

ASPIRE!

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

- Colin Wright

A publication of United Disability Services

SUMMER 2020

**Creative
Ingenuity
Abounds
at UDS**



A Message from Brian Thomas, UDS President/CEO



There is no doubt that the COVID-19 crisis has affected UDS and other non-profits in ways we could have never imagined and moving

forward organizations will not look like they once did.

Prior to this health pandemic, United Disability Services had already been undergoing significant transformation. To help face down some critical financial challenges, we divested ourselves of operating a charter school and intensified our focus on what we do best. At the same time, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, and local county boards of DD have been working to, among other things: a) replace traditional, facility-based day services with emphasis on more

community-based settings, and b) redesign how vocational programs are delivered.

Change is needed at UDS in order to continue as a vital service provider with a strong future ahead. With knowledge of the changes and timelines that were set to occur this year, our Board of Directors approved a new strategic plan for the agency last November. Our highest priorities are to:

- 1. Evolve and strengthen UDS core programs and infrastructure to ensure high levels of quality in meeting the changing needs of the people we serve;*
- 2. Attract, engage, appreciate and retain qualified staff who advance the mission of UDS;*
- 3. Protect and enhance the reputation of UDS as a leader in the field of serving persons with disabilities; and*
- 4. Strengthen the financial position of UDS for continued sustainability and growth.*

We are diligently pursuing these goals with some specific action plans. One of those is to consolidate four adult day services down to two locations while keeping person-centered options, both existing and emerging, available to everyone we support.

Before the COVID-19 crisis struck, we had many plans under development. We were preparing to announce the opening of another community-based BraVo! location in Kent, and to pursue other new community-based settings to serve the Kent and Twinsburg participants. Some of these pursuits are “on-hold” as we navigate through tumultuous times. But we continue to develop new service models that will help UDS to move forward with strength in an environment of ever-changing expectations of service providers.

The Board approved a detailed proposal to close the Kent and Twinsburg buildings this spring, and to consolidate their operations—consumers and staff members—into our two Akron locations. A key analysis of the Kent and Twinsburg sites concluded that this was the fiscally responsible thing to do. Both are leased spaces with costly upkeep. Because of the inefficiency of operating such large facilities with relatively few consumers, it is no longer reasonable to continue to cover the high occupancy costs associated with the operations there.

Many elements of this transformation were planned to commence between May and October of this year. Then the pandemic hit. We were without any activity and revenue in our core services from March 18 through May 27. Now,

continued on page 5



As the cover of this issue says, staff members of UDS have tapped into their creativity to come up with various ways to stay connected with consumers while staying apart. Denise Swigart (shown at left) connected with Jared on FaceTime and made a card holder so he can see the Go Fish cards and tell her which card he wants to play. Reggie Greer (at right) enjoys listening to Matt (inset photo), an avid reader, read stories aloud to her on the phone and tell her all about activities he is doing while at home. We are creatively coming up with ways to engage with participants until the time we are able to all be together again.



ALL-STAR TRAINING CLUB

UDS Program Updates

Starting this month we've launched a new video series featuring

some of the sports we offer through our All-Star Training Club. We've kicked off the series with some golf instruction from PGA Professional Ron Tristano, along with a look at Cleveland Clinic Akron General's Challenge Golf Course. Upcoming videos include:

Low Impact Exercise ♦ Bowling ♦ Soccer ♦ Yoga

Follow us on Facebook @UnitedDisabilityServices to see when these videos are posted. Let's stay fit while we're staying apart. You can also find the videos by visiting www.AllStarTrainingClub.org.



Community Living Services



Services for individuals in the community have continued in-person, virtually and by phone. Our staff members take people to medical appointments, help with household errands/maintenance and provide one-on-one social and recreational activities to keep folks active and connected. Shared Living homes are monitored virtually by staff members to ensure needs are being met and things have been going very well.

Additional services have been added for high-risk individuals to assist with grocery store trips and errands so they can stay safe at home. Virtual check-ins and one-on-one visits have been critical to the people we serve as their safety remains our top priority.



Before COVID-19, UDS consistently implemented high standards of health and safety with our use of universal precautions and disinfectant/sanitation protocols. Now with the COVID-19 virus, new greater levels of precaution-

ary behavior, hygiene and sanitation will be adhered to by all employees and participants during their program services.

Kathy Flach, our recruiter/staffing coordinator (pictured here), sews face masks and gives them to new hires at UDS. We are thankful for her and the many other masked superheroes in the community who have made masks and donated them to us.



We are still accepting face masks but would also appreciate cash donations and:

- hand sanitizer
- disinfectant wipes
- paper towels
- Kleenex

A no-contact donation drop box is located at the main entrance of 701 S. Main Street.

Community Employment Services

Remote Support for Job Seekers/Students

During the shutdown we continued to provide job development services to job seekers and Pre-Employment Transition Services for high school students. Staff members worked from home, providing services to job seekers remotely via Zoom, FaceTime, Microsoft Teams and Skype, and by phone with those individuals without Internet access. Many took advantage of the hiring occurring by essential businesses. Staff members continued coaching people who were hired during the shutdown. Back in the office now, we continue to providing service to job seekers/students remotely (Mike Haney is pictured here on a Zoom call).



Summer Youth Services

Our Summer Youth services are a little different this year. We are conducting three, five-week remote sessions via Zoom. The first two weeks focus on self-advocacy and job seeking skills training.

The remaining weeks are spent learning about a different type of occupation daily. Instead of going to work sites for tours, employers are providing video tours of their businesses and the various jobs they employ. Akron Zoo staff members demonstrated how and why they do physical exams on the animals. Staff members from every role in the zoo, from maintenance and food services, to the veterinarian and keepers, to the accountants and fundraising staff, talked about what they do in their jobs, the education/experience needed and what they like about their jobs. UDS staff members have been equally creative in how they provide services, such as creating fun, online digital games for students to play each day to learn about different jobs.

Illuminating the Future for Those with Low Vision

Brady is a well-spoken, straight-A student who enjoys drawing, playing video games, being outside and watching YouTube videos. He also has low vision. He was in preschool when he had his first assessment with Dr. Cheryl Reed, director of Judith A. Read Low Vision Services at UDS. His mom, Danielle, says, "It's helpful to come in every few years for an evaluation. Dr. Reed has good ideas and recommendations that always seem to help him." Now a seventh grader, he has a few different aids, like this specialized lamp shown here, and at the recommendation of Dr. Reed, his school will purchase the Prodigy, a table-top magnifier with multiple light

settings. He's an amiable young man who hopes to be an architect someday and with advancements in technology for people with low vision, the future looks bright.

In addition to health screenings, masks and social distance precautions at UDS, our clinic is only allowing one person to accompany each patient in the building. Our waiting room is limited to two chairs, positioned ten feet apart and traffic patterns within the clinic will minimize contact with separate entrance and exit doors. Staff members will also wear gloves while working with patients to ensure safety.





ALL-STAR
COMMUNITY
STRIDES

Walk & Roll for **ALL** Abilities September 13-26, 2020

This year's UDS All-Stars at the Alley bowling fundraiser has been postponed due to COVID-19, but we need your help more than ever! Lace up and join us in September for UDS All-Star Community Strides, a fundraiser benefiting the programs and services of UDS. This virtual walk can take place anywhere. In your neighborhood, a favorite park or even on your treadmill at home! Show your support of UDS and encourage your friends and neighbors to participate by placing an event sign in your yard. All registered participants will also receive an event face mask to help keep you safe while you walk, run or roll! Stay tuned for more event and registration information. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram or visit our website www.udsakron.org today!

Presented by  **Huntington**

Message from Brian Thomas *continued*

even with those programs very slowly coming back to life, there are still many unknowns. Yet, we do know that our commitment to a strong and sustainable UDS is unchanged, and we still need to improve efficiency in the agency's physical presence. As planned, we have moved ahead with consolidating the Twinsburg and Kent operations into our Akron facilities. At Main St. and Firestone Park, we have the capacity to fully absorb and continue those programs within our own buildings.

All families who were served at the centers in Twinsburg and Kent are aware that UDS will not be re-opening those facilities. We are delighted that we are already serving many of them at our Akron centers, as well as virtually, in small groups out in the community, and individually at home.

I believe the future for UDS is bright. Those we serve, and the agency itself, are beneficiaries of a very generous and benevolent community. We remain one of the largest operations of its kind in the region. Once the pandemic subsides and the economic and cultural skies begin to brighten, I believe that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities will need and want the options we offer them more than ever before. That is ultimately why changes at UDS are needed, so that each individual is enabled to live his or her most fulfilling life.

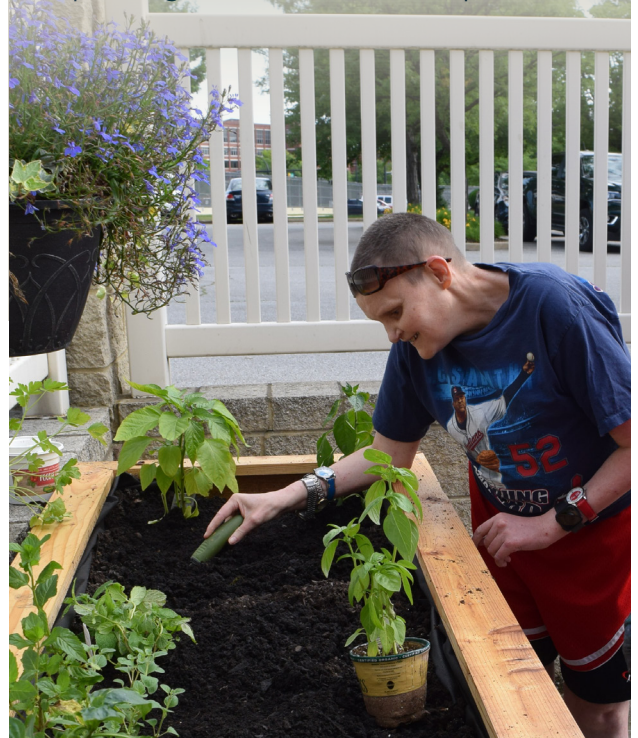
Brian



One-of-a-Kind Trellises and Planters Designed for UDS

This unique addition of three planters with trellises that spell out UDS are the creation of a team of engineers from FirstEnergy: Ron Kovach, Anthony Lelli and Amanda McIntosh (UDS board member). Designed to be accessible and add vertical appeal, they are a fabulous addition to our beautiful patio.

The FirstEnergy team also donated various plants which our BraVo! volunteers promptly placed in some soil. A variety of participants will tend to these lush gardens throughout the summer. The three planters include flowers, a salsa garden and a pasta sauce garden. At the end of the summer, consumers will be able to taste the fruits of their labor when they enjoy some salsa and pasta sauce. Our participants enjoy watering and caring for the plants, as well as spending time in the beautiful patio.





Transportation Services

On the Road Again

In January of this year, 18 catalytic converters were stolen from UDS vehicles. The agency was out thousands of dollars in deductible costs and lost revenue caused by this disruption in our services. The Summit County Land Bank has awarded UDS a \$15,000 matching grant to help defray the costs of installing a new security fence to safeguard against future theft and vandalism of the transportation fleet. The Corbin Foundation gave \$7,500 and the Lehner Family Foundation gave \$5,000 to help fund the match requirement. The project was fully funded by grants, response to an emergency donation appeal, and by a number of very generous, spontaneous donations after people heard about it on the news.

Meal Delivery

During the statewide stay-at-home order Vantage Aging Meals on Wheels experienced a volunteer shortage and needed to find a way to deliver meals to those who depend on them. Thanks to the generosity of the Akron Community Foundation and The Tom, Mary and Becky Babcox Family Foundation, UDS was able to collaborate with Vantage Aging to provide a vehicle and drivers to help deliver shelf-stable meals to hundreds of households in Summit County. Longtime driver, Flora Sabbagh, and UDS president/CEO, Brian Thomas, delivered meals, along with several other drivers.



Fueling More Efficiently

A 1500-gallon gas tank (shown below) has been delivered to UDS and is now being used to fuel our fleet of vehicles. This tank will add convenience and cut down on the cost of fuel and employee hours spent refueling the vehicles at gas stations. The pump will fill vehicles at twice the speed of a conventional gas pump, saving us time and money.



Program Update from Kay Shellenberger, UDS Vice President of Program Services

As Ohio eases back into operation, so does UDS, with careful planning to keep employees and the individuals we serve safe and healthy.

The Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) has been issuing guidance to agencies like ours indicating what services can be provided, how, when and to whom during the COVID-19 pandemic. Starting mid-May providers began applying to DODD for approval to begin implementing small group center-based day services. This process involved assuring DODD that as a provider we would take all necessary health and safety precautions, implement new procedures and serve individuals in a prescribed setting. The approval process included a virtual tour of all the areas where we intend to provide services. UDS approval was quick with no recommendations. In this initial phase, there can be no more than 10 people in an area, including staff members. Each area has restrictions related to entering/exiting program areas, restrooms and eating areas. All of these measures are in place to reduce exposure to others so the separation of groups and staff members is essential. Transportation Services requires facial coverings, unless there is a health or behavioral issue, and ensures a safe distance between riders and the driver during transport. Temperature readings are checked prior to boarding a vehicle, as well as at the time of arrival/departure of program area.

At this time, we have small group areas approved at both our Main Street and Firestone Park locations. Our goal has been to start low and slowly build up to our approved capacity making sure that we felt comfortable with the implementation of modified processes and safety protocols. Over the course of two months, we have been able to restart 80 individuals in both vocational and day activity programming. Under these current service restrictions, this represents about 25% of census we served

prior to March. As much as we all want to return to a pre-pandemic level of service provision, we are following specific guidance from DODD and the

CDC to keep employees and individuals safe and healthy.

Returning to center-based group services is not beneficial or an option for everyone at this time. Throughout this pandemic, individuals and their families have been sharing with us their comfort level and interest with a return to services. When someone expressed a desire to return to small group services, the Service/Support Coordinator through the County Board of DD is contacted to begin the team process. DODD

requires that each consumer's team must complete a risk/benefit assessment to determine if returning to a small group setting is appropriate for him/her and his/her household. For those who are not able to return at this time, we continue to offer virtual programming and 1:1 community-based activities.

Our virtual programming and 1:1 community-based activities are part of STEP services, a DODD transitional service category. These services are intended to help individuals stay engaged with meaningful programming during this time when center-based services are limited and individuals are making program decisions related to their own health and safety. We are hoping to build community-based activities to small groups of 2-3 but we make those decisions based on health department guidance and our ability to use outdoor, socially distanced spaces.

We miss all of our UDS family very much! We stay connected during this time in a variety of ways holding onto the hope of returning everyone back and engaged in programming.



Happy to be back at UDS for center-based services, Ashley is taking a moment to stop and smell the flowers while Jessika waters some of the plants in our patio area.

Kay



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Taste Buds

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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).

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Equal Rights for Everyone

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law in 1990 and celebrates its 30th anniversary this month. The purpose of the law is to make sure people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. We encourage you to check out a recent TED Talk by Rebecca Knill, a writer, who has cochlear implants that enable her to hear. She explores the ways technology has changed what it's like to be deaf and believes that by shifting our cultural understanding of disability we can build a more inclusive world. To watch her talk, visit: go.ted.com/rebeccaknill



Sail Away

Last year the Gail Willmott Art Award was created to honor her contributions as editor of *Kaleidoscope* for 36 years. Her passion for the arts will be shared through the annual purchase of a piece of art created by a person with a disability that will be added to the art collection at UDS for everyone to enjoy. This year we purchased a signed print of Jeff Hanson's work. His art was featured in issue 78 of *Kaleidoscope* (www.KaleidoscopeOnline.org) and describes his pursuit to raise ten million dollars for charity by the time he is thirty. Individual contributions made this year's purchase of *Bermuda Sail Away* possible. If you are interested in supporting *Kaleidoscope* or making a donation toward next year's purchase, contact Lisa Armstrong, director of communications, at 330-762-9755.



Jeff Hanson, *Bermuda Sail Away*, 2016, Heavily-textured Acrylic on Canvas, 23" x 30"

Issue 81 of *Kaleidoscope* has been delayed slightly due to the pandemic but will be posted at KaleidoscopeOnline.org soon.