

# ASPIRE!

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

- Colin Wright

A publication of United Disability Services

SPRING 2019

**Jason  
Answers the Call  
& Shows What's  
Possible**







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

Hello, friends of UDS. In this issue of *Aspire!*, you'll read about some of our services related to community employment and helping students prepare for the transition from school to work. We exist to help every individual we serve advance along the pathway of their own choice.

In addition to our transition services for youth, we provide a continuum of services for adults whose goal is to be employed in the community. Job skills are developed through challenging paid work and prevocational training opportunities in Vocational Services while our BraVo! program promotes work and socialization skills through community exploration and volunteerism. Community employment services are also available to provide supports to match job seekers with employers to create positive employment outcomes. Whichever option someone may choose, our experienced and dedicated staff members will help participants reach their personal goals through a variety of individualized programs and services.

If you wish to be involved in our employment efforts in a substantial way, I ask you to consider a couple of different areas where we are in great need of the com-

munity's help. First, we need employers to step forward with jobs in the community. People with disabilities bring unique skills and a very strong work ethic, and studies show that customers have an overwhelmingly positive opinion of companies that hire people with disabilities. But, while people are fundamentally supportive of the concept, it takes deliberate willingness, and deliberate action, to invest and make it happen in your own workplace.

UDS has many resources to assist you with building an inclusive workforce. We would love to discuss how we can help identify, train and retain candidates for employment. We provide as much or as little job coaching as might be required, and will help identify job accommodations for a successful experience.

Employers who already participate eagerly share their success stories, which usually include improvement of overall company morale that is good for the bottom line. Economics may impede making the "leap of faith," but those who do so, and who make the investment, seldom regret it. Hiring people with disabilities is good business, and it is good FOR business.

My second request is directed to anyone whose business involves the manufacturing, assembly and packaging of products. In Vocational Services there is a tremendous need for work for our participants to engage in as a means to

build skills and work behaviors. These vocational options are an important part of the continuum of inclusion for people with disabilities, and provide much-needed job training that can lead to community employment.

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If your business has functions that could be outsourced to such a vocational center, please consider doing so. Our staff can perform studies to establish production expectations and rates, and we have procedures and resources in place to make it a very manageable and beneficial endeavor for your company.

This is an opportunity to help literally hundreds of individuals with disabilities perform paid work while they build confidence and self-esteem, and learn skills and behaviors needed to move forward toward future employment goals. Vocational participants display such great pride in the work they produce. As yet another option, perhaps you would consider hosting a work crew in your facility.

Please help UDS promote the dignity of work among people of all abilities. Even if you are not an employer or a decision-maker who can provide community employment or vocational work projects, you can help us by spreading the word to those who might. And if you ARE one of those decision-makers, let's talk!

# April is National Volunteer Month

## Spotlight on Toy & Resource Center Volunteers

National Volunteer Month is celebrated every April to honor all of the volunteers in our communities as well as encourage volunteerism throughout the month. Volunteers play an important role at UDS by providing much needed support to several agency programs. One such program that relies heavily on its volunteers is the Toy & Resource Center (TRC). The Toy Center has a dynamic team of four enthusiastic UDS retirees who give freely of their time to greet guests, check out toys, provide recommendations for play and make sure toys are thoroughly cleaned upon return.

Shortly after retirement, Liz Faust, Pat Richards, Lynne Came and Barb Van Fossen all returned to UDS and began volunteering in the Toy & Resource Center, as well as with other programs throughout the agency that needed help. As employees of UDS, they saw first-hand the direct impact volunteer support has on the agency's programs and, as past users of the Toy Center, they were familiar with the need for volunteers to help the program run efficiently.

Sheila Svoboda, TRC supervisor, says, "TRC wouldn't be able to



L to R: Pat Richards, Liz Faust, Lynne Came and Barb VanFossen (not pictured) are all UDS retirees who volunteer in the Toy & Resource Center to assist in any way they can.

run without our volunteers. They provide the ability to keep toys in use and rotated with cleaning and disinfecting. There are days I am busy helping our members and if I also had to keep the toys up to date and clean, I wouldn't be able to assist them at the level we want to achieve."

### Our Volunteers

**Lynne Came** left public education and found UDS in 1989, where she used her teaching skills in our Adult Services program. Lynne has been volunteering in the TRC and other UDS programs since her retirement in 2008.

**Liz Faust** retired from UDS in 2004 after 15 years of employment and has volunteered in the TRC

since 2013. She's glad she can play a role in making sure toys are clean and safe to use since the TRC is such a great resource, "especially for children with special needs."

**Pat Richards** became involved with UDS when her daughter was enrolled. She grew so fond of the agency and the people we serve, she became an employee and worked for more than 30 years. Immediately after retiring in 2008, she began volunteering in the TRC.

**Barb Van Fossen** began her journey with UDS teaching in our preschool and then transitioned to the Time for Me program as a respite coordinator after the preschool closed. Barb began volunteering in the Toy Center shortly after her retirement in 2009.



UDS is thankful for the continued support of all our volunteers who help us provide quality services for our community. If you are interested in volunteer opportunities with United Disability Services visit our website at [udsakron.org](http://udsakron.org) to see how you can make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities.



# Helping Students Transition from School to Work

Our Community Employment Services department has been awarded a contract by Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services to high school students with disabilities in Summit, Medina, and Portage counties. UDS staff members will provide career exploration counseling, work-based learning and workplace readiness training to students. These services are intended to help students with disabilities get an early start in exploring career interests.

As we prepare to provide these additional supports to students, we continue to work with job seekers of all ages and abilities to help them reach their employment goals. Our experienced team of employment specialists assist individuals in developing the tools and skills necessary to obtain employment. This includes learning how to identify job leads and assisting job seekers with applying and interviewing for jobs. Staff members are also available to provide on-the-job supports after an individual is hired.

Employers can help by providing tours and job shadow experiences for students, having employees mentor students interested in their field, being a host site for work assessments, or informing UDS staff of job openings. Interested individuals and employers can contact **Kristen Campagnano** at [kcampagnano@udsakron.org](mailto:kcampagnano@udsakron.org) or by calling 330-762-9755, ext. 246 for more information.

## Be My Valentine?

The fragrant scent of freshly-cut carnations fills the halls of UDS every year on Valentine's Day. Pictured below are Lana Stryker, Heidi Young, Courtney Deal and Kristy Mulneix as they counted, sorted and tagged 950 carnations this year, more than ever before. The annual tradition of sending beautiful carnations to coworkers and friends has grown each year since it began many years ago when Lynne Came (UDS retiree) organized the first sale.

Carnations are sold for \$1.25 each and can be sent to anyone at the agency (all locations). Money raised from past sales has been used to provide special extras for participants of Vocational Services including T-shirts, pizza parties, lunch boxes and other items. Staff members and participants alike enjoy supporting this internal initiative to spread the love each year.



**Save the Date!**  
**Saturday, July 20**  
**6-9 p.m.**  
**Spins Bowl Akron**  
**2911 E Waterloo Rd, Akron**

**No shooting hoops at the All-Star Jam, this year we'll be bowling for spares and strikes at our inaugural All-Stars at the Alley bowling fundraiser! Mark your calendar now. More details coming soon.**



Issue 78 of *Kaleidoscope* is posted and can be viewed at [KaleidoscopeOnline.org](http://KaleidoscopeOnline.org)

# Looking on the Bright Side

## Celebrating DD Awareness Month in March

**B**e polite. Say “please,” “excuse me,” and “thank you.” Hold the door open for someone behind you. Jason learned early in life that good manners like these are important. His parents also taught him that he was just like everybody else even though he couldn’t see, and he could do the things everybody else does, he just has to do some things differently.

### A Perfect Fit

With a phenomenal aptitude for facts and dates, Jason recalls that he started working at UDS Kent on March 28, 2006, just a few days after the program opened its doors on March 20. Born in Anchorage, Alaska, he has lived in 17 different locations across the country, acclimating to different schools, programs and work environments. When he walked through the doors here, he remembers being greeted warmly and feeling welcomed by everyone. He says, “I knew this was it.” Mom, Cathy, was with him and says, “UDS has been a godsend. We were in the right place at the right time when we found this place.”

### The Up Side

Jason has an upbeat, positive spirit and says, “I try to always look on the bright side of things. Mom and Dad raised me right, to be respectful, mannerly and polite.” All of those traits, combined with a pleasant demeanor, make him the natural choice to cover for the receptionist when she goes to lunch or happens to be off for a day. He enjoys answering the phone, greeting people and assisting them when they enter the building. Preferring to work, he spends four days a week working on a variety of jobs including packaging Kong dog toys, heat sealing, and cotton swabs

on the Vocational side and one day a week is spent on the SociAbilities side doing recreational, social and community activities.

### Community Inclusion

In addition to raising Jason and his brother (both



Jason enjoys spending time with good friend Alex who also attends UDS Kent. They both look forward to community trips and a favorite destination for Jason is Twisted Meltz in Kent.

with Leber congenital amaurosis, a rare, genetic eye disorder that also causes kidney failure), Mom was also a special education teacher during a time when children with disabilities were separated from the rest of the students. She is grateful there is more knowledge and acceptance of people with differences in schools now. To those who might be afraid of people with disabilities, she encourages “Give them a chance. Welcome them into your heart. It can make such a big difference.” Jason is grateful for all the friends he has made at UDS Kent and for his girlfriend, Tammie, who he met several years ago. They talk on the phone every evening, get together once or twice a month and have an annual tradition of going to the Portage

County Randolph Fair. He also enjoys reading and would like to write his own book someday, sharing some of his experiences.

This year UDS is celebrating 70 years of serving people with disabilities and DD Awareness Month is the perfect time to embrace differences and share the stories of people like Jason who make this world a better place. Visit [udstv.org](http://udstv.org) to watch a short video of him sharing his story. If you’d like more information about UDS Kent Adult Services contact **Erica Taylor** at **330-676-1493** or via email at [etaylor@udsakron.org](mailto:etaylor@udsakron.org). For information about any other program or service call **330-762-9755** or visit [www.udsakron.org](http://www.udsakron.org).



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## BraVo! Souper Bowl Scores BIG for Shelter Care

For most people the Super Bowl means football, wings, commercials and a star-studded halftime show. Here at UDS, it also means that our employees will be dicing, seasoning and stirring up savory soups as they compete to be named the winner of BraVo!'s annual Souper Bowl. This year 15 soups were entered and first place was awarded to three-time winner, B.J. Seabolt, our physical therapy assistant. Annually, when the judging concludes, employees, participants, friends and family members purchase cups of soup, desserts and raffle tickets to raise money for local charities. This year the BraVo! event raised \$655 for Shelter Care, an organization that provides care for children, youth and their families through residential and non-residential services. We look forward to this event each year and are grateful to have the opportunity to assist another wonderful organization this year as they provide valuable services to the community.

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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).

Amanda Leffler, chairperson  
Brian Thomas, president/CEO  
Lisa Armstrong, director of communications  
Sandy Palmer, editor  
Jayme Romanchuk, staff writer

**Souper Bowl 2012 - 2019 Grand Total Donations = \$3773**  
Supporting All-Star Training Club, St. Martha's Soup Kitchen, Summa  
at Home Hospice, Greenleaf Family Center, Habitat for Humanity of  
Summit County, Good Neighbors and Safe Landing.

The annual Souper Bowl is just one of the service learning projects hosted by the BraVo! program. **Since its first bake sale fundraiser to benefit Share Our Strength in 2010, the program has raised nearly \$10,000** by creatively involving participants, staff members and the community in an effort to support many worthy causes like Leader Dogs for the Blind, Ronald McDonald House, Akron-Canton Regional Food Bank and Battered Women's Shelter, to name a few.

To learn more about BraVo! contact **Courtney Deal** at [cdeal@udsakron.org](mailto:cdeal@udsakron.org) or call 330-762-9755.