

# ASPIRE!

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

- Colin Wright

A publication of United Disability Services

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Choose a job you

**L♥VE**

and you'll never work  
a day in your life.

October is  
National Disability Employment Awareness Month







## A Message from Brian Thomas, UDS President/CEO

*Tommy Roberts is a talented visual artist from Baltimore who has required the use of a wheelchair since childhood. His painting, "Jimi Hendrix: Purple Haze All In His Brain," graces a hallway wall at UDS. It also appeared on the cover of our Kaleidoscope magazine in 2013. Hendrix's creative use of electronic effects revolutionized guitar playing, paving the way for companies like Akron's EarthQuaker Devices, a highly respected manufacturer of guitar effect pedals.*

*What brings this peculiar connection to mind? Today, EarthQuaker Devices is one of many places in the community that have opened its doors to UDS and the individuals we serve. Recently a group from our Work Exploration Academy (a project of our Vocational Services) was welcomed to tour their facility and learn about their production process. They also hosted a group of Summer Youth Career Exploration students this summer to learn about jobs in assembly of electronic circuits.*

*For individuals who are considering their options and opportunities to work in the community, visits like this are instrumental learning experiences. We thank EarthQuaker Devices and the many other companies and nonprofits who are helping those we serve on their pathways to achieving their personal goals.*

*Another way UDS partners with local employers is to actually connect individuals with jobs. Community Employment Services is a UDS program that does just that. Our staff provides guidance every step of the way, including job exploration, work site analysis, coaching, and support all the way up to and beyond the achievement of full employment.*

*These services are not limited to persons with intellectual/developmental disabilities. One of the hidden gems here at UDS, the Judith A. Read Low Vision Services clinic, can be an invaluable resource to help someone who is experiencing low vision to become equipped and prepared for the workplace. It is exciting when Community Employment and Low Vision*

*Services work together to create a path to successful employment.*

*I previously have written in this column of the many benefits employers enjoy when they make the commitment to hire persons with disabilities. October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, and we are reminded of just how important inclusion-minded employers are. Hiring people of all talents, including people with disabilities, contributes to building strong communities and a strong economy.*

*UDS is a multi-faceted agency, with a wide variety of offerings serving people of all abilities. We could not do all of the things we do without the full community's support. In this season of Thanksgiving, on behalf of UDS, I want to express our profound gratitude to all of the individuals, corporations, nonprofits, and governmental entities who support our work in many different ways. And finally, thank you to each of you we serve, who place your trust and confidence in United Disability Services to be your service provider of choice!*

*Brian*

## Celebrating 70 Years

In 1949, a group of concerned parents formed the Parents Cerebral Palsy Unit so their children with disabilities would have access to the same quality of life enjoyed by other children. Its mission was to provide a safe environment where their children could go to school and receive physical, occupational and speech therapies. The group flourished, merged with other organizations, and seventy years later, is now known as United Disability Services. We are pleased to celebrate our milestone anniversary and our continued commitment to people with disabilities.



Our anniversary also marked the end of an era at UDS with the retirement of production supervisor, Norma Henson. She began her affiliation with the agency as a parent of a child with a disability who attended the school, and she later joined the agency as an employee. At a retirement celebration she was recognized for her contributions to the agency and is pictured here with a cozy blanket commemorating her commitment to the agency during her 45-year tenure.

# Small but Mighty

## On the Playground and in the Classroom with Miss Rachel

In a bright, cheerful room with decorated cubbies, lots of toys, tiny tables with chairs and toddlers all around, Rachel attends to one child and then in a flash she's on the floor, preparing for a new activity where little children gravitate to her. As a 23-year-old college graduate with a bachelor's degree in childhood development, she had spent a few months on her own looking for a job before she came to UDS Community Employment Services for assistance. She worked with an employment specialist who she says, "provided the motivation I needed to look for a job in places I never would have considered on my own." Although her first job didn't work out the way she had hoped, she continued her search and now loves being an assistant teacher at the Goddard School where she has been employed for a year.

Her supervisor Lisa Sondej says, "She has a great rapport with the kids and the parents. With a visual impairment, she needs to be up close and personal, engaging with the children. She gets down on their level and everyone loves Miss Rachel." At 4'6" she isn't much taller than the kids in the classroom and doesn't hesitate to crawl around on the floor interacting with them. She says, "They bring me toys and climb on me and I love it."

### Overcoming Obstacles

UDS Low Vision Services director and optometrist, Dr. Cheryl Reed, first met Rachel in the clinic when she was only three years old. When she started kindergarten, Dr. Reed provided a low vision assessment and recommended aids that would assist her in the classroom. According to Dr. Reed, "Rachel is small in stature but big in heart. Because of her quiet determination, she has overcome multiple obstacles including adoption and relocation to the United

States from China, her severe visual impairment and the loss of her mother, who was her greatest advocate. Over the years, Rachel or her mother contacted me for guidance or assistance only when necessary, another testimony to her independence and determination." Rachel credits Dr. Reed with helping her to be prepared in school and in life by recommending equipment like magnifiers, lighting and a monocular. Although she is legally blind, to look at her,

you might not realize she has an impairment. She says, "I function pretty much like anyone else." She lives in an apartment that she shares with her sister and enjoys playing video games and watching Japanese anime.

### A Message for Employers

Big things really do come in small packages and Rachel is living proof of that. She believes employers should consider hiring

people with disabilities because, "All people have different strengths and skills and everyone deserves a chance." Her supervisor adds, "We couldn't have asked for a better teacher who shines every day in her passion for teaching." People with disabilities have a lot to offer employers and National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) is celebrated every October to acknowledge their contributions to the American workforce and economy. If you are an employer looking for good candidates or you want to learn more about receiving assistance as you search for a job, contact Kristen Campagnano at 330-762-9755, ext. 246.

For more information about Low Vision Services, aids/assistive devices or assessments, contact Dr. Cheryl Reed at 330-762-9755.



Rachel works with a student on developing fine motor skills as they build a tower with brightly-colored pegs.



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UDS' Inaugural All-Stars at the Alley FUNdraiser at Spins Bowl in Akron was a groovy event with a '70s theme to celebrate our 70th anniversary. Twenty-four teams participated in a fun evening of bowling, food, contests and prizes while supporting the All-Star Training Club. Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors and everyone who came out to bowl, we raised **\$46,000** to provide inclusive sports for everyone! To see video highlights visit [www.UDSAAllStars.org](http://www.UDSAAllStars.org). Next year's event will be on **July 25, 2020**. Save the date and make plans to join us!

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The mission of UDS is to support people with disabilities and their caregivers by providing the highest quality, client-focused programs and services.

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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## What's New at UDS

### Work Exploration Academy

Earlier this year, Vocational Services began providing the Work Exploration Academy (WEA). It's a way for our individuals who are interested in working to begin exploring different types of employment. Following a curriculum, we are going into the community, learning about a variety of jobs and discovering personal preferences. Recently, we toured Ohio Means Jobs and learned how they support people who are interested in working. EarthQuaker Devices (shown here) is one local business that has welcomed participants of our WEA program to visit their company and learn about what they do.



### Building Relationships and Volunteer Opportunities

BraVo! will open a pilot "facility free" expansion program in partnership with First Congregational Church of Akron. The church will provide a space for our volunteers to use and, in exchange, our participants will support numerous community volunteer projects coordinated by the church. Nineteen individuals from the BraVo! program at Main Street (including those shown here) will move to this new location, along with existing staff members, mid-October.

