

ASPIRE!

"Labels can only confine. Aspire to be undefinable."

- Colin Wright

A publication of United Disability Services

WINTER 2021

2020

A YEAR IN REVIEW



TOGETHER WE STAY #UDSSTRONG





Happy New Year from Everyone at UDS!

Brian Thomas, UDS President/CEO

We hope this issue of Aspire! finds you and your families safe and healthy.

Without a doubt, this year has been a challenging one for our agency. However, rather than focus on the difficulties, we are highlighting some of our accomplishments, sharing some heartwarming stories, and celebrating our greatest successes. We are strong, dedicated to the people we serve, and thankful to our essential workers here at UDS, our Board of Directors, and the many people in our community who continue to support us. Despite all that has happened this year, UDS has many reasons to be thankful.

We began last year as a target of the much-publicized rash of catalytic converter thefts here in Akron. Our transportation services department rallied to reorganize routes resulting in minimal disruption of services for the people who rely on us to get to day services and critical medical appointments through the NET program. UDS is especially

thankful to The Lehner Family Foundation, The Corbin Foundation, Summit County Land Bank, and individual donors who came forward to help us install a new security fence and security cameras to protect one of our most valuable agency assets.

Little did we know that as March rolled around, a pandemic was lying in wait that would bring the world to a grinding halt. The agency experienced a three-month shutdown as we observed a state-wide stay-at-home order. During this time, members of the Adult Services team developed the plan and strict protocols that would allow us to reopen programs "low and slow" to keep everyone in our facilities safe and healthy. Although the agency has been touched by COVID-19, we are pleased to report that at the printing of this newsletter we have been proactive in preventing any internal spread at UDS.

In other news, UDS continued to work on its strategic plan by moving out of its leased spaces in

Kent and Twinsburg while consolidating our programs and services to operate more efficiently at our owned facilities in Akron. We also said goodbye to our Taste Buds catering business, another casualty of COVID-19, after a 12-year run. We are thankful to Summit County Children Services for allowing us to call its kitchen home for many of those years and our staff members who worked so hard to make it a success.

We are also appreciative of the Summit County Board of DD, Akron Community Foundation and Summit County Executive's Office for the distribution of CARES funding that has helped to keep our social service network strong in a year where all nonprofits have felt the impact of the pandemic on operating budgets.

We remain hopeful that with the availability of a new vaccine, 2021 will begin to feel a little more normal and we can all be together again. In the meantime, stay safe and be well.



Community Employment Services didn't skip a beat during the statewide shutdown earlier this year. An investment in technology occurred immediately so employees could work remotely. Some services are still being provided via Zoom but staff members continue to take clients to job interviews and provide job coaching. When Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities decided that Summer Youth Services would need to be provided remotely, staff members developed 60 hours of curriculum in a short span of three weeks. Flexibility and creativity have been essential.

Transportation

454,380
miles driven

50,463 trips

870 passengers

(January 1 to October 31, 2020)



All-Star Community Strides

\$45,000
raised for UDS

160 people
supported the event

Adult Services

130 consumers
on-site in small
groups

75 consumers
virtual and/or
1:1 community visits



BraVo! partnered with Akron Summit County Public Library's Goodyear Branch Manager Tonya Gardella a few years ago to create an amazing book club. Although the pandemic put a stop to gathering at the library or other locations in the commu-

nity, it has not curtailed their desire to continue reading together, so Gardella now joins them remotely (inset photo). After reading each book, they participate in a culminating event that relates in some way to the book. Gardella says, "I think it is important to show the relevancy of what we read and connect it with the real world." By design, libraries are inclusive environments that welcome everyone. We are grateful for the service they provide to the community and their continued support of UDS.



SociAbilities participant Vilo gathers materials and waits eagerly by the computer twice a week for her Zoom calls from UDS. Her sister says it is the first thing she talks about when she wakes up on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Although she never called people by their names before, she now knows the names of each staff member who calls her and happily shares what she has been doing since the last call. While visiting with Jen Doering (UDS employee), Vilo



proudly displayed a picture she had colored and told Jen all about the Christmas tree she decorated by herself because her family members were not in as much of a hurry as she was to decorate.



Judith A. Read Low Vision Services

has received two \$2,000 grants (2019-2020) from the GPD Employees' Foundation to purchase specialized sunglasses for children with visual impairments. People with low vision often have severe light sensitivity and slow adjustment to changes in lighting. A standard sunglass lens does not provide what is needed. In addition, children often need special frames that fit well and have side shields or frame inserts to block light which leaks around the frame. Thanks to these grants, we can design glasses with special lens materials, lens colors and transmissions, and frames to help these children. Traditional optical shops and standard insurance coverage for glasses do not meet the special needs of children with severe visual impairments. Many families travel for hours to come to the clinic and take advantage of this grant that will help their children and they are very grateful.

21 pairs purchased
(2019-2020)



Kaleidoscope

2 issues published
(53 authors/2 artists)

Partially funded by
Lloyd L. and Louise
K. Smith Foundation
& Kenneth L. Calhoun
Charitable Trust



Community Employment

23 people placed
in employment

94 students
received transition
services

United Disability Services

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The mission of UDS is to provide and support inclusive, life-enriching options through person-centered programs and advocacy.

UDS is a non-for-profit organization [501(c)(3)] with programs accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF).

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NONPROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE

PAID
AKRON, OH
PERMIT NO. 678

Social Media

Facebook

228,855 impressions
2,572 fans
22,687 video views

Now on
Instagram!

Contributions

\$67,322

Grants

\$175,353

(January 1 to October 31, 2020)


Toy & Resource Center

3,000 toys available to borrow

Thanks to the generosity of Akron Community Foundation and The Tom, Mary and Becky Babcox Family Foundation,

Transportation Services

collaborated with Vantage Aging Meals on Wheels to provide meals to hundreds of households in Summit County during the statewide shutdown.



Firestone Park employees and participants enjoyed the beautiful colors of autumn while hiking trails prior to the recent spike in COVID-19 cases. During that time, Mallorie Anderson (UDS employee) and James (shown here) participated in Summit County Metro Parks' Fall Hiking Spree. Both completed the hikes and earned a hiking staff.

Another hiking duo, Cathy Lancianese (UDS employee) and LaRon were walking on a trail when he began singing. A woman nearby complimented his singing and stopped to visit with them for a moment. She explained that she sings in a choir and has been sad that she is unable to continue that activity during the pandemic, which made her all the more grateful to hear him sing.

We are thankful for our longtime partnership with Summit Metro Parks and the valuable role they play in our community, providing a safe environment to enjoy nature and stay fit.