

ASPIRE!

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

- Colin Wright

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Summer 2021



**Masks Can't
Hide These
Smiles**





Gradually Easing Back to Normal

A Message from Brian Thomas, President/CEO

May 28 marked the one-year anniversary of restarting UDS day programs after more than ten weeks of mandatory shutdown due to the pandemic. How time has flown since then!

We knew that it would be impossible to safely restart unless we made significant modifications to everything we do. To keep consistent with government health orders, we creatively added program spaces to accommodate smaller, distanced groupings. Entryways, corridors and restrooms were designated for exclusive use by one group only. Buses and vans operated with very small passenger counts. Sanitization was frequent (as it always is), and of course face coverings were mandatory at all times.

The virus surged throughout the summer, and we followed strict protocols of isolation and quarantine whenever there was concern of exposure due to pos-

itive cases. These precautions worked as planned, completely avoiding community spread within UDS facilities. What an achievement for our participants and staff members!

Everyone's health and safety is the paramount concern in every decision we make.

As the vaccines rolled out earlier this year, we eagerly awaited acceptable levels of immunity so that we could gradually revert back to more traditional environments. Now, we are starting to get there, and things are beginning to gradually ease back to normal.

Due to our variety of programs and settings, the staff members responsible for operating the programs will communicate with participants and caregivers about evolving protocols and easing of restrictions. One thing

remains certain and consistent: Everyone's health and safety is the paramount concern in every decision we make.

For those who are hesitant to return to day programs, please know that the nearly 90% of the participants who have returned are fully vaccinated. This is quite remarkable compared to the population at large. As of this writing, face coverings are still mandatory at all times. We look forward to masks becoming optional among groups who are fully immunized. (When the pandemic is "over," those who wish to continue wearing masks will be welcome to do so.)

Exciting things are ahead. On behalf of the Board of Directors and the leadership team, thank you to our participants, families, staff members and supporters who have answered the challenge to carry us successfully through a grim and challenging time. Together, we are UDS STRONG!

CHAMPS—A New Option for Seniors Coming Soon!

Community, Health and Meaningful Program for Seniors (CHAMPS) is a new program starting at UDS in August. An important priority for UDS in 2021 is to offer services geared toward mature participants who may have changing needs, interests and health supports as they age. CHAMPS will create:

- Greater focus on wellness and preventive health activities
- A variety of opportunities to keep both mind and body active
- Ways to encourage healthy habits to maintain or improve health
- A plan to monitor healthy benchmarks individualized to the individual
- A supportive peer community age 50 years and older

Based at our Firestone Park location, this program will be offered to all of our current participants and new referrals who meet the age eligibility. For more information, contact Jessie Craig, program supervisor, at 330-379-3337.



A Friendship that Spans Three Generations

One Dedicated Family Serves UDS for Decades

The past year has been a challenging one for everyone. As an agency, we couldn't have made it through without the creativity, compassion and dedication of our direct support professionals. Angie Addie has been with the agency through thick and thin, and this pandemic with its masks, social distancing and other restrictions, wasn't going to stop her from being there for her consumers, like Eileen.

Eileen

Eileen's parents were very involved during the early years of the agency and she has been with UDS ever since. "Mom and Dad took me to the workshop and I got paid for going to work, just like them." Tears fill her eyes when she thinks about her parents, who have passed away, but she enjoys sharing her fond memories. After decades of working at Vocational Services she has officially "retired" to our SociAbilities program where she enjoys music, art, crafts, movies and other activities. Her brother Joe says, working in Vocational Services "made her feel like a valuable member of society and gave her a sense of purpose. She has greatly benefited from the consistency of services she has received from UDS over the years. What I like best about the agency is that they engage the clients to participate in their own growth and development, and become a part of the community in which they live."

Angie

Angie celebrated her 25th anniversary with UDS last year but her family's history with the agency goes back even further. Her mother, Glory, was a driver for 16 years and her grandmother, Virginia, was also an employee. During her tenure at the agency, Angie has worked in nearly every department, filling a variety of positions. Looking back, she remembers having the most fun when she was in charge of planning parties for consumers. She dressed up as an elf for a

Christmas party and was a cheerleader once, complete with pigtailed and pom poms. "I love to throw a great party for them, because they enjoy those parties! I enjoy watching them dancing and having fun."



Eileen (left) has been with UDS since she was 11 years old, around the time that Angie's grandmother worked at UDS. These photos of Eileen and Angie were taken pre-COVID as they reminisced about the fun times they have shared over the years.

It hasn't been all fun and games for Angie though. A few years ago a house fire destroyed nearly everything the family owned. In response, her coworkers poured out support in the form of gift cards and donations of items they needed. She was touched to learn that there were even employees at the agency she didn't know who reached out and provided assistance. She feels honored to work for an agency that cares about its employees, as well as the consumers it serves. She knows what it's like to have a bad day and says, "If someone is having a bad day, I am the person who will see what I can do to make their day a little bit better. That brings me joy."

Connections

Kay Shellenberger, vice president of programs at UDS, met Eileen when she started at the agency 33 years ago as the social worker for Adult Services. Although she never met Virginia, she heard stories about her marvelous macaroni and cheese, worked with Glory as she transported participants and has been working with Angie since she started with the agency more than 25 years ago. She says, "Angie and Eileen bring out the good at UDS—history, quality work, strong determination, advocacy, commitment, kindness and compassion. Each of them, in their own way, are sewn into the fabric of our agency, represent our mission and reinforce why we do what we do here at UDS." Eileen's brother adds, "I cannot thank Angela, and everyone at UDS enough for helping Eileen to become the person she is today. Your care, love and empathy for her through the years is evident in the joy she receives from being there each day."

Lifesavers Celebrated One Year After Reopening

One year ago in May, we slowly began reopening in-person programs and services in the midst of the pandemic after closing on March 19. It was a challenging year of expanding service provision while keeping health and safety our top priority.

We could not have survived the past year without our direct support professionals (DSPs) who helped UDS get back to business and connected to the people we serve. Their creativity, determination and commitment to our consumers was vital to our success.

While Direct Support Professionals Week is officially in September, we felt it was important to take some time now to show our DSPs how much we value them. Last year Summit DD provided grants to group home agencies that bore the brunt of 24-hour care during the statewide shutdown. This year they supported agencies that provide day services,

transportation and homemaker/personal care in community settings. UDS was awarded a grant and chose the week of May 17 to celebrate those who helped us get program services back up and running one year ago.

As a small token of our gratitude, we celebrated our DSPs with daily gifts, words of appreciation and regular posts on social media. They received flashlights, first aid kits, T-shirts, note pads and on the last day of the week they enjoyed a box lunch from Jimmy Johns. These employees are such an integral part of our agency and we are grateful for the valuable work they do each and every day. We love our DSPs!

UDS encourages anyone interested in making a difference to join our team. Visit www.udsakron.com for job opportunities.



Vision for the Community

"I can finally read my medications and food packages. Thank you!"

The quote above is from an eighty-five-year-old patient of Judith A. Read Low Vision Services who received a high-quality magnifier and training on how to use it properly, thanks to a grant from Bath Volunteers for Service (BVS). For the past eight years, the organization has donated \$1,000 each year to UDS to assist seniors who cannot afford magnifiers. Since there aren't many options for seniors who cannot afford low vision aids, the grants have been a blessing to many patients. Another patient in her eighties was simply thrilled to use her magnifier to read her Serbian Bible.

In 2016, UDS Low Vision Services was renamed in honor of longtime

supporter, Judy Read, who was also an active member of BVS. Dr. Cheryl Reed is the director of the clinic and recently met with BVS members via Zoom to share with them the clinic's connection to Judy Read and ways their efforts



Summa Health family practice resident, Dr. Michael Tandon (right) is pictured here with Dr. Reed (center).

have made a difference in the lives of people with low vision.

The clinic is currently a site for Summa Health family practice residents to visit and learn about low vision while observing Dr. Reed with her patients. Gaining this experience during residency will help doctors as they work with patients, specifically senior citizens, who may have underlying conditions that lead to low vision. Learning the options that are available to those with low vision, these doctors can refer them for assistance in the future.

For more information about aids or the clinic, contact **Heidi Chalmers** at 330-762-9755, ext. 229.

Disability from a Global Perspective

When *Kaleidoscope* transitioned from being a print publication with paid subscriptions to an online publication, free to everyone, our exposure increased along with submissions from other countries. The next issue of the magazine will be published mid-July and includes the work of seven writers from abroad.

Carrie Jade Williams of Ireland reveals her secret addiction to “ogling the tempting photos” of exotic destinations in her essay, “The Brightness of Neurology.” A diagnosis of the incurable disease of Huntington’s was given after many years of misdiagnosis. The doctor who finally revealed her fate also handed her a pen and told her to write a bucket list. With that prompt, her addiction to picturesque, magical getaways was born.



South African author, Keletso Mopai, writes about social issues in

most of her work and albinism is an issue she is passionate about. “Skinned” is her story about a young woman who experiences rejection and struggles with self-worth.

In these two stories and the poetry of authors from the United Kingdom, India, South Africa and Canada, we find commonalities in the experience of disability, despite the distance between us.

UDS is committed to the mission of *Kaleidoscope* and making it accessible to a greater audience. Thanks to a grant from PNC Foundation, we will add audio podcasting as a powerful medium to lift the words from its pages in a new meaningful and modern way to create a deeper understanding of issues of disability, diversity and inclusion. The podcast will also be an effective means of reaching individuals with visual impairments or other disabilities for whom reading can be challenging. Stay tuned for further details about this exciting new chapter in the life of *Kaleidoscope*. Go to www.KaleidoscopeOnline.org to download issues of the magazine.



We are grateful to Summit County Master Gardeners for the donation of 30 hanging basket kits that were provided to the BraVo! program. Everyone was able to put a planter basket together and take it home for Mother’s Day. In addition, they donated some plants for our patio area and Master Gardeners Lisa Treen (shown here) and Evelyn Taylor (wife of retired UDS President/CEO Howard Taylor) spent some time planting them in our patio flower boxes.



BraVo! volunteers are not going into the community to complete assignments due to the pandemic, but they are happy to help local nonprofits with in-house assignments again. Lawrence is pictured here packaging safe medication disposal bags (with kitty litter) for Summa Hospice. Volunteers have also been packing dental hygiene kits for Embracing Futures.



During the week of April 18-24, UDS celebrated the volunteers who are an essential part of our team. Jami Mino, shown here, enjoys washing/disinfecting toys at the Toy and Resource Center. We also have a volunteer who reads stories to participants of SociAbilities via Zoom and several people who volunteer with All-Star Training Club.

United Disability Services

Akron Office

701 S. Main St., Akron, OH 44311
330-762-9755

Firestone Park

1275 Sweitzer Ave., Akron, OH 44301
330-379-3337



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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).

John Lerner, chairperson
Brian Thomas, president/CEO
Lisa Armstrong, director of communications
Sandy Palmer, editor



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with a disability by donating today.

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Summer Sports are Back!

We are excited to offer **golf, bowling** and **coach pitch/kickball** this summer. For all sports, masks are recommended, but not required, for those who are fully vaccinated. For individuals not vaccinated, masks are required for indoor and outdoor activities. Sports are now open to everyone. If you'd like to participate, contact **Jeff Campano**, recreational coordinator, at **330-762-9755, ext. 233**, for more information.

Volunteers are needed to assist with all sports. If you would like to volunteer contact **Amy Tubergen**, administrative assistant, at **330-762-9755, ext. 243**.

**"WE ALL NEED
TO STAY ENGAGED
AND BE HEALTHY.
IT'S REALLY
IMPORTANT
WE SUPPORT
EACH OTHER
DURING THESE
TIMES."**

Lana Stryker
UDS Program Director



UDS | ALL-STAR
COMMUNITY
STRIDES

Stay tuned for more details about
our virtual fundraiser in September.