Awareness Month ribbon is blue. And second, because we wanted the kids to ask, 'Why are there no other colours?' That question becomes an opportunity for parents to explain what



Hisham Alrayes, Group CEO and Executive Director of GFH Financial Group, is seen with his son Tariq Hisham Alrayes at the 'Ocean of Hope' blue colour run, underscoring his personal commitment to autism awareness and family-centred social responsibility



GFH Financial Group's Head of Corporate Communications Sahar Qannati beams with pride at the Ocean of Hope run, where her vision helped turn a simple race into a powerful platform for autism awareness and inclusion

autism is, how autistic children are different, what they like and don't like, and how we can be more aware and inclusive."

Throughout the event, dozens of children on the autism spectrum participated alongside classmates and teachers from schools like Britus International School - Special Education and Nadeen International School - each known for their inclusive learning practices.

"It's also a chance to bring everyone together under one roof," said Qannati. "Today, we have a lot of autistic children with us... the kids are enjoying, and we're really pleased with the outcome."

Khalifa Al Najem, Vice Chairman of Bahrain Road Runners, praised GFH for enabling a cause-driven race that went beyond athletics. Speaking to TDT at the event venue, he said, "Today is a special day. Bahrain Road Runners is organising a fun run. It's called the Blue Colour Run for Autism Awareness. This year, we planned it with our sponsor - thanks to GFH Financial Group for their sponsorship. This event is to increase awareness of the autism spectrum."

"We've had a good number of people turn out today, participating in this important event," he continued. "Bahrain Road

Runners is always serving the community in Bahrain in different aspects... but this race in particular is very unique—and honestly speaking, everybody loved it."

The decision to champion autism awareness stems from a deep sense of responsibility, shared by both GFH and its community partners. "Autism is increasing worldwide, and we felt - with our sponsor GFH - that we needed to highlight this condition and its importance, and bring the whole community together," said Al Najem.

"I'm happy that people are now asking, 'What is autism? How do we handle autism?'" He also acknowledged national stakeholders: "We thank the autism centres that participated - they've come up with great ideas, along with the Ministry of Interior, on how to handle patients on the autism spectrum."

The run was held at the Lost Paradise of Dilmun, Areen - a venue chosen not only for its family-friendly environment but for its scenic and symbolic value. "The Lost Paradise of Dilmun is a perfect place, actually, to host this kind of event," Al Najem said. "We are thankful they hosted us in this beautiful area, and we assure them we'll have more events here in future."

For GFH, the event signals a renewed focus on impactful, community-driven CSR programming. "GFH Financial Group tries to create events around Bahrain that add real value in terms of corporate responsibility," said Qannati. "It might be sports events, it might be donations, or site visits—there are many initiatives. We always try to do something a little different with

a unique GFH touch. This creativity is what keeps us going year after year."

"This might be the first CSR event we're doing this year," Sahar concluded, "but many more are coming. We're just putting the pieces together, and we'll be announcing them soon."

GFH Financial Group's commitment to the cause was underscored by the personal presence of its Group CEO and Executive Director Hisham Alrayes, who took part in the run alongside his young son, Tariq Hisham Alrayes - a gesture that resonated deeply with families at the event and reflected the Group's values not just in words, but in action.

As the final runners made their way across the blue-dusted finish line, it wasn't just the colour that lingered, it was the quiet clarity that GFH isn't treating social responsibility as a checkbox, but as a commitment that runs deep.

Covered in blue and holding melting cones, two young girls enjoy a sweet post-run moment that captures the spirit of the day



The blue powder used in the run was specially chosen to be skin-safe and biodegradable, making it a celebration that was gentle on both kids and the environment.



Volunteers, organisers, and community runners gather for a commemorative group photo under the banner of unity and awareness
Pics credit: Anchalo Bensingier

BLACK & WHITE

CHESS TOURNAMENT - SEASON 1

ON APRIL 30 & MAY 01, 2025, AT MC INDEEZ AUDITORIUM,
MAHOOZ, KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

in association with

FOR MORE DETAILS : 3513 9522 / 3645 8398