

ASPIRE!

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

- Colin Wright

A publication of United Disability Services

Fall 2024

Doggone Amazing

WE'VE GOT
THE GOOD STUFF
& WE'LL BRING IT TO



STILL
SHINING
BRIGHT



Maintaining Excellence

A Message from Brian Thomas, President/CEO

For 75 years, tens of thousands of individuals and their families have relied on UDS being open, properly equipped and well-trained to handle every aspect of the services provided. We will never take for granted the trust and loyalty that are conferred on our team. That is why we hold ourselves accountable to the highest standards of service, safety and overall excellence. We are also proudly transparent while undergoing the professional scrutiny of other entities to obtain their "seals of approval."

Just recently, UDS completed a review by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). This is widely regarded as the leading accreditation body for providers of health and human services. CARF is an independent nonprofit and its mission is to promote and ensure quality of care. Surveyors do so by reviewing an agency's compliance with hundreds of standards and best practices. It includes interviews and reviews of policies and procedures, including operational, financial, ethical and governance. UDS first became CARF-accredited in 1991 and has continuously maintained three-year accreditation as an outcome of each review.

On the mandatory side, every three years we undergo a similar level of scrutiny by the State of Ohio's Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). This is the government body that oversees and certifies all agencies that provide our array of programs. Due to the publicly funded nature of the services, there is more focus on

financial propriety and on standards specific to the care and outcomes for the persons we serve. Certification by DODD is essentially our license to operate.

The newest litmus test to come our way is from the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) and they call it a "technical assistance review," or TAR. Again, this one is related to public funding. ODOT manages funds that flow from the Federal Transit Administration and those grants help us operate a transit fleet that provides specialized transportation to seniors and persons with disabilities. The flow of all grant dollars is highly scrutinized, as is our adherence to state and federal employment mandates and laws.

During any of these compliance reviews, it is assumed that there will be some findings and recommendations. In every instance, UDS has been granted the opportunity to respond and, when necessary, make any corrections that lead to full certifications.

These are labor intensive projects requiring months of preparation. Our leadership staff members and outstanding administrative professionals are highly experienced in the assessments and UDS is always up to the task.

The community rightly expects us to live up to our reputation of excellence and the individuals we serve deserve nothing less than the best.

Brian



Community Employment Gets the Job Done

Celebrating National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Rachel is a self-proclaimed daredevil. Her zest for life may be why she has a love for roller coasters or why she keeps a sixteen-pound, purebred Maine coon cat as a pet. However, even with a love of adventure, Rachel still had a challenge to overcome: a job interview.

Preparing for an interview can be nerve-racking. Even with experience, small things like maintaining eye contact and following verbal cues can be difficult. For Rachel, cognitive and hearing impairments make interviews extremely challenging. That's why the UDS Community Employment team helped her build the skills she needed to succeed.

It was Rachel's mother who discovered UDS after considering several agencies and she chose our services as the perfect fit. Our Assessment Specialist Jenn Gorski has worked with Rachel since 2020. Originally, Rachel worked at a doctor's office, but has since explored various jobs in search of the right match. Fortunately, our staff members understand the importance of matching job roles to an individual's abilities, giving Rachel the opportunity to successfully adapt to her role as a dog groomer.

Jenn has been providing Rachel with on-the-job support, just one service provided by Community Employment. Another UDS

employee helped Rachel develop a variety of skills, including interview preparation and searching for jobs through websites like Indeed. Now, Jenn helps Rachel continue to enhance her skills to grow in her career.



Rachel enjoys working with animals despite the fact that the hair sticks to everything. She likes getting to know her regulars and building relationships.

"It's nice just to have that extra support where you need it," Rachel says. "Some people don't think that they need it, but they do."

Currently, Rachel works for a local pet supply store. As she was prepping a long-haired dachshund for grooming, you could see the excitement in her eyes as she began bathing a dog to prepare it for a haircut. On average, Rachel grooms four to six dogs each day she works.

Thanks to Community Employment, Rachel can maintain her independence. She's even building stronger relationships with her coworkers, with one employee serving as a mentor. Between sharing life advice and her coworker providing guidance, the two also enjoy crafting bandannas for dogs. In the future, Rachel would like to start her own dog grooming business.

"I was with her through a lot of these jobs," says Jenn. "I've seen the growth that she's made, and honestly, I think this is the happiest I've ever seen her."

When asked if she had any advice for those thinking of reaching out to UDS for help with their job goals she said, "Just go for it. It's a really awesome company and they do a lot of good work for people." Rachel has found her niche working with animals and we celebrate her success during National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) in October.

Community Employment also provides community-based assessments, travel training, work adjustment training and more. If you're interested in learning more about these services, call **Kristen Campagnano**, Community Employment manager, at 330-762-9755, ext. 246.



UDS Welcomes Mayor Shammas Malik

Working diligently to make Akron a more inclusive city for everyone, Mayor Shammas Malik visited UDS on June 27 and toured the agency. He was highly engaged with our participants, taking the time to sit down and talk with several individuals. During the visit he presented the agency with a proclamation in celebration of our

75th anniversary, declaring the day "UDS Day" in Akron. He is pictured here with UDS administrative staff and board members. Representing our SociAbilities program is Ericka, proudly holding the proclamation. We are grateful for Mayor Malik's support of our agency and his passion for inclusion.



Cathy Turner (right), a UDS driver, is pictured here on the indoor walking path at UDS with Marcias as they both work on maintaining fitness goals. After a life-changing diagnosis, Cathy found walking to be a way to increase mobility, decrease pain, lose weight and improve her quality of life. She can often be found walking inside and outside the agency and has motivated both employees and participants to get in step and get moving. Thank you, Cathy!

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ALL-STARS AT THE ALLEY

Thanks to everyone who supported All-Star Training Club and inclusive sports at this **SOLD OUT** event!

We raised
\$45,000
and we couldn't have done it without YOU!

Thank you!

Celebrating 75 UDS
STILL SHINING BRIGHT



Interactive Play Arrives at UDS

It can be easy to forget the health benefits of video games, but a recent technology upgrade for UDS is promoting cognitive development, social interaction and fun! Two Lucynt Interactive Systems were installed within the SociAbilities and CHAMPS program areas and the benefits for our consumers are incredible.

These small devices hang from the ceiling or a wall to create a fun and relaxing experience through sound and visuals. Using interactive technology and projection, Lucynt displays motion and images on a flat surface or wall. Individuals can then interact and play with what's being displayed.

Friends all over UDS are having a smashing time playing whack-a-mole (shown

here), or simply enjoying a calming experience interacting with jellyfish on a virtual beach. The Lucynt includes 150 games for direct support professionals or consumers to choose from and a lifetime subscription service ensures we'll receive new games to play for years to come.

Designed with patients who have dementia in mind, Lucynt also helps our seniors in CHAMPS who are beginning to show symptoms of the condition. For those with cognitive impairments, physical fitness and activity can often be difficult. Lucynt is designed to encourage activity and movement through gaming. The system also helps promote eye-hand coordination, group participation, recollection of memories and more.

Lucynt can help our friends

through different stages: games are categorized as early-, middle- and late-stage games. Early-stage games encourage inductive and deductive reasoning, focusing on cognitive abilities to help promote thought and social interaction. Middle-stage games focus on cognitive object play, whereas late-stage games are designed to be easier for those combating late-stage dementia symptoms.

"It's learning and it's also fun," says Education Specialist Tanya Nicholson. UDS thanks The Mary S. and David C. Corbin Foundation for providing funding for these systems. Thanks to this generous contribution, our friends will be having fun learning and interacting for years to come!

United Disability Services

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Aspire! is published quarterly by
United Disability Services

701 S. Main St., Akron, Ohio 44311-1019

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: Ian Mihalek

When Ian Mihalek applied for the Service Learning program at Hudson High School, the senior did not know where he would be volunteering this fall. Lucky for us, Ian was matched with our BraVo! adult day program. He spends every Wednesday working with the participants as they volunteer in the community and within UDS. "I'm enjoying the chance to get to know everyone and help them help others," he says.

He initially felt challenged as he stepped out of his comfort zone, but realized quickly, "They are people first and you just treat everyone as a person and follow the golden

rule. It's been fun discovering everyone's unique personality." Ian says his experience is helping improve his communication and focus, which will serve him well as he plans to study accounting and finance in college.

Encouraging others to volunteer, Ian reminds us all, "If you do more, you get more, so don't just go through the motions."

For information on how you can volunteer at UDS, contact **Amy Tubergen**, Community Relations administrative assistant, at atubergen@udsakron.org.

