

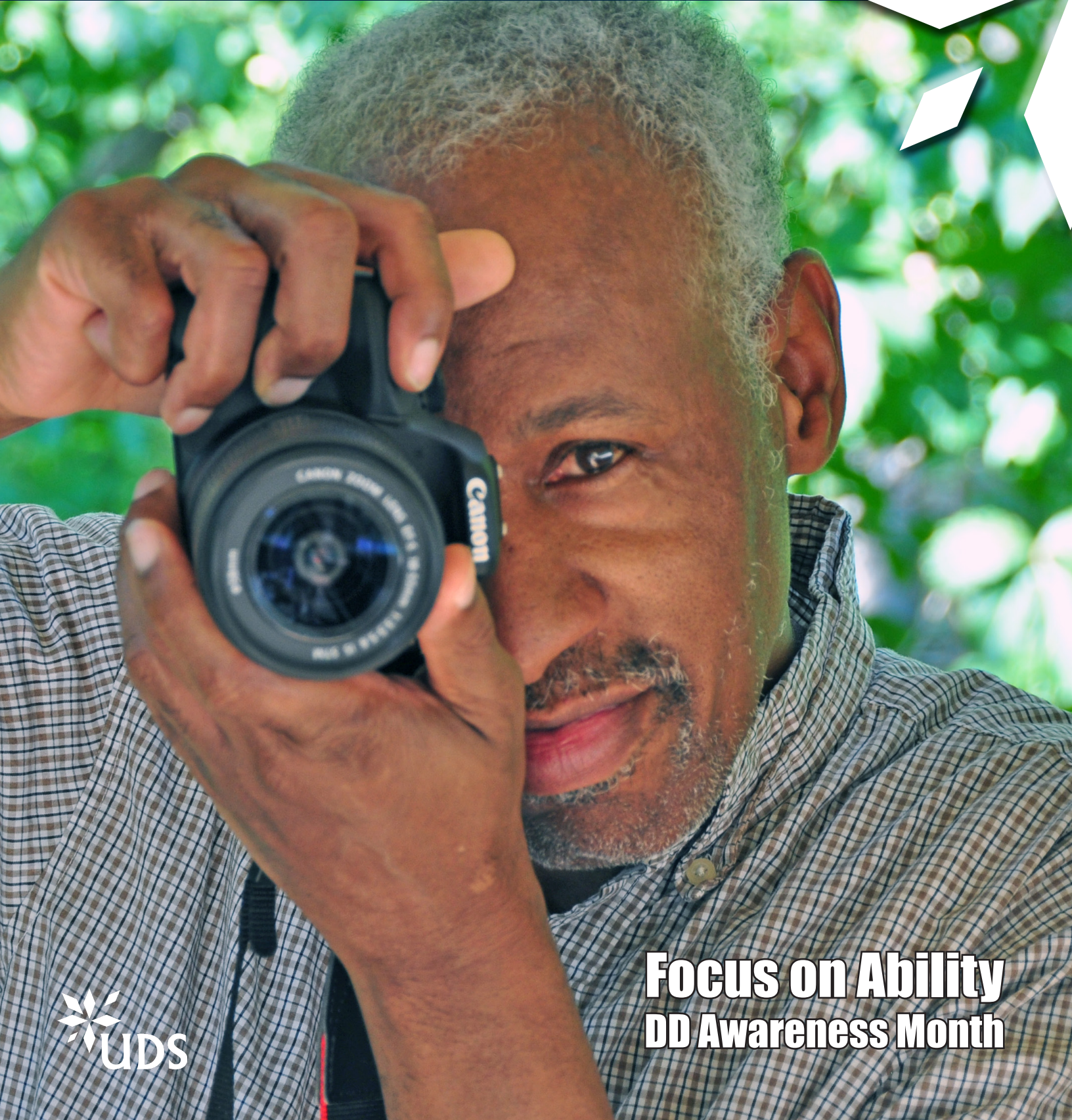
ASPIRE!

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

- Colin Wright

A publication of United Disability Services

SPRING 2021



Focus on Ability
DD Awareness Month



Resilience During Difficult Times

Brian Thomas,
President/CEO

Do you read our *Kaleidoscope* magazine? It is published twice each year and easily accessible at **KaleidoscopeOnline.org**. In previous times, it would have a regular place on the coffee table and be frequently revisited. But still, in its modern electronic format, I find it very worthwhile to drop by online frequently, to check out a random poem, essay, short story, or visual work of art.

What I appreciate most about *Kaleidoscope* is its eclectic nature. It has a particular emphasis on how lives are shaped by disabilities. Contributors are from all over the world, and from every sort of background and life experience. It never fails to make me reflect on human resilience, and the richness that all of our differences bring to the world.

March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, which is another opportunity to reflect on how we are enriched by the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of our community.

...we are excited about the future...

Over the past several years, UDS was on a rapid course to be more community-centered in our day programs. Daily immersion in activities outside of our "home base" facilities had become routine, and we were even setting up home bases outside of our own walls, thanks to wonderful partners.

The pandemic dealt a significant blow to our progress, but now that we are making headway in the fight against COVID-19, we are excited about the future, where we will resume our inclusion in locations and activities throughout the community.

During the health crisis, our Community Employment program continued the work of developing opportunities, and training and placing people in jobs.

Sadly, most of the athletic programs of our All-Star Training Club were paused, but we are confident that those activities will come roaring back when it is safe to restart. Otherwise our services are in full operation, including the Low Vision clinic and the Toy & Resource Center.

Our staff is very eager and grateful to provide all of these programs and opportunities. I am fortunate to witness their spirit and dedication every day. In addition to each of the unique individuals that we serve, I wish to express gratitude for our employees, and for the family members and care givers who place their trust in UDS.

Brian



Transportation Talk

- UDS is now providing COVID-19 vaccination NET (non-emergency transportation) trips for people who are eligible through Summit County Department of Job and Family Services. Our drivers will wait as the passenger enters a vaccination site or the passenger can stay on the vehicle if the vaccination is scheduled at a drive-through location.
- Bus routes were changed as we bring additional consumers to day programming.
- Our fleet of vehicles is being updated with Azuga devices that will help track vehicles, monitor driving habits and speeding occurrences. This is a free service through our insurance carrier that will help encourage safe driving.

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Developing a Passion for Photography

Celebrating DD Awareness Month in March

Phrases like “smile for the camera” and “say cheese” just don’t work as well these days with everyone wearing masks. When Charles began taking photos at thirteen years old, family members were his favorite subjects. His love of photography and an eye for good composition have developed since his younger days and his subjects are mostly found in nature now.

Employment

Charles is a reliable, hard worker who was employed as a dishwasher for a local restaurant for twenty-seven years before joining the crew at UDS Taste Buds where he worked for nearly ten years. “I learned a lot from Heidi while I was there. One thing she taught me was how to make pizza.” He enjoys cooking and credits Heidi Imhoff, his supervisor at Taste Buds, with building his confidence in the kitchen. After working in the food industry for almost four decades, Charles needed a change and joined UDS at its Firestone Park location last year. He has enjoyed getting to know a new group of people and gaining exposure to a variety of jobs. His new supervisor, Jessie Craig, says, “Charles has adjusted well to the vocational program despite the COVID-19 restrictions. He is open-minded about learning new jobs, has great communication skills, is polite to staff members and coworkers, and enjoys sharing pictures of his artwork with everyone.”

Passion

Jackie Boesinger of the HELP Foundation began working with Charles during the statewide shut-down, after being redirected from community employment to residential services. They share a passion for photography and after taking a Nikon

photo class online together, they began one-on-one trips into the community to put what they learned into action. She says, “Charles has an eye for photography and is one of the nicest, sweetest humans I’ve ever met.” Jackie looks forward to their excursions to Cuyahoga Valley National Parks, Summit County Metro Parks and Ohio Amish Country where they

photograph birds, flowers, landscapes and anything else that captures their attention. They recently joined the Akron Camera Club and look forward to participating in the group with other photographers.

Trail Mix

Their partnership is “a little miracle” that resulted from the pandemic, according to Jackie. They work with digital

photographs, upload them, then “Charles makes the creative choices and I execute them on the computer.” He is the creative force behind each photo and the finished, cropped image. She is working with him to develop a business plan and expand his sales potential. He has business cards, a Facebook page (@CKWphotoartistry) where his photos can be seen and purchased, and greeting cards with images of his photos are currently on sale at Cuyahoga Valley National Parks’ Trail Mix gift shop.

During DD Awareness Month, and every other month of the year, our focus is on ABILITY. We enjoy celebrating the talents of individuals like Charles and helping them to thrive at UDS. For more information about our services or to find out how you can explore, engage and excel along with us, visit our website www.udsakron.org.



Charles is pictured here with Jessie Craig, supervisor at Firestone Park, and the beautiful photo of a gerbera daisy she purchased from him that now hangs in her office.

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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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Seeing Things Differently

What do a nun, a hotel engineer, a clown and a piano teacher all have in common? They are all roles held by Mary Kissel during her life. Born with congenital ocular albinism, she never dreamed she'd be able to drive a car. In 1984 she left Pennsylvania and headed for California because they offered a program for people with low vision to obtain a driver's license. After two years of training, she earned her driver's license at thirty-six. "Pride and happiness best describe it....I lived with my best friend who was single, blind and raising a daughter. Being able to drive made our lives easier."

Using bioptic telescopes for driving and working opened up a

world she never anticipated. She marvels at the technology that is now available to young people with low vision and says, "Maybe now there isn't anything they can't do."

She has been a piano teacher for thirty years and plays by ear since she can't see sheets of music on a stand in front of her. With the help of Dr. Cheryl Reed, director of Judith A. Read Low Vision Services, she has received an Ocutech Falcon with auto-focus



capability. With this technology she can now see the music and is teaching herself how to read music and play simultaneously. With a new bioptic telescope for driving and the recent addition of the Ocutech Falcon, she says, "I can hardly wait for all the new adventures I will have with them." She was featured during Low Vision Awareness Month in February and you can see her playing the piano and talking about bioptic driving by going to our website (www.udsakron.org), clicking on the About UDS tab and selecting the Video Gallery.

For more information about Judith A. Read Low Vision Services contact Heidi Chalmers at 330-762-9755, ext. 229.