

ASPIRE!

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

- Colin Wright

A publication of United Disability Services

Winter 2022



Celebrating
Developmental Disabilities
Awareness Month



Awareness, Inclusion & Community

A Message from Brian Thomas, President/CEO

We humans rely upon each other for many aspects of survival, comfort and enjoyment. We are social by nature, and by necessity. The ongoing pandemic, which

thus far is the defining event of the 21st century, truly challenges our social nature and our urge to be immersed among others. Most of us have a strong urge to belong to communities. We don't want to be left out or forgotten.

The very word "community" resides within our vision statement, as we envision "a community where each individual is enabled to live their most fulfilling life." Each of our lives is enriched by the diversity that makes up our communities, including diversity of abilities. The strongest communities are those where people of different abilities and disabilities come together.

Recently a colleague posed this question to our leadership team at UDS: What one word would you use to describe the culture of UDS? "Community" was the first word that came to my mind. One of our key objectives, in all of our programs, is to be

more immersed, present and visible throughout the community at large.

At the same time, UDS is a distinctive community of our own, where every individual is welcomed, seen, heard and valued. Our programs thrive on the awareness and appreciation of our differences. Whether within the walls at UDS or out and about in other environments, everyone's day is enriched when we welcome and thrive on the wonderful mixture of people who bring vibrancy to our lives.

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March is "DD Awareness Month," filled with activities to celebrate people of all abilities. On March 7, wear orange for Inclusion Day (This should be easy for fans of the Browns or Bengals!) and inclusion days at the Akron Zoo are March 3-7.

Beyond awareness, we are all challenged to act; make thoughtful efforts to include and welcome people of all abilities in every aspect of community life, whether it's work, play, or whatever else makes up your day. It is one of the most effective things you can do to strengthen the communities to which you belong.

Time, Tools & Technology for Better Vision

Optometrists do a great job providing routine eye care, diagnosing and treating patients. But if your vision cannot be corrected with glasses, medical treatment or surgery, Judith A. Read Low Vision Services may be able to help. We can spend more time with our patients, show them what tools are available and train them to use technology that can benefit them with daily activities. Dr. Jocelyn Pettitt, director of Low Vision Services, specializes in low vision and says, "For me the best thing is the opportunity to help people and improve their lives, whether it is helping them to read again when they thought they never would, or teaching them new skills that can help them get a job." She is shown here with a pair of MaxTV glasses that magnify things seen at a distance and are perfect for sporting events, bird watching or even watching TV. These glasses, and more than 300 other aids, are available for demonstration and a free trial loan period. To find out whether or not we can help you, contact Heidi Seymoure at 330-762-9755.



Blooming Wherever She is Planted

“What a lovely thing a rose is.” - Arthur Conan Doyle

For nearly two decades Rose has been a dedicated worker at UDS. Most of her time has been spent in our Vocational Services program where she has been an asset, always focused on the specifications of each job, making sure she completes each task correctly and efficiently. She is also proud to say she was a bus aide during the years when preschoolers were transported to the agency’s First Place Early Learning Center.

Unveiling

Rose has a quiet demeanor and usually keeps to herself as she works, while listening to music. Although her words may be few, her actions speak volumes. She helps in the kitchen by setting up lunches for some of her peers and cleaning up dishes after lunch. Her commitment to doing a good job and helping those around her are reasons why staff members say she is one of the hidden gems at Firestone Park. Her current supervisor, Charles Harrison, says, “She heat seals everything and checks *all* of the work that goes out . . . even mine!” Recently, her deadpan humor has been revealed as she cracks jokes with perfect timing, surprising and entertaining those within earshot.

CHAMPS

In October of last year, UDS launched CHAMPS, a program serving individuals who are 50 years and older. Its focus is to help participants maintain good health, a critical part of growing

older, while staying active and engaged in community life. Rose joined the program right away and divides her time between working on in-house jobs, earning a paycheck, and participating in group activities. She looks forward to taking community trips and brainstorming with staff members and participants to plan future destinations.



Rose is shown here with CHAMPS staff member, Cathy Lancianese, as they head out for a community trip.

Blossoming

Lauren Presutti, CHAMPS staff member, says, “Rose has blossomed in her new environment and enjoys the freedom of socializing with different people while participating in various activities.” Rose has also taken the initiative to chronicle the activities, special events and birthdays of her peers at CHAMPS by creating a program newsletter. She writes the content, which

includes a monthly recipe (since she likes to cook) and other tidbits of interesting information. Her handwritten copy is typed up by a staff member and then Rose gives a copy to everyone. Lauren says, “We all look forward to reading her newsletter when she distributes it. All things considered, CHAMPS has allowed the participants and staff members the chance to get to know Rose better as a person and an awesome coworker.”

Relaxing

When she isn’t at UDS, Rose enjoys listening to music, shopping at Walmart, watching TV (especially *Sponge Bob* and cooking shows) and participating in All-Star Training Club sports (bowling, golf and bocce).

March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month and a great time to share stories of participants, like Rose. She’s a great example of someone who works hard, does her best, loves helping others and enjoys being a part of her community.

For more information about our CHAMPS program, contact **Lana Stryker** at 330-762-9755, ext. 278, or lstryker@udsakron.org.

Are you interested in learning more about upcoming All-Star Training Club sports? Contact **Jeff Campano** at 330-762-9755, ext 233, or jcampano@udsakron.org.

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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: Anne Sapp

Anne Sapp sees toy washing as a very good thing. "Lots of toys needing to be cleaned means the toys are being used!" As a volunteer at UDS' Toy & Resource Center (TRC), Anne spends her time getting toys ready to go back out to bring joy to more children.

Cleaning, sorting, and organizing the games, toys and adaptive resources at the TRC is a perfect fit for this former preschool teacher. "It's so important to get educational toys into the hands of children who otherwise might not have access to them. Audrey (TRC Supervisor) is great at guiding parents and teachers to just the right toy for a child."

Anne may be retired from teaching, but she remains active in the community. In addition to UDS, she also volunteers with the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad. "I like keeping busy and using some of my time to help others." Her advice to someone considering volunteering at UDS? "Definitely sign up! UDS is a great place to volunteer and you get back as much as you give. It's fulfilling!"

Anne says it's important to share the gifts you've been given and UDS is so grateful that Anne shares hers with us. If you'd like more information about volunteering at UDS, contact **Amy Tubergen** at 330-762-9755, ext. 243.

