

ASPIRE!

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

- Colin Wright

A publication of United Disability Services

WINTER/SPRING 2025

**Lights.
Camera.
Action!**





Creativity Transcends. Celebrate!

A Message from Brian Thomas, President/CEO

Each year in March, we acknowledge Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. One way to personalize this commemoration is to visit (or revisit) something from the realm of arts and entertainment that expands our appreciation of disabilities and the people who live that experience.

I recall watching the Academy Award-winning film *The Miracle Worker* while in elementary school. It was an excellent age to learn to appreciate what people with disabilities CAN do, versus what they cannot. It is the story of teacher Annie Sullivan's breakthrough to communicate with Helen Keller who, of course, overcame tremendous odds and emerged as one of the greatest advocates of all time.

Some more recent movies have dealt with a variety of disabilities. In 1989 *My Left Foot* was based on the true story of Christy Brown, an artist and writer with cerebral palsy. Actress Marlee Matlin, who is deaf, was not only the first deaf Oscar winner, but was also the youngest woman ever to win Best Actress for the movie *Children of a Lesser God*. Matlin also turned in an award-winning performance in 2021's *CODA*.

In the Best Actor category, Sean Penn performed in *I Am Sam*, as a father with an intellectual disability fighting to keep custody of his child. In 2020, Zack Gottsagen, who starred in the wonderful movie *The Peanut Butter Falcon*, became the first person with Down syndrome to present at the Academy Awards.

Beethoven, Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder are among the great musical creators of all time. Many musicians, painters, sculptors, architects and other

creators have autism. The world is filled with wonderfully creative people who have physical, mental, intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Literature is rife with novels, memoirs, poetry and prose about, and by, people who live with disabilities. In 1979, UDS began publishing *Kaleidoscope* magazine to highlight the creativity of adults who participated in our programs. Today, *Kaleidoscope* features submissions from people all around the world. The purpose of the magazine is to express the experience of disability from various perspectives including individuals, families, friends, caregivers, healthcare professionals and educators, among others.



The material chosen for *Kaleidoscope* challenges stereotypical, patronizing and sentimental attitudes about disabilities. The literary submissions include fiction, nonfiction, poetry, short stories and more. We also share select pieces of visual art, much of which also adorns the walls throughout 701 South Main Street.

In our current issue, we sought out local artists to put in the spotlight. Our search revealed two visual artists, a ballet dancer and an inclusive orchestra, all in our own backyard, and we are excited to share their talents with you. The magazine is now published in electronic format only and there is also a podcast to accompany each issue. Both are freely available for all to enjoy at www.KaleidoscopeOnline.org.

Take yourself on an entertaining artistic journey and appreciate how individuals with disabilities are such fundamental and enriching forces in the creative arts!

Brian

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Save the Date!

UDS
ALL-STAR AT THE ALLEY

Saturday, July 26
Clutch Lanes & Sports Center



BraVo! Dishes Up Record-Breaking Results

What's better than a hot bowl of homemade soup on a cold winter day? Enjoying that soup while supporting a worthy cause! That's a win-win. Thanks to everyone who supported the annual BraVo! Souper Bowl fundraiser, they raised \$1,178 benefiting Grace House. That's almost double what was raised last year and more than any previous Souper Bowl event!

Eight UDS employees filled slow cookers with delicious soups and entered them into the flavor-filled competition that was held on Friday, February 7 at UDS. Barb Lane, of Prevocational Services, received the Judges' Choice Award for her loaded baked potato soup and Heidi Young, of SociAbilities, took home the Tasters' Choice Award for her chicken taco soup. Both were given Amazon gift cards for their culinary creations. Baked goods were provided by employees and one participant/family, and then sold for a donation. A raffle for two fantastic prizes yielded additional funds and Christy Wilson, of Prevocational Services, was the lucky winner of both!

BraVo! is proud to provide Grace House with this record-breaking donation to support compassionate end-of-life care in a loving environment to individuals who are indigent, homeless or abandoned and might otherwise die alone. To learn more about them go to: gracehouseakron.org.



Dr. Melanie Butera, veterinarian

Living Well with Low Vision

With eight percent of the U.S. population having a visual impairment, our low vision clinic is committed to helping individuals maintain their independence while making the most of their vision. Dr. Melanie Butera is a patient of the clinic and says, "I don't want to quit working, it's my life. It's who I am. Low Vision Services has people trying to help you. It's more than vision, it's the conception of vision. Regular optometrists just don't do this."

Director Jocelyn Pettitt, O.D., has more than 15 years of direct patient care experience and Office Coordinator Heidi Seymoure has been with Judith A. Read Low Vision Services (LVS) for nearly 18 years. Serving individuals in 34 of Ohio's 88

counties, the clinic provides a variety of services to those with low vision. They identify a patient's visual needs, educate them regarding their vision and help determine the best low vision aids and assistive technology for a specific task. Our clinic is also one of only two places in Ohio, The Ohio State University being the other, that assists individuals in obtaining driving privileges through the Ohio Bioptic Driving program.

Low Vision Awareness Month (February) is almost over but it is never too late to learn more about your vision and ways that we can help. For more information about our services or aids available for purchase contact **Heidi Seymoure** at **330-762-9755**.

Making Waves

The mission of *Kaleidoscope* is to explore the experience of disability through literature and the fine arts. In doing so, we hope our online publication will make waves and become a catalyst for change as we challenge stereotypes and promote the work of talented writers and artists. One way we do this is by purchasing work that is created by artists who are featured in the magazine.

Thanks to the Gail Willmott Art Award, established in honor of our longtime editor who had a passion for the arts, UDS purchases artwork each year. We recently acquired *Fantastical Fish Fandango*, a digital art print by Diana de Avila, who was featured in issue 89. This tropical, underwater scene is a welcome sight for those of us who are tired of the cold, winter weather and looking forward to warmer temperatures. The next time you are at



UDS, be sure to take a look at the area off the lobby where this brightly-colored canvas is on display and read more about the artist with acquired savant syndrome who created it.

Walking the Red Carpet

Best Young Actor Nominee Takes Center Stage for DD Awareness

Sometimes art imitates life. When Caroline played the role of Lizzie, the middle child of three sisters, in the short film, *One Foot In Front*, it was a little bit like that. Caroline really is the middle child of three sisters and was cast in the role by her sister, Kelsie Adams, the film's writer and director.

Filming took place in Northeast Ohio and the movie debuted in 2019, earning Caroline a nomination for Best Young Actor at the FirstGlance Film Festival. Kelsie says, "This film is about taking a leap of faith." Since the on-screen presence of people with disabilities is lacking in films, she says, "making one of the characters with Down syndrome was a very deliberate part of this piece." Unlike many films that do include people with disabilities, the middle child isn't the central figure, nor is the disability the focus. "Our character Lizzie exists in this story because she's part of the family."

The film chronicles a mother deciding to grab birth certificates and pack up her three children in the middle of the night to escape an emotionally abusive situation. Dedicated to parents who are strong enough to make the right decisions, this short film can be seen at vimeo.com/305602791.

Traci Adams is mom to Kelsie, Caroline and Kaylie. While



Caroline and Kelsie walk the red carpet at the FirstGlance Film Festival.

living in Hudson and working for Evant, she provided nursing services for UDS when the agency was contracted by Evant to operate a day program at our former Sweitzer Avenue location. When the program ended, Jane Mason was working at the agency as a part-time nurse and says, "Traci encouraged me to apply for the full-time position and become certified by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities as an RN Trainer. She trained me to do this job and we have been friends ever since."

By 2021, Kelsie and Kaylie had moved out west and Traci and Caroline decided to move to California to be closer to them. A lover of animals, Caroline

started volunteering at a pet rescue there. Unfortunately, it proved cost prohibitive, so the mother-daughter duo decided to move back to Ohio in 2023. Shortly after, Caroline joined Prevocational Services at UDS where she works a couple of days a week and has enjoyed making new friends. The other days she can be found at GentleBrook in Hartville, sowing seeds in the greenhouse.

She enjoys going to the Akron Zoo where she can see her favorite animal – the red panda. The baby goats come in a close second because, "they are so fluffy," she says.

Having acted in a film, it is no surprise that "she loves to ham it up when given the opportunity," according to Mom. She is small but mighty, with a sweet disposition, "always happy, social and funny." She enjoys Disney movies, dancing, singing, baking and cooking. UDS is celebrating Caroline's talents for Developmental Disabilities Month in March and we invite you to join us as we celebrate abilities of all people and spread the message of inclusion.

If you're interested in learning more about Prevocational Services and how we can help you develop skills that can lead to future employment in the community, call **Kristy Mulneix**, supervisor of the program, at 330-762-9755.

United Disability Services

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

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UDS is a non-for-profit organization [501(c)(3)] with programs accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF).

David Hansen, chairperson
Brian Thomas, president/CEO
Lisa Armstrong, director of communications and external relations
Sandy Palmer, editor
Nichols deCourville, writer
Amy Tubergen, writer

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Volunteer Feature: Carrie Roseberry



Carrie is a dedicated volunteer who was recently recognized at the agency for 500 hours of service to SociAbilities. UDS President/CEO Brian Thomas proclaimed December 17 "Carrie Roseberry Day at UDS" and she was celebrated with certificates, gifts and a surprise concert by Hearts For Music, a special needs orchestra that was featured in issue 90 of *Kaleidoscope*.

Representatives from VANTAGE Aging, the organization that connected Carrie to UDS, were on-hand that day to present her with a certificate (pictured here) and express their support for the work that she does. Carrie encourages everyone to volunteer and says, "You get back so much more than you give."

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