

# ASPIRE!

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

- Colin Wright

A publication of United Disability Services

Spring 2023



*CAK Clears the Runway to Inclusion*







# Celebrating Diversity & Inclusion

A Message from Brian Thomas, President/CEO

Here in Northeast Ohio, it is not unusual to see a lot of orange during football season. But on the first Monday of March each year, we also see a late-winter burst of orange throughout the community in celebration of Inclusion Day and the beginning of DD Awareness Month. Why was orange chosen as the color of inclusion? Perhaps because it conveys a positive, cheerful energy. It combines red, the color of passion, with yellow, a color of optimism and happiness.

We are energized by inclusion. We draw vitality from sharing experiences with others. We learn and grow when we invite and accept a diversity of people into our lives.

At UDS, our staff members have the privilege and responsibility of being directly involved with facilitating inclusive experiences for the individuals we serve. We help people to explore, train for, and be hired into jobs in the community. We take direction from individuals in our day programs as we plan outings to places in the community that interest them. We operate inclusive sports and recreational activities that blend people of many levels of ability.

Awareness, inclusion and acceptance are part of the fabric of UDS not just in March, but year-round. This would not be possible without the dedicated staff members who continuously seek creative activities and connections that enrich and add color to the lives of the people we serve. So, a tip of the orange cap to everyone who is part of the team at UDS for "living the mission" in a cheerful, positive and energetic way!

## Rate Increase Needed

For the first in a very long time, the Governor's proposed biennial budget includes a request to increase the rates for Home and Community Based Services (or "Waiver" Services). Most of the programs of UDS fall into this category, comprising a vast majority of the agency's revenue. Despite the pleas of service providers and our advocates, those rates remain unchanged for many years, which creates a very consequential financial crunch.

We do not have the ability to "set our own prices" in response to the ever-escalating cost of living and rising wages. Only elected officials of the state of Ohio can do that. More regular increases are needed in order to stay competitive so that we can recruit, hire and retain the best people. They are performing essential tasks that improve the quality of lives.

Having Governor DeWine's support in the initial proposal is a very encouraging sign, but it ultimately needs the support of the Ohio Legislature, which is no sure thing. But the odds for passage may improve if the legislators see and hear that this issue is important to their voters. A statewide coalition has created a website where you can sign a petition to add your support. If you are so inclined, please take a moment to visit [www.ohioddcrisis.com](http://www.ohioddcrisis.com) and click on the red button that says "TAKE ACTION."

On behalf of all of us who choose to work in this field, I thank you.

*Brian*

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# The A-Team at CAK

## We love it when a plan comes together!

With “Eye of the Tiger” playing, Chip, the IT guy at the Akron-Canton Airport, entered the lunchroom in dramatic fashion, sporting a headband, signaling he was ready for battle. His opponent, Jeremy, is a member of UDS’ custodial enclave at the airport and his biceps were already warmed up after vacuuming carpet all morning. Both men were ready to rumble. Ding. Ding. Ding. Let the arm wrestling begin! Although Chip was a formidable adversary, Jeremy was declared the winner that day.

This friendly showdown is just one example of the camaraderie among employees at the airport and the UDS cleaning crew they affectionately refer to as The A-Team. Everyone from TSA agents to baggage handlers and the CEO all know their names, and vice versa.

### The Beginning

The UDS enclave began with two individuals and one on-site supervisor at the airport in 2007. Ricky has been a part of the team since its inception and says he wants to work there until he is 80 years old and then retire. According to Bob Ewing, UDS service coordinator, the airport hosted an employee appreciation day at Canal Park several years ago and chose Ricky to represent them and throw out the first pitch at the game because he is so well-regarded by everyone.

### The A-Team

Currently three individuals work with one workstation

specialist. Jeremy and Rachel joined Ricky a year and a half ago and the newest member, Fred Neloms, has been hired to oversee the custodial team that works at the airport Monday through Friday. They vacuum all carpeted areas of the airport each day before taking a lunch break. Afternoons are spent cleaning windows, disinfecting tables and chairs, and sweeping/mopping the stairwell. Rachel enjoys cleaning the windows most of all and her dad, Bill, says, “I’m grateful to the UDS team for making a positive impact on my daughter’s life.”



L to R: Ricky, Fred, Rachel and Jeremy. This maintenance crew is serious about cleaning but they love to joke around, help others and spread a little bit of sunshine everywhere they go.

### The Mission

This elite janitorial crew makes it their mission to maintain a clean airport that is a welcoming space for weary travelers and an upbeat workplace for everyone who is employed there. Last year, while Kim Rambo, UDS direct support professional

(DSP), was supervising the team, they received an Akron-Canton Airport award when a guest commended the entire team and said Ricky, who helped her find her way, was “the nicest person she’s interacted with at an airport.” They were praised for making a tremendous impact on everyone. According to David Regula, vice president of customer experience, “They exemplify our ‘A Better Way To Go’ motto. They consistently show up for work, are happy and incredible workers. We are extremely fortunate to have them here!” UDS is grateful to Kim Rambo and Kathy Fowler, another DSP, for their work at this job site for the past three years, prior to hiring Fred as a permanent, part-time employee. They helped coordinate the “fun” interactions while maintaining professionalism.

### Awareness

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month is celebrated each year in March. During this month, and every month, UDS celebrates abilities and the diverse talents of those we serve. We love when a plan comes together and employers/community members are intentional about creating inclusive environments where everyone is accepted and valued, just like Ricky, Rachel and Jeremy.

For more information about Prevocational Services for adults with disabilities or any of our other programs, visit [www.udsakron.org](http://www.udsakron.org).



# Insights into Low Vision

Christine Donmoyer was attending Vanderbilt University in 2000, on target to earn her doctorate in molecular physiology and biophysics that year, and then she would begin her research career on glucose metabolism and eventually cure diabetes. That was the plan. Then, at twenty-seven, she was diagnosed with Stargardt disease, an inherited, early form of macular degeneration. In her book, *Invisible Disability*, she says, "I cried nearly every day for three months after my diagnosis. I stopped applying mascara because it began to irritate my eyes and stain my face. This may have been the saddest period of my life."

During this difficult time, she scoured the Internet for information and read books. She is a researcher and scientist after all. She couldn't find anything

that would help her as a young person with macular degeneration. "It really is all about resources and when you don't have them, what you don't know really can hurt you." After studying glucose metabolism, she switched fields and began researching vitamin A metabolism and its role in vision. Years later an acquaintance told her about low vision services and she began using a handheld magnifier and a closed-circuit television, which she still uses today.

By 2011, she was legally blind, no longer able to drive and living in Pennsylvania. She used public transportation, asked people for rides or walked. In a journal entry from that time she wrote that she was tired of being a victim. She was intrigued when she heard about the Northern Ohio Bioptic Driving Program and scheduled an appointment with UDS' Judith A. Read Low Vision Services to begin the arduous process of, hopefully, becoming a licensed bioptic driver. Less than a year later she passed! "Low vision services are really important because being able to drive makes getting a job much easier. Having devices that enable me to do my job helps me retain employment. Being employed provides me with income and health insurance. It really is all about resources."

She now lives in Ohio and is grateful to UDS Low Vision Services for recommending the devices she uses daily that allow her to live an independent life. No longer a victim, she cheerfully refers to herself as "the bag lady" because she carries

several aids with her, using different devices depending on the task she's asking her eyes to perform. The bioptic telescope is mounted on a pair of glasses and used for driving and other distance-related tasks like reading words projected on a screen at church. The well-worn handheld magnifier remains in the bag and, in response to her current position as a pharmacy technician, she's added magnifying bifocals and a portable, mini closed-circuit television to her arsenal.

*"It really is all about resources and when you don't have them, what you don't know really can hurt you."*

Several years ago Christine began writing the book she wished she could have read after she was diagnosed—a book that would provide a road map of sorts to help others on this journey. The book, part memoir and part science, was published last year and she hopes it will serve as a guide for newly-diagnosed patients with macular degeneration. *Invisible Disability* is available in print, eBook and audio from Amazon and Barnes & Noble, and provides valuable insight from her unique perspective as a patient and scientist.

If you would like to learn more about Judith A. Read Low Vision Services or the many aids/devices available to try, call Heidi Seymoure at 330-762-9755.

Low Vision Services Director Dr. Jocelyn Pettitt with patient, scientist and author, Christine Donmoyer and her new book *Invisible Disability*







Register  
for one (1) NEW  
sport in 2023 and  
receive \$10 off the fee  
by calling Jeff  
Campano at  
330-762-9755.

**Are you ready to have some fun?  
Join Jeff & Dan and get in the game!**

**We have a variety of sports to choose from AND a special offer.**

**Spring Sports:** Track & Field, Gymnastics, Soccer and Bocce

**Summer Sports:** Golf, Bowling, Coach Pitch/Kickball and Cornhole

**Fall Sports:** Flag Football, Bocce and Volleyball

To see a full listing of sports, dates and locations go to  
[allstartrainingclub.org](http://allstartrainingclub.org) and click on the **ATC Calendar**.

For more information contact **Jeff Campano**, recreational coordinator,  
at 330-762-9755, ext. 233, or [jcampano@udsakron.org](mailto:jcampano@udsakron.org).

To volunteer, contact **Amy Tubergen** at [atubergen@udsakron.org](mailto:atubergen@udsakron.org).

**A VERY SPECIAL SHOW  
TO BENEFIT**



**THE TWANGLERS**



**Freez-R-Burn**



**Introducing:  
John B. & The Seven Deadlies**



**Doors Open at 7 p.m.  
Music at 7:20 p.m.**

*UDS CEO Brian Thomas and his bands  
The Twanglers and Freez-R-Burn will perform.*

**Saturday, April 8**

**The Rialto Theatre**

1000 Kenmore Blvd., Akron

Admission: \$10 + \$2 surcharge/ \$15 day of show  
Tickets available at [TheRialtoTheatre.com](http://TheRialtoTheatre.com)

**SAVE THE DATE**



**Saturday, July 29, 2023**

**Spins Bowl  
Akron**

Benefiting UDS  
All-Star Training Club  
and opportunities for  
integrated sports.



# Discovering Unexpected Truths in *Kaleidoscope*

The Winter/Spring issue of *Kaleidoscope* is available online now! Unexpected truths are discovered throughout this issue, in all genres. Sometimes the truth can be hard to swallow and in

other cases, revelations are surprisingly sweet. One story exposes bits of the truth without fully disclosing all the details, and will likely leave you wondering what really happened.

In the featured essay, author Jane Gabriel recounts the events of a beautiful, sunny summer day when she picks up her teenager's phone only to discover her daughter is plotting a murder and has enlisted the help of someone online. Without warning, a fast-moving, dark storm erupts within the home and what transpires is sure to leave readers stunned in "Awakening." Check out this story and many others at: [KaleidoscopeOnline.org](http://KaleidoscopeOnline.org)



## PLAY is the work of childhood.

- Mr. Rogers

### Playing is what we do best at the Toy & Resource Center!

We now have an incredible array of new creative, educational, fun toys for tots of all abilities to borrow and enjoy, thanks to some generous donors! Braille books, large print playing cards, textured toys, noise-canceling headphones, switches and sensory items can all be found at the Center. Each item has been chosen specifically for individuals with vision impairments, autism and other disabilities, all purchased with donations from **Summit DD** and the **Akron Community Foundation's Millennium Fund for Children**. Special thanks goes out to John O'Connor (pictured here at right), parent of an adult daughter with a disability, who has made a couple of trips to the Toy & Resource Center learning about the agency and donating boxes full of amazing toys—some that his daughter has outgrown and others that are brand new! Thanks to these amazing donors, we have **tons of fun for everyone** on our shelves just waiting for you!

Our TRC Supervisor Audrey Sentz is a great resource and always has incredible ideas for ways you can make the most out of the items you borrow and lessons that can be learned while having fun. Stop by the TRC today and see all of the wonderful things we have to offer!

#### Toy & Resource Center Hours:

Tuesday	2-5 p.m.
Wednesday	2-5 p.m.
Thursday	11 a.m.-2 p.m.

[www.udsakron.org](http://www.udsakron.org)







# SMILE!

You're on camera.



Dual-facing cameras are now installed on all UDS vehicles. With these dash cams we can now see the road the vehicle is traveling on as well as the driver and passengers. We can also track the location of each vehicle on the road and detect driving violations like hard breaking or speeding. According to Brian Joyce, director of UDS Transportation Services, "The purpose is to promote safe driving and to capture incidents to protect the driver and passengers. In the event of an accident or complaint on the road, a supervisor can review footage to see what actually happened." Having cameras for just a short time has already proven beneficial.



## NOW HIRING!

**Seeking Direct Support Professionals & Drivers**  
For position descriptions and requirements go to [udsakron.org](http://udsakron.org) or scan the QR code above.

## Support UDS All-Star Training Club with: **DRIVE-IN TO DONATE**



Present this image to your Curb Server when you order and 15% of the food and beverage sales will go back to the UDS.

**WHEN:**

Wednesday, March 15th  
Between 5:00 - 8:00pm

**WHERE:**

Swensons West Akron  
40 S. Hawkins Ave.



Gift card and gold coin purchases don't count towards total donated sales, but purchases made with gift cards or gold coins will count toward the total.



# United Disability Services

## Akron Office

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

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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).

Dale Elwell, chairperson

Brian Thomas, president/CEO

Lisa Armstrong, director of communications and external relations

Sandy Palmer, editor

Amy Tubergen, writer



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

To learn more visit: [www.udsakron.org/donate](http://www.udsakron.org/donate)



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## Volunteer Feature: Steve Pryce

Steve Pryce's love of sports and heart for service are a winning team for UDS All-Star Training Club. For the last year and a half, Steve has volunteered as an activity assistant for our inclusive athletic program for children and adults of all abilities. He assists athletes playing flag football, basketball, soccer and cornhole. "It's a lot of fun playing with the athletes and other volunteers. They like to mix it up a little."

The value of this program for the athletes is clear to Steve. "They have the opportunity to play competitive sports, maybe for the first time. It helps them stay physically active and have a well-rounded life."

The hour or two each week he spends with the athletes benefits him, as well. Steve says it has made him better at his

job as he gets to know some of the people he works with in UDS Prevocational Services in a relaxed setting. "At age 52, I love still being able to play sports and talk sports and spend time with a really good group of people."

For information on how you can volunteer for any of the eleven sports offered by All-Star Training Club, contact Amy Tubergen at [atubergen@udsakron.org](mailto:atubergen@udsakron.org).



Steve is pictured here with athletes TJ and Matt.