

ASPIRE!

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

- Colin Wright

A publication of United Disability Services

Summer 2024



STILL
SHINING
BRIGHT

A Family Affair



Seventy-Five Years and Still Shining

A Message from Brian Thomas, President/CEO

The idea that individuals with disabilities should have options and opportunities to enjoy life in the same manner as their peers is the very foundation upon which UDS was established 75 years ago. Since its earliest days, UDS has unified and enhanced community resources in support of our mission, which is to “provide and support inclusive, life-enriching options through person-centered programs and advocacy.”

From its humble beginning in 1949 as the Parents Cerebral Palsy Unit at Akron Children’s Hospital, the agency grew into United Cerebral Palsy and later merged with United Services for the Handicapped to become known as UCPSH. It was renamed United Disability Services in 1993 and continued to expand programming both by innovating new services and bringing other entities under the UDS umbrella. So, while we are celebrating 75 years of UDS, we also have other anniversary milestones within our sphere:

- This is the 50th anniversary of our unique Toy & Resource Center; its offerings reach thousands of children each year through family memberships and community partnerships.
- 2024 also marks the 45th year of our own *Kaleidoscope* magazine, with biannual issues that are now accompanied by a podcast.
- Ten years ago, the All-Star Training Club sports program, which was founded by the Lancianese family, became part of the UDS family of options.

The Judith A. Read Low Vision Services is another entity that unified with UDS along the way, with hundreds of patients supported annually.

The pioneers who put the wheels into motion would be proud of the community asset that UDS

Transportation has become, each year serving more than 1,000 individuals with varying mobility needs.

Among our center-based day programs, SociAbilities and Prevocational Services are now joined by BraVo! and CHAMPS, all of which launch small groups out into the community each weekday to pursue their individual interests and goals.

UDS’s Community Living Services continues to support people in their homes, while Community Employment Services has upward of 100 persons being supported on their job pathway at any given time.

Over the decades, the size, scope and complexity of the UDS programs have grown, serving a total of 5,200 individuals in some capacity. Today, our key relationships include Summit County Developmental Disabilities Board, the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD), Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD), and Summit County Job & Family Services. We receive such generous support from the wonderful foundations in the region, as well as from the City of Akron.

Our unifying efforts are embodied in you, the community members who entrust the care of family members, or yourself, to UDS; who support us in the form of volunteerism; who organize or participate in fundraising activities; and, who share your stories that become part of the UDS story and define our success.

And finally, I can’t say enough about the dedicated employees, whose work at UDS—past, present and future—enriches the fabric of our story. You inspire me daily. Happy 75th anniversary, UDS!

Brian

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Meet the Masts: Living with Stargardt Disease

Apple Creek, Ohio is a small village of farmland in Wayne County. With acres of grass in every direction, it's easy to overlook. However, within this village is a unique and unforgettable family. When you first meet the Masts, it's hard not to get drawn in by their Disney-like charm: Amy, the mother smiles bright as sunshine as her daughter Hannah and son Caleb radiate warmth and a curiosity about the world.

While everything may seem picturesque for the Masts, things can be spotty: their worldview is obstructed due to a rare genetic condition. Amy and her children are the first in their family to have Stargardt disease: a disease that causes degeneration within their central vision. Imagine having a giant gray, black or hazy dot constantly within the center of your eyesight and you can picture how the world looks for the Mast family. Fortunately, Judith A. Read Low Vision Services at UDS provides a variety of tools and resources to help.

Amy began her journey in 2014. In addition to providing visual assessments, the clinic supplied her with a wealth of tools and technology to aid in her daily life and job as a bookkeeper—a job that can be difficult to

perform when half your world is distorted. "If I didn't have my CCTV and all my little gadgets, I wouldn't be able to do my job," Amy says.



Dr. Pettitt is a good sport when Caleb and Hannah decide they want to turn the tables and put her in the examination chair so they can evaluate her vision for a change.

Along with providing Amy with prism reading glasses and special lamps, Low Vision Services provided a bioptic telescope, allowing her to obtain special driving privileges through the state of Ohio. Likely the most stringent driving test in Ohio, Amy had to earn both her daytime and nighttime driving privileges by passing both city and highway driving tests. "I've passed and I never want to have to go back and do it again," Amy jokes.

Her daughter Hannah also relies on her bioptic lenses to drive, though she currently only has daytime privileges and not on the highway. While her driving

permissions don't allow her to drive to her job at McDonald's in the mornings, her privileges do help her make it to cosmetology school, where she aspires to be a nail technician.

Though Caleb tries to avoid relying on tools for his condition, that doesn't stop him from succeeding. Spending his days working in the meat department at Buehler's Fresh Foods, Caleb also has an interest in genetics and biology, and is working toward obtaining his degree from The University of Akron. He plans to move to campus for his final year so that he can easily walk, as he does not have driving permissions. He also receives assistance from his fiancée, Kaitlyn, who he plans to wed once he graduates.

Low Vision Services gives the Mast family the chance to navigate their life a little easier. From providing assessments and services to tools that can help make the most of vision loss, Low Vision Services is here to help. The cost of aids may be covered by Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) for qualified individuals. If you're interested in learning more about the services provided by the clinic or its large selection of assistive technology and low vision aids, call **330-762-9755**.

New Cameras Motivate Drivers

The Transportation team at UDS prioritizes safety. That's why all our buses are now equipped with dual-facing cameras from Motive. These cameras provide inside and outside views of every bus, allowing the team to get the full picture for all situations. Along with a bird's-eye view of every moment, cameras can monitor the vehicle and send alerts about driver behavior. The cameras monitor each driver's stats in areas such as speeding, hard braking, hard cornering and idle time. Drivers are provided with a base score and their numbers decrease with each infraction in these areas.



To further commit to safety, Transportation offers an incentive where the safest driver for the month receives a \$25 gift card. "It helps create friendly competition," says Transportation Director Jim Acton. Cathy Turner, one of our drivers (pictured here) won in April and May. "I think it's a good idea," says Cathy. "It protects us while driving. Transportation can see if you're actually driving safely." Since installing the cameras, hard acceleration has decreased 77%, hard braking 81%, speeding 60% and hard cornering decreased 94%. The current goal for the program is to decrease the idle time of our buses, which helps reduce fuel consumption and costs. Of course, we continue to develop new ideas and strategies for keeping our passengers safe on the road.

The program provides transportation to adults attending day services, community groups under contract and non-emergency medical transportation for those who qualify through the Department of Job and Family Services. For more information about this program, contact **Jim Acton** at 330-762-9751 or jacton@udsakron.org.

RIISING & SHINING with BraVo! to Support a Good Cause

BraVo! volunteers planned a delicious breakfast fundraiser at UDS on June 14 to benefit the Ohio Miss Amazing organization. Our volunteers and staff members made and served a breakfast plate (sausage gravy over a biscuit, scrambled eggs and a fruit cup) and sold baked goods, donuts and raffle tickets. UDS employee Troy Sutton is also the state director of Ohio Miss Amazing and is pictured here in the center photo with 2023 Senior Miss Queen. Thanks to everyone who supported the event, they raised more than \$800 for the organization that provides opportunities for girls and women with disabilities to build self-esteem and shine!



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Department of Job and Family Services
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MEDIA SPONSOR:

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SPECIAL NEEDS
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Saturday,
July 20, 2024

6-9 p.m.

New Venue!

Clutch Lanes & Sports Center
4190 State Rd., Cuyahoga Falls

\$65 Per Bowler

4 or 5 Bowlers Per Team

(smaller groups will be combined)

Registration Fee Includes:

3 hours of bowling/shoe rental
pizza and wings/soft drinks/raffles

*** Register by July 8 ***

All proceeds benefit All-Star Training Club.



To register or donate go to **www.UDSAllStars.org**

For information call **330-762-9755, ext. 243.**

Toy & Resource Center

SUMMER Vibes

Having family and friends over for a cookout this summer?
Make a splash at your next gathering with one of our water
tables or our fire truck with a fully operational water hose!

Summer smiles are guaranteed with an up-down roller coaster,
basketball hoop, bikes, scooters or other other summer-themed
items from the Toy & Resource Center! If you aren't
already a member, stop in to become one today,
and start borrowing some summer fun!

TRC Hours:

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

**"Time spent playing with children
is never wasted."**

- Dawn Lantero



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

To learn more visit: www.udsakron.org/donate



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Volunteer Feature: Kaylee and Kaysie



A school requirement became much more for Kaylee and Kaysie Anderson. Since 2022, the twins have volunteered a combined 300 hours in the UDS Toy & Resource Center (TRC) where they cleaned, sorted and prepped items to lend out.

As students at Akron Early College High School, they began volunteering in their sophomore year and have continued even after graduating this spring. Kaylee appreciated the welcoming environment and was proud to help others. Impressed by all the resources at the TRC, Kaysie enjoyed working with Audrey Sentz, TRC supervisor.

"Both girls have been such wonderful assets to the TRC

and I've enjoyed watching them grow," Audrey said. "I will miss their hard work and kind hearts when they head to college in the fall."

Kaysie and Kaylee will be heading to different colleges to study computer science and English, respectively. They will miss their days at the TRC and encourage other students to volunteer. Kaysie summed up their experience, "UDS is a great place to do more than just gain community service hours."

For more information on UDS volunteer opportunities visit udsakron.org or contact Amy Tubergen, Community Relations administrative assistant at atubergen@udsakron.org.