

ASPIRE!

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

- Colin Wright

A publication of United Disability Services

SUMMER 2026



Having a Ball!

*On This Court
Everyone Plays*





The Empowered Athlete: How Inclusive Sports Change Lives

A Message from Brian Thomas, President/CEO

On Saturday, July 25, UDS once again presents "All-Stars at the Alley," our signature fundraiser to support the All-Star Training Club. The program supports hundreds of participants in a dozen sports throughout all four seasons of the year. We anticipate a completely full house at Clutch Lanes for an evening of bowling, food and fun! Proceeds from the event will support the purchase of uniforms, equipment and facility fees.

For people of all abilities, participation in organized athletics can be a transformative experience that extends far beyond the boundaries of a playing field. Programs such as the All-Star Training Club provide a vital framework for physical, social and psychological development, offering benefits that are often unique to sporting activities.

Physically, organized sports help to overcome sedentary lifestyles. Regular activity improves gross motor skills, cardiovascular health and muscle tone. For those with coordination challenges, the repetitive and structured nature of sports helps to refine balance and spatial awareness. By establishing a routine of physical fitness, athletes can prevent secondary health complications such as obesity and heart disease, leading to a higher quality of life and increased longevity.

Psychologically, the impact is rooted in achievement and self-esteem. For an individual who frequently encounters societal barriers or perceived limitations, the act of performing a new skill—whether it is running for a first down or bowling for a spare—builds profound self-confidence. This "can-do" attitude often spills over into other areas of life, improving performance in school or work settings. Furthermore, sports provide a safe environment to learn emotional regulation, helping athletes navigate the highs of victory, and the lessons of defeat with resilience.

Socially, organized athletics serve as a powerful antidote to isolation. Being part of a team fosters a sense of belonging and community. Athletes learn critical communication skills, teamwork and the importance of supporting others. UDS All-Star Training Club includes athletes with and without disabilities, which is effective in breaking down stigmas and fostering genuine friendships based on mutual respect and shared goals.

Ultimately, organized athletics are a vehicle for empowerment. They shift the focus from what an individual cannot do to what they can achieve through dedication and practice. By providing inclusive spaces for training and competition, UDS acknowledges the inherent value and capability of every athlete, proving that developmental challenges do not define a person's potential for greatness.

Brian



Making Friends Everywhere He Goes

The "Big Dog" with a Big Heart

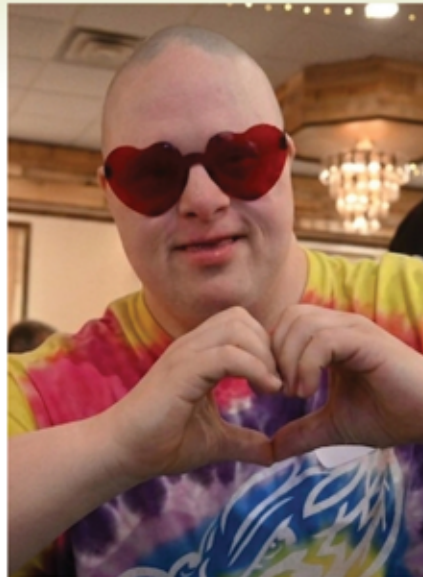
Jared's story began in Cleveland, but the trajectory of his life changed when he was six months old and adopted into a loving family that just kept growing. He has seventeen siblings, all adopted, ranging in age from 49 to 29. Jared's mom, Mary Ann says, "We were unable to have kids so we decided to adopt." One child led to another and soon children with disabilities joined the family, as well as three children from Bogata, Columbia. She adds, "People with disabilities are no different than anyone else. They want to be respected and included."

All-Star Athlete

Jared joined All-Star Training Club when he was a teenager. He's the oldest of five siblings who also joined the Club and Mom says, "It is a great outlet for them—they have fun and it keeps them active." Dan Lancianese, sports supervisor, says "Jared is the 'big dog' and a really good big brother—always looking out for his younger siblings." He's participated in several different sports over the years, beginning with track and field. Now that Jared is in his forties, he isn't as fond of the running that's involved with soccer, track and basketball so he now sticks with sports like bowling, cornhole, golf and bocce. Jared notes that bowling is his overall favorite.

Life Lessons

Jared attended St. Vincent-St. Mary's High School where Lancianese taught a career readiness program for students



Jared is always stylin' at program parties and eager to get his groove on when the dance music drops, showing off his spectacular moves.

in special education. (And Jared's twentieth reunion is this year!) It was there that Jared learned about what life after high school might be like. UDS was presented as an option after graduation and he joined the BraVo! volunteer program in 2010.

Earning a Paycheck

After a couple of years volunteering, Jared began splitting his time between BraVo! and Prevocational Services where he completes in-house production work and earns a paycheck. Mom says he likes to stay busy so for the past five years he has been enrolled full time in Prevocational Services. He rides a UDS vehicle to and from the program each day and says he enjoys heat sealing products into bags that are boxed up and sent to contracted companies.

According to the supervisor of his work group, Barb Lane, "He is an amazing worker who will conquer any job that you throw at him and he is always willing to learn new skills to help him in his journey to community employment. He always offers to help with jobs, assisting other coworkers and staff. He is the first to jump up and say 'Hey, I can help you.' No matter what the job is. Jared has a kind heart. He is the sweetest soul and has the purest heart."

Effortless Charm

With a smile and an outstretched hand, Jared enjoys meeting new people and getting to know them. Whether it is supporting his siblings on the field or helping one of his peers with a job he is always willing to extend a hand to anyone in need. He is friendly, sociable and supportive. A natural on the dance floor, he commands the room with confidence, showing off his energetic moves the moment a good beat drops. His magnetic charisma and big heart leave a lasting impression on everyone he meets.

For more information about All-Star Training Club, or to register for an upcoming sport, contact Program Supervisor **Kelly Maze** at kmaze@udsakron.org or visit AllStarTrainingClub.org.

You can learn more about our Transportation Services, BraVo! and Prevocational Services by visiting our website: www.udsakron.org.

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Huntington

Welcome.



MEDIA SPONSOR

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UDS



ALL-STARS AT THE ALLEY

Join us!

**Saturday
July 25
6-9 PM**

**Clutch Lanes
& Sports
Center**

2026
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Register by July 17

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

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



All proceeds of this fundraiser benefit **UDS All-Star Training Club.**

Judith A. Read Low Vision Services Celebrates 25 Years with UDS

To commemorate the clinic's anniversary with UDS we're highlighting the voices of a patient, a family, a physician and community partners who have made our work possible over the years.

Kay Lossing
former volunteer

"My interaction with UDS was on the tail end of my time with Dr. Reed and the clinic. Watching the staff up close as they worked with patients and the manner they did so was quite wonderful to observe! I enjoyed seeing all of the UDS staff members and the devotion they have for the needs of their patients, serving them with great care and concern. I have always been very impressed with their whole operation. **The city of Akron is very, very fortunate to have this gem in their midst.**"

"While providing orientation and mobility services, I was fortunate to work in conjunction with the UDS low vision clinic for almost twenty years. **It was an honor to be a member of such an excellent care team as we assisted our clients with their specialized vision needs.**"

Kim Vernis
former independent contractor

"My sincerest gratitude to UDS & Judith A. Read Low Vision Services. **Through this partnership, my father's quality of life has been restored!** I want everyone to know just how beautiful life can be!"

The Day Family

"There are not enough words to express my gratitude to UDS. As a person with severe macular degeneration, meeting the people at the clinic has opened up a whole new world for me. They set me up with a video magnifier and it is now my 'go-to machine' to help me read. They also set up my home to use touch instead of sight and trained me on how to use the tools. These two main changes equaled true understanding and empathy for keeping my everyday tasks as close to normal and allowing me to be as self-sufficient as possible. **They are the best!**"

Doris F.
patient

Dr. Hakim
optometric physician

"Low Vision Services has been a valuable asset in helping patients regain their visual independence."



THEN
Dr. Cheryl Reed



NOW
Dr. Jocelyn Pettitt & Heidi Seymoure



Thanks to the Jill Marsey Recreation Fund, participants of our Community Living Services program enjoyed an Akron RubberDucks game in style. They watched the home team play the Chesapeake Baysox from a 20-person suite at Canal Park on Saturday, May 16. Excitement was in the air when a foul ball was caught by one of our lucky participants and everyone enjoyed a *suite* encounter with Orbit. We are grateful to the Marsey family for their support of UDS and for the lasting memories that are made at events like this.

\$10 TUESDAY MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Here's a new and easy way to support UDS programming and services. Make a donation, **and a difference**, by giving a \$10 gift on **August 18**. Donate online at udsakron.org/donate or call 330-762-9755, ext. 222.

It will be the most meaningful \$10 you spend all day!

Your gift has **2x**

the impact thanks to a challenge gift from **exp REALTY BILL LOWERY**

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).

Bob Chess, 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



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Volunteer Feature: Gretchen Kennedy

Every Wednesday UDS goes to the dogs, thanks to Gretchen Kennedy, her goldendoodle Christy and their friend Cathy Heaps and pup Addison. The volunteers and their canine companions spend an hour or two each week visiting all four of the UDS adult day programs. Gretchen and Christy, who is certified by Therapy Dogs International, have been volunteering at UDS for more than three years and it's hard to say which is more popular among the participants and staff. Everyone loves to hug, pet and give treats to Christy, but it's Gretchen who knows everyone's name and spends time chatting about their lives and talking sports. She encourages others who may have a talent or skill to share, or just an interest in volunteering, to check out UDS volunteer opportunities. "Coming to UDS is very rewarding. Everyone is so positive. We get more out of the visits than we give!"

For more information about volunteering for any UDS program, reach out to **Amy Tubergen** at 330-762-9755, ext. 243 or atubergen@udsakron.org or visit our website at udsakron.org.

