

# ASPIRE!

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

- Colin Wright

A publication of United Disability Services

Fall 2022



**Community Employment Team Celebrates  
National Disability Employment Awareness Month**



# Diversity Makes Us Stronger

A Message from Brian Thomas, President/CEO

Annually in October, United Disability Services celebrates National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) by recognizing the many contributions of people with disabilities in our workplaces. These individuals add diversity and strength to our workforce, and we will showcase their talents and abilities throughout the month. The theme this year for NDEAM is “Disability: Part of the Equity Equation.”

Imagine having the desire for independence and belonging through employment but not having the opportunity. In this issue of *Aspire!*, you’ll meet the dedicated members of the UDS Community Employment team who help people reach their full potential by teaching them the steps to successful employment. You’ll meet Troy and Abby who found rewarding jobs that have not only boosted their self-confidence but put the brightest smiles on their faces – and ours, too. Their employers benefit by having hired conscientious, reliable employees while helping fill the gaps in today’s workforce shortage. Individuals with disabilities continue to be overlooked as a valuable untapped resource in solving this problem. UDS challenges you to become part of the equity equation by giving someone a chance to share their unique abilities within your organization. If you are

looking for employment or would like to learn more about hiring someone with a disability, contact our Community Employment Services today. You never know, it could be the start of a great relationship.

In this issue, we also get behind the wheel with one of UDS Low Vision Services’ bioptic drivers. Many of you may be surprised to learn that some people with low vision, who meet specific criteria, can maintain their independence by learning to drive with the use of bioptic telescope glasses. We’ll introduce you to Scott, a whirlwind of energy, who at age 52 is a man on a mission with no time to put his foot on the brake. We invite you to visit our website to learn more about our low vision services and how they help make a difference in the lives of people with visual impairments every day.

Last, but certainly not least, we pay tribute to the very backbone of UDS—our Direct Support Professionals or DSPs. DSPs play a critical role in enhancing the lives of the people we serve by helping them participate fully in the community. As summer begins to fade, we’ll share some of our last of the season activities and also thank several community partners that make these opportunities possible.

As we turn the corner on another new season, we wish all of you a safe and healthy fall.

## Success Snapshot: Pizza! Pizza!

Troy, shown here working with a stack of pizza boxes behind him, was referred to UDS for a community-based assessment. Jenn Gorski, assessment specialist for Community Employment Services, approached several businesses before finding a local pizza shop agreeable to hosting the assessment. Troy’s communication skills are limited but he was a whiz at assembling pizza boxes and did a great job rolling silverware, wiping off tables and other duties. As Jenn observed him, she noticed he continually updated her on his progress, which slowed his pace. Instead of staying nearby while he worked, she decided to make sure he understood the task and then left the area so he could work on his own. She realized he was more confident and worked more efficiently that way. He did such a great job during the two-week assessment, they hired him on-the-spot when his assessment was over and he’s been employed at the pizza shop ever since!



# Disability: Part of the Equity Equation

## Find Your Passion and Success is Sure to Follow

Life is hard sometimes. If you've acquired a disability later in life, struggle with anxiety, use a wheelchair, have a visual impairment or some other condition, you may feel as though the deck is stacked against you in your search for employment. People of all abilities are important elements of the workforce equity equation and UDS is here to help.

Serving a six county area, our highly-motivated, qualified team members work with adults, of all ages and abilities, and high school students. Individuals are referred by OOD (Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities) and county DD boards for a wide range of services tailored to the specific needs of each person.

### Meet the Team

**Kristen Campagnano** is the manager of Community Employment Services. As a former contract counselor for OOD, the source for most of our referrals, she understands their process and has the expertise to help her team navigate challenges as they arise. She also assists participants with information on earning potential, benefits and work incentives.

**Jenn Gorski** coordinates assessments (community-based and work adjustment) as well as the summer youth services. She evaluates punctuality, hygiene, social interactions, work pace and the quality of work. She provides honest feedback on the individual's strengths, areas for

improvement, needed accommodations and says, "I want to set people up to truly be successful." Countless hours of her time are spent cultivating relationships with employers and matching prospective candidates with a site in their geographic area for the assessment experience.



Matt Mino is pictured here on a Zoom call with high school student, Avery, as they discuss her career goals.

**Matt Mino** and **Dan DePasquale** are employment specialists who prepare high school students for life after graduation and assist adults in their search for employment. A great deal of time is spent getting to know each person, determining what they need, identifying barriers and unearthing their potential. With students, Matt says, "I enjoy helping them discover areas of interest that can potentially become a job in a field they are passionate about." Matt and Dan assist job seekers by helping them create résumés, search job listings, apply for jobs and

sometimes accompany them on interviews. Reflecting on the entire process, Dan says, "It is more than finding a job, it's about helping them find a purpose."

Once someone is hired, Employment Trainer **Julie Dentler** accompanies them the first few weeks on the job to help them get acclimated to the position. Retention services continue for 90 days, and Julie says, "I enjoy seeing them learn and grow in their job, and in life." Both Julie and part-time Employment Trainer **Carol Wagner** help with the summer youth services and assessments as needed.

**Lorraine Abbott**, program secretary, works behind the scenes handling the billing, authorizations and paperwork necessary so everyone has what they need to do their job. "When I tell people what I do, most are curious how people with various disabilities work in different jobs," and she is happy to enlighten them.

While some people are referred to UDS for multiple services, others only need one or two of the services we offer. Whatever the need, our team is here to help you on your path to success.

If you need help finding a job, or know of someone else who does, please contact **Kristen Campagnano** at 330-762-9755, ext. 246, or [kcampagnano@udsakron.org](mailto:kcampagnano@udsakron.org), for more information about our services.



## Driven to Serve

At 32, Scott Pugh was raising a young family when he went for a vision exam and learned he had cone-rod dystrophy and macular degeneration, for which there are no cures and limited treatment options. During that visit he was also told he could no longer drive. Wait. What? He had a newborn at home. He needed to provide for his growing family. He needed to drive. What would he do? So many thoughts swirled through his mind.

He went to the Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired (BSVI) and met with Bernadetta King, his counselor at the time. She referred him to The Northern Ohio Bioptic Driving Program where he received an assessment from UDS Low Vision Services. He was grateful to learn he was a candidate for bioptic driving and embarked on the painstaking task of becoming a licensed bioptic driver. "If not for Dr. Reed (retired clinic director) and UDS, I'd be in a really bad spot. I'm 52 years old now and, thankfully, was able to continue working during the past 20 years. If there wasn't a UDS low vision clinic, I don't know what I would have done."

### Community Focus

Scott walks fast, talks fast and exudes an enthusiasm that is

contagious. He has worked with children his entire career – seven years in the lower Appalachian region of Kentucky and six years in Clinton, Ohio, before moving to Cleveland with his wife, Vanessa, and their two children to start a new church. They began with 14 people meeting in their living room. Velocity Church now has two locations (Lyndhurst and Mentor) and a congregation of more than 500. Their focus is "external," with a mission to serve others and make a difference in the community – helping those who are "hurting, hungry and homeless." In addition to being the lead pastor, he is the founder and director of Love Cleveland and Children Matter, two nonprofits dedicated to helping young people by "providing kids with the tools they need to excel in and out of the classroom." And, as if that isn't enough, he's written three books: *My New Church*, *Children Matter*, and *The Church Next Door*.

Scott doesn't appear to have an "off" switch. He is fueled by his faith, filled with compassion and driven to help those around him. He acknowledges there are other modes of transportation he could use but he wouldn't be able to accomplish nearly as much if he were not able to drive. And the man does a lot. "No joke. If there were no UDS Low Vision

Services, the majority of what I do for the people in my community just could not happen."

With grace and humility he says, "We take so much for granted." He describes how people go into the Bureau of Motor Vehicles and, when prompted, press their foreheads against the bar, read some letters, respond to a few more prompts and in no time they pass the vision screening. "Most people don't even give it a second thought." He pauses at the notion. If only it were that easy.

### Bioptic Driving

Not all people with low vision are candidates for bioptic driving but if someone, like Scott, meets the visual acuity and visual field requirements they must also complete the following: bioptic telescope fitting; training to use the telescope; written test of traffic laws and signs; a minimum of 20 hours of driver's training; and an in-car test for a bioptic driver's license. Candidates under 18 years old must also complete classroom training and 58 hours of in-car training through Heights Driving School.

After two decades of driving with the same bioptic telescope glasses, Scott now has a brand new pair, paid for by BSVI so he



can continue working and maintain his independence. He has also recently received a lighted pocket magnifier that helps him read with relative ease, a portable CCTV (closed circuit television) and other low vision aids to help with daily activities.



The Northern Ohio Bioptic Driving Program, one of only two in the state of Ohio, has been certified by the Ohio Department of Highway Safety to evaluate and train qualified Ohioans with visual impairments. Dr. Jocelyn Pettitt (shown above) is now the director of Judith A. Read Low Vision Services and says, "I'm honored to continue the work that was started by Dr. Reed and to have a positive impact on the lives of patients like Scott, who in turn, has made a huge impact on the lives of so many others." If you would like to learn more about this program, other services or low vision aids offered by Judith A. Read Low Vision Services, call **330-762-9755** or visit us at [www.udsakron.org](http://www.udsakron.org).



# THANK YOU!

We raised

# \$50,000

to support the UDS All-Star Training Club inclusive sports program!

This year's event was

# SOLD OUT

*We couldn't have done it without YOU!*



Last year's All-Star Training Club flag football team is shown here and they are looking forward to competing at Special Olympics again this fall. Other sports offered this fall are bowling, bocce and volleyball.

If you are interested in joining All-Star Training Club, to compete or volunteer, contact **Jeff Campano**, recreational coordinator, at **330-762-9755, ext. 233**, or [jcampano@udsakron.org](mailto:jcampano@udsakron.org).



# Recognizing Our Amazing DSPs


Any way you slice it, we are thankful for our Direct Support Professionals every day. We celebrated them during National Direct Support Professionals Recognition Week (September 12-16) with raffles, gifts, pizza and a special breakfast prepared by their supervisors. While planning for the week, an unexpected discovery revealed

that several DSPs had not missed any days since the beginning of the year and they were rewarded with gift certificates for a half day off for this incredible accomplishment.

Our DSPs play a critical role in enhancing the lives of people with disabilities by transporting them to day programming, assisting with hands-on activities, teaching

vocational skills, taking them into the community and helping them live full and meaningful lives while keeping them healthy and safe. They are teachers, advocates, listeners, helpers, encouragers and so much more.

We literally couldn't do what we do without them. THANK YOU!



*In Remembrance...*

*We are saddened by the passing of UDS retiree, Norma Henson, on September 14. Her affiliation with the agency began when she enrolled her child, with cerebral palsy, in our programming. She was later hired and held various positions during her 45-year tenure. Her dedication to the agency and devotion to the people we serve was incomparable. She retired from UDS three years ago, having worked at the agency longer than any other employee, enriching the lives of countless people. She was a tireless worker, advocate, friend and mentor to many. We offer our condolences to her family. Norma was one of a kind and is greatly missed.*



**Amazon will make a donation to UDS if you shop AmazonSmile.**

It has exactly the same products and prices but when you shop Amazon Smile, 0.5% of your eligible purchases will be donated to UDS, **once you select our agency.**

Go to <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/34-1374195> and support us every time you shop.

## Success Snapshot: Pawsitively Purrfect!

Abby was earning minimum wage in a supported employment setting when she was referred to UDS Community Employment Services. Abby's vocational goal was to work in an animal care environment, so her employment specialist, Dan DePasquale, started looking for openings at doggy daycares and similar facilities. She was hired by a large veterinary hospital and Julie Dentler, employment trainer, was with her for her first week on the job and continued to provide assistance during her first 90 days. Now her case with UDS is closed because she is gainfully employed doing something she loves. Julie says, "It is so rewarding to be a part of her success story right from the very beginning."



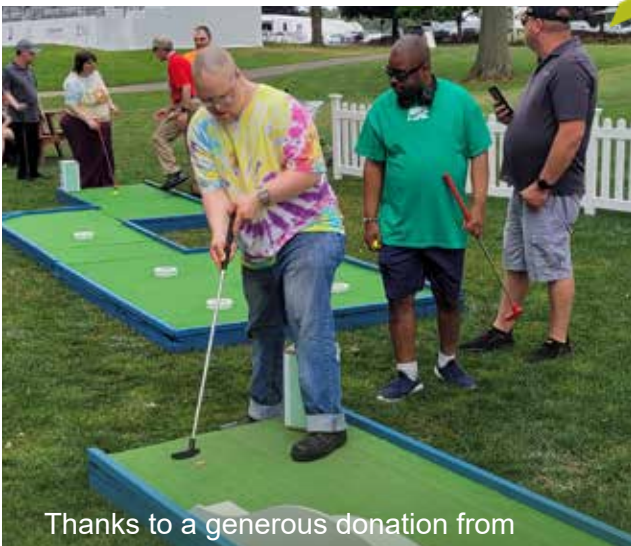


Prevocational Services is becoming more active in the community through volunteering and local trips. During a recent trip to Bright Star Books in Akron, our folks put stickers on books and collated/bagged packets of books and flyers that will be distributed to children. Their mission is to promote a culture of reading by increasing access to and ownership of books for limited-resource children in the Greater Akron region. This volunteer experience gave individuals the opportunity to give back to their community while learning about teamwork, vocational skills and social skills.



We are proud to say Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) inspected UDS buses in September and all of our vehicles passed.

In 2023, we will begin providing transportation for Portage County Special Olympics and we will be able to purchase new routing software and five new buses with grants from the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT).



Thanks to a generous donation from Bridgestone Golf and Firestone Country Club, participants of CHAMPS, Prevocational Services and SociAbilities attended the Bridgestone Senior Players Championship in July. They even had a chance to play some miniature golf while they were there!



BraVo! team members have taken advantage of the beautiful weather by going on some great community trips. Here they are enjoying an outdoor lunch at Szalay's Farm & Market. They have picnicked at Firestone Metro Park's Little Turtle Pond, traveled to the J.M. Smucker Co. Store to buy some goodies and walked around Lake Anna in Barberton looking at the colorful mums.

# 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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## Volunteer Feature: TeamPHLY



Recently employees from The Philadelphia Insurance Companies-Ohio Valley Region spent a gorgeous fall afternoon volunteering at UDS. They weeded and cleaned the grounds of our Firestone Park location and then spent time with folks in our CHAMPS program for older adults.

The company is committed to community involvement and encourages staff to volunteer through its "TeamPHLY Acts" program. "Having our employees help organizations that are already giving back is a great way to connect with our clients," says Adrienne Childs, one of the program administrators. "Staff members enjoy getting to catch up with coworkers in

person, especially after the last few years. There's a lot of team building as people serve causes they are passionate about."

Adrienne encourages any company thinking about starting a volunteer program to do it. "There are no negatives! It benefits the community, improves morale and helps us go above and beyond with our customers."

UDS is grateful to The Philadelphia Insurance Companies and all the companies that partner with us to make a difference. For more information about individual or corporate volunteer opportunities, contact **Amy Tubergen** at [atubergen@udsakron.org](mailto:atubergen@udsakron.org).

