

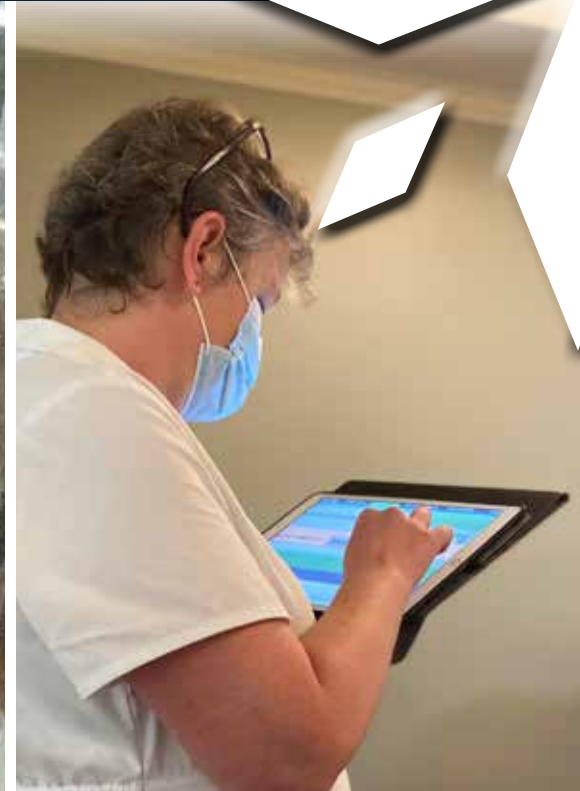
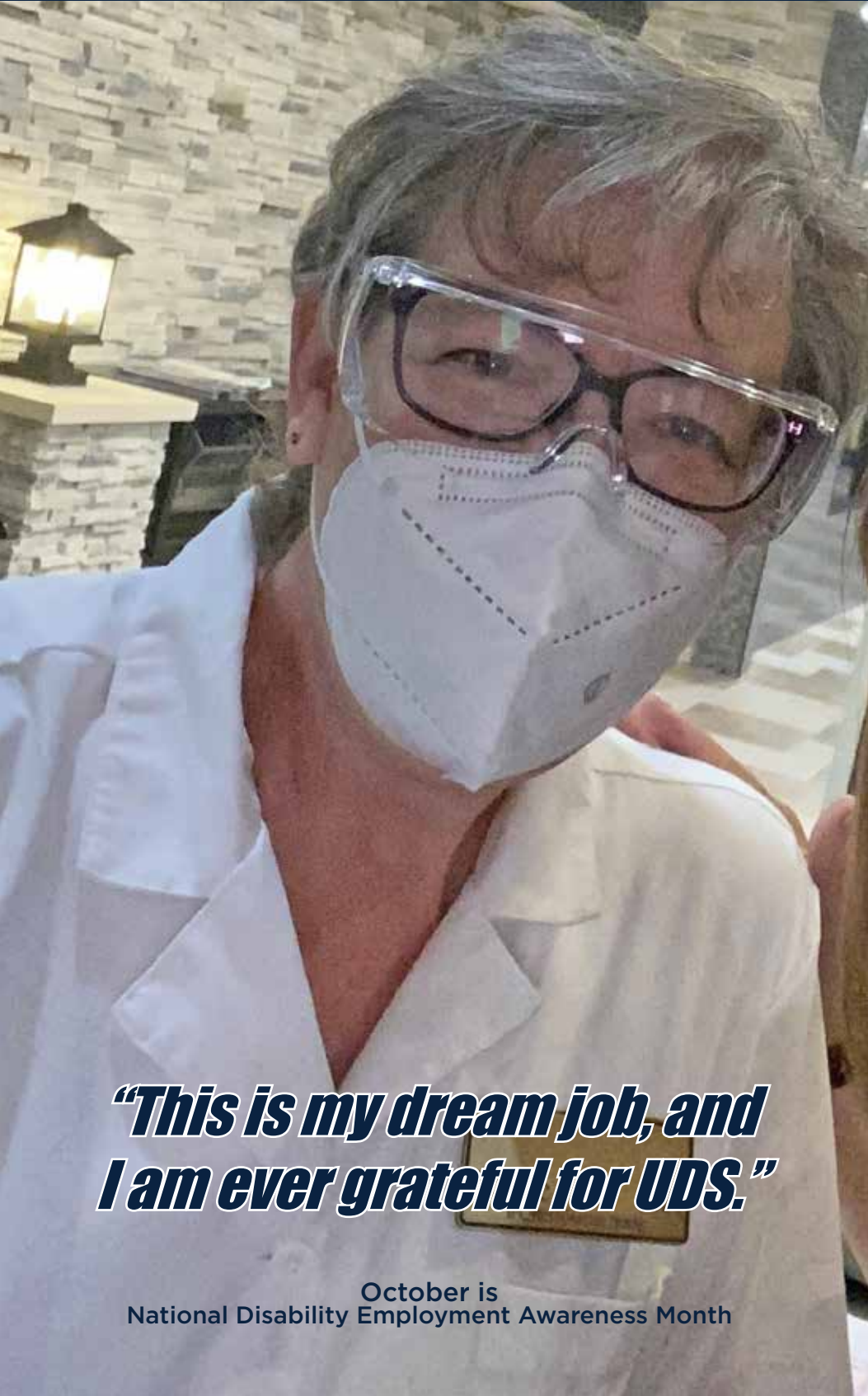
ASPIRE!

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

- Colin Wright

A publication of United Disability Services

Fall 2021



***"This is my dream job, and
I am ever grateful for UDS."***

October is
National Disability Employment Awareness Month





Do you have the right stuff?

A Message from Brian Thomas, President/CEO

These are very strange times in the employment world. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics, there is one unemployed person for every job that is

available. As recently as 2020, the number of unemployed people for each job was five. This situation creates a hiring predicament for employers across the country, including UDS.

Because of the number of job vacancies we currently have, the entire UDS staff is working far above and beyond typical expectations in order to maintain the levels of service, safety and health that are fundamental to our work and our reputation. Words can barely express the appreciation and admiration I have for the efforts of our direct support professionals and their supervisors in continuing to carry out the mission at the highest level of excellence. Even so, more help is wanted.

About two-thirds of the individuals who participated in our day programs and transportation prior to the pandemic have returned to UDS. We hope to welcome back many more over the next year, but in order to do so, more help is not just wanted, but in fact needed.

The title of Direct Support Professional (DSP) encompasses a wide variety of specific jobs at UDS. This is where our need is currently the greatest.

Some DSPs are specialists in our pre-vocational production areas while others assist with community employment. Some provide daily support to the folks who spend their time at Sociabilities and others assist individuals where they live. Some supervise the volunteers in our BraVo! program and others are drivers in our transportation fleet. Each DSP is highly trained and personally motivated to provide compassionate direction and care to those who place their trust in UDS, and we need more people like them.

Many of the current staff members at UDS started out with a job, but ended up in a career. Do

you know anyone (or are you someone) who has the "right stuff" to give it a try? Full-time positions at this agency include generous benefits as well as working hours that contribute to an enjoyable work-life balance. Experience is not necessary, as we provide on-the-job training for recruits who have a high school diploma or GED and two years of driving experience. College graduates

and experienced DSPs can enter at a higher level. We welcome people of all ages and backgrounds to apply.

The work can be challenging at times, but is always rewarding. You may view our current job openings on the UDS website: www.udsakron.org.

Words can barely express the appreciation and admiration I have for the efforts of our direct support professionals and their supervisors...

Brian



"I love seeing smiles on our individuals' faces when we have accomplished a job or a project."

~Reggie Greer (BraVo!)
17 years of service at UDS



"My advice for future DSPs is that you will bring meaningful and lifelong changes in the lives of individuals you work with and develop friendships that will always stay with you."

~Erica Taylor (Firestone Park)
14 years of service at UDS

iPad, Scrubs and Rubber Gloves

Improving the quality of life for others in the midst of a pandemic

Shortly after becoming a registered nurse in her twenties, Connie was diagnosed with Stargardt disease. The rare disease causes progressive vision loss and the diagnosis caused her to question whether or not it would lead to the loss of a profession she loved as well.

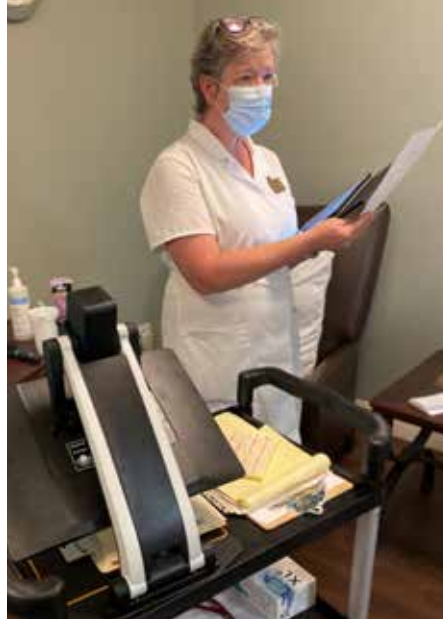
Thirty Years Later

A referral from Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD), was sent to UDS Community Employment Services to help Connie find a job. UDS Employment Specialist Matt Mino met with the job seeker and learned she was a registered nurse. With her employment history and experience, he felt she could still work as a nurse despite her vision loss. Connie says, "I admit I really did not believe I could, but Matt believed it was possible. He said there was a job somewhere that was perfect for me. It turns out, much to my joy, he was right." Earlier this year, she was hired as the infection control/restorative nurse at a nursing care/rehabilitation center. With Matt's assistance, she worked with OOD to receive the accommodations needed to perform her job. He says, "Connie was a pleasure to work with and a fascinating person to get to know. She was very motivated and determined to find something in the nursing field as she knew her expertise and skills would prove useful to anyone willing to take a chance on her."

Technology

In order for her to succeed on the job, Connie needs to enlarge materials. She quips, "If they can

read a license plate from space, they certainly can find a way for this little nurse to see what she needs to see in order for her to do her job. If I can see it, I can



Connie does rounds with her iPad and cart equipped with a CCTV.

do it." With a large TV screen in her office for computer work, a closed-circuit television (CCTV) on her cart to magnify items and iPad for charting, she's set.

On the Move

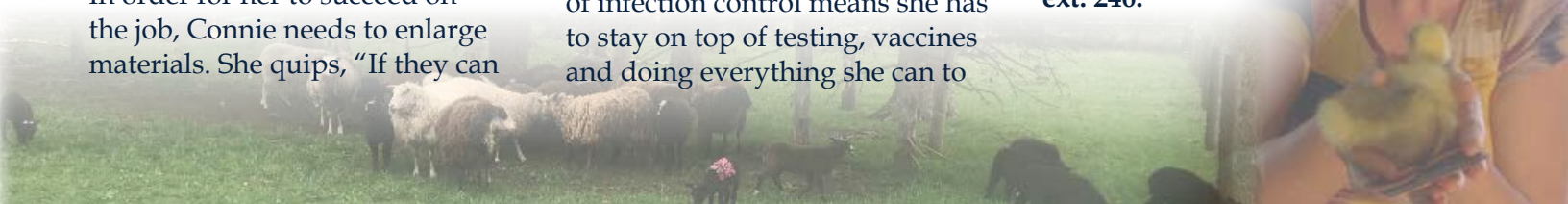
"I'm constantly busy." The demands of the job continue non-stop throughout the day, but she puts patients first, loves what she's doing, and feels blessed to be employed in the field of nursing. Most people are not aware she has a visual impairment and she says emphatically, "They really don't know what a miracle it is that I am here!" With COVID-19 cases on the rise, being in charge of infection control means she has to stay on top of testing, vaccines and doing everything she can to

assure the health and safety of the people in her care, as well as the staff members who are caring for them. "I want to care for the residents and the staff members who are burned out from this pandemic." Having a visual impairment has helped her impact the quality of life for the people she serves. Her coworker shared, "I think it makes her more empathetic and motivated toward proper care."

Enrichment

In her spare time, she composes music and enjoys caring for the animals on the farm she and her husband own in Northfield. "We raise rabbits, chickens, ducks, geese and Finnsheep. We have more than 25 sheep, assist them with birthing and grooming, and in return they keep our yard mowed. When there is a chore to do outside, there's always lots of company. They make life complete."

People with disabilities have a lot to offer employers and National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) is celebrated every October to acknowledge their contributions to the American workforce and economy. If you are an employer looking for good candidates or you want to learn more about receiving assistance as you search for a job, contact **Kristen Campagnano**, Community Employment manager at **330-762-9755, ext. 246.**





UDS Welcomes Toni Sideri

The newest member of our administrative leadership team is Toni Sideri who joined us as the director of Human Resources this summer. She has a bachelor's degree in business administration from Kent State University, is a certified professional through Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM-CP) and is a certified Professional in Human Resources (PHR).

Most recently Sideri was employed by Krugliak, Wilkins, Griffiths, & Dougherty Co. LPA in Canton as an employee benefits specialist. Her experience includes all aspects of personnel-related matters, and more than 20 years of experience in the field of human resources for private and nonprofit employers. She says, "I have always enjoyed working with nonprofits and was excited to come back to this area. I find working in the non-profit sector to be rewarding and was excited to accept this position."

She has two daughters, Callie and Courtney, and two grandchildren, Crew (2-1/2) and Kailynn (10), and enjoys spending time with her two Savannah cats and rescue dog, Max.

Become a CHAMP for UDS

Our newest program has been created specifically for individuals who are 50 years or older and things are off to a great start! At our Firestone Park location, Community Health

And Meaningful Programming for Seniors (CHAMPS) will provide interactive programming to support the changing needs of our participants as they age.

Individuals in this program will have the option to continue doing paid production work as well as participate in social, recreational and educational activities. Personal care, nursing support and health monitoring options are all available to our CHAMPS.

For more information about the program or to register contact **Jessie Craig**, program supervisor, at 330-379-3337.

You can become a champ for UDS by donating some items on our wish list. CHAMPS is looking for a variety of craft items to be used and enjoyed by participants during the day. Please take some time to review the list and consider making a donation (new or gently used items) or a purchase through AmazonSmile.

CHAMPS Wish List:

- trivia books/games
- playing cards
- UNO or similar card games
- small radio/CD players with a headphone jack
- over the head headphones
- simple craft kits (such as jewelry, card making, wood, etc.)
- self-hardening clay
- latch hooks
- 300 or less jigsaw puzzles
- exercise bands
- small weights
- large exercise balls with 5-gallon buckets

Go to <https://amzn.to/2Y2qMz1> to purchase items for CHAMPS on AmazonSmile today. Thank you!

Did you know Amazon donates to UDS when you shop AmazonSmile and select our agency? When you shop AmazonSmile, UDS will receive 0.5% of your eligible purchases as a donation! Please support UDS when you shop this holiday season.





This summer we launched a mini sports camp for participants of BraVo! and SociAbilities. Small groups are sampling some All-Star Training Club sports, exercising and having fun on the patio every Thursday. They have enjoyed cornhole, bocce, Jenga and Uno, among other activities. We hope this joint venture will encourage people to join All-Star Training Club for year-round fun. For more information about All-Star Training Club, our inclusive sports program, contact **Jeff Campano**, recreation coordinator, at 330-762-9755, ext. 233.



On the Road with UDS

When UDS received a call from Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) with a request to inspect vehicles so that a handful of their instructors could maintain their inspection certification, we gladly invited them to our agency. During a two-day period, they inspected 14 buses and found no issues.

In addition to the transportation of people with disabilities to day programs and Non Emergency Medical Transportation, we also provide transportation for community events and activities. In September our drivers began transporting members of Leadership Akron to various programming sites. There are anywhere from 20 to 55 people who ride our vehicles each time and programming will continue through April of 2022.

For information about Transportation Services contact **Brian Joyce**, director, at 330-762-9755, ext. 283.

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udsakron.org/employment/current-openings/



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OUR
TEAM!**



\$33,000

raised during our virtual fundraiser to support inclusive sports. We are grateful to our sponsors and everyone who participated.

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Hats Off to Volunteer Groups!

In August, students from Kent State University (left) gave the 10 All-Star Training Club cornhole boards a makeover. The boards are used by our All-Star Training Club inclusive sports program. The students also helped in our Toy and Resource Center.

In September, employees from Philadelphia Insurance and Oswald Companies spruced up our property (center), did a bit more painting on the cornhole

boards, and updated storage in the Toy & Resource Center (right).

We are grateful to these groups for giving so generously of their time and talent. Volunteering at UDS is a great way for groups to grow together and make a difference! Visit our website (www.udsakron.org) to see how you can get involved or contact volunteer coordinator, **Amy Tubergen**, at 330-762-9755, ext. 243.

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).

John Lerner, chairperson
Brian Thomas, president/CEO
Lisa Armstrong, director of communications
Sandy Palmer, editor
Sammy Heim, writer
Amy Tubergen, writer



You can make a difference in the life of someone with a disability by donating today.



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Consumers and staff members have enjoyed Akron Rubber Ducks baseball games this summer thanks to the Jill Marsey Fund. Our largest group included 40 participants! Passes for the Akron Zoo and Stan Hywet were also purchased.

We welcome Jocelyn Pettitt, O.D. to Judith A. Read Low Vision Services

Dr. Pettitt has more than 13 years of direct patient care experience. She is a graduate of the Pennsylvania College of Optometry where she was awarded the David J. Kerko Low Vision Award for excellence in the area of low vision. She completed her residency in Ocular Disease at the Louise Stokes VA Hospital in Cleveland.

Dr. Pettitt comes to us with a special interest in low vision. She will be working with Dr. Cheryl Reed, clinic director, seeing children and adults every other Monday.

Referral letters are required to schedule appointments. If you have low vision and would like information about vision assessments or aids, contact Judith A. Read Low Vision Services at 330-762-9755.

