

SPOTLIGHT ON

UCP Seguin

of Greater Chicago



The Path To Guardianship Made Smoother With Help From UCP Seguin

We've all been there...waiting on hold, standing in line, being transferred from one person to another, trying to finalize never-ending government paperwork. Now, imagine doing that when you are not sure where you need to go, filing paperwork that could be prohibitively expensive, and you are doing it all to support your child with disabilities.

This was Schon's reality in 2022. His ex-wife had recently passed away, and she had been their son Kris's legal guardian.

When Kris turned 18, Schon and Rhonda were still married and raising their four children. Rhonda filed the paperwork to become Kris's guardian, but adding Schon was an extra \$500. It wasn't in the family's budget. They never imagined what the future would bring.

Captions: Kris and Schon enjoy Developmental Disabilities Awareness Night with the White Sox; Kris and his late mom Rhonda shared a special bond

Create Life Without Limits for People with Disabilities!
GIVE AT UCPSEGWIN.ORG

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Life without limits for people with disabilities™

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A Letter from Joseph Mengoni, President/CEO



As 2024 draws to a close, I've been looking back at the last year and all of the incredible things the UCP Seguin community has made possible. I owe you a debt of gratitude, whether you've been an advocate for our work, given generously of your time or resources, or trusted us to support your loved one. Thank you for empowering individuals with disabilities to live life without limits.

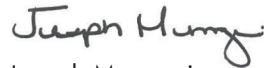
I'm also incredibly grateful for the tireless efforts of the UCP Seguin staff and their commitment to the people and families we serve. We kicked off our fiscal year back in July with Employee Appreciation Month. The month began with

a carnival full of games and classic circus food, ended with a staff talent show, and was full of treats, surprises, and activities. I want to express my gratitude to the Community Memorial Foundation, Proviso Township, the UCP Seguin Board of Directors, and the Staff Appreciation Committee for making Staff Appreciation Month (and bonuses for our dedicated staff) possible.

This month, 74 staff who have been with UCP Seguin for 5 or more years will be honored at our annual Years of Service luncheon. Our organization is rich in tenure, which speaks to the quality of the culture and the services we are able to provide.

I hope you enjoy this issue of our Spotlight newsletter. It's full of things that are only possible because of you and the rest of the incredible UCP Seguin community.

Thank you for all you do,



Joseph Mengoni
President/CEO



MEET SAMMY GUTIERREZ

Chief Program Officer – Adult Services

Sammy has worn many hats in her social services career: DSP (Direct Support Professional), Job Coach, Case Manager, Admissions Coordinator, and Associate Director of Quality Assurance. With an undergraduate degree in Special Education, she intended to go into teaching. But when she heard about the new Seguin Cares Program (allowing older adults to age in place), she knew she wanted to be a part of it.

She joined UCP Seguin in 2009 as the Coordinator of the Seguin Cares Program and quickly moved into the role of Director of Residential Services. Earning a law degree in 2018 has also been extremely beneficial in her role as Chief Program Officer.

Working in social services is a natural fit for Sammy. Growing up she had direct exposure through her mother, who had a developmental disability and seizure disorder. "Having a parent with IDD (Intellectual/Development Disability) taught me the importance of advocating for others and educating people about the positive contributions people with IDD make in the world."

Then, in 2022, the unimaginable happened, and Rhonda became ill. When she received the news that she only had a few months to live, Rhonda and Schon had that “next steps” conversation but never actually followed through. They thought they had more time.

When Rhonda passed mere weeks later, Schon knew he needed to act. But where did he even start? No one he knew had any idea how to begin. A friend of a friend knew an attorney who could help — for \$10,000.

Kris was already receiving services at UCP Seguin, and his guardianship became an issue for a simple visit to the dentist. Schon first heard the name Laura Gonzalez during Kris’s annual staffing meeting at UCP Seguin. He was told she might be able to help.



Schon and his son's Ian (Kris's secondary guardian), Austin, and Kris

“She’s God’s gift and Heaven sent,” says Schon

“Thanks to Laura, I didn’t give up.” As UCP Seguin’s Director of Intake and Transitions, Laura Gonzalez spent years walking families through establishing legal guardianship, steering them through the mountains of paperwork, and explaining all the options. Before meeting Schon and Kris, Laura had never gone through the successor guardian process from start to finish. But she loves learning new things - she says it keeps her going. And she was ready for a new challenge. She and Schon were going to learn together.

Schon had consulted the free legal desk at Daley Center but was still struggling. Laura was able to pick up the ball when Schon was ready to drop it and ran. She collaborated with the Cook and DuPage County court system, filed notices to appear, and completed paperwork. Through Laura’s perseverance, Schon became Kris’s legal guardian, and Kris’s brother Ian became a backup guardian,

Right Photo: Kris and Schon picking apples
Left Photo: Kris and Ian relaxing at home

Schon says, “For some reason, we as parents don’t think about it. We think we will always keep our children with us.” But as thier family’s story illustrates, that isn’t always the case. Many parents of children with disabilities do not realize that once their child turns 18, they are no longer their legal guardian. When a young adult cannot adequately communicate their needs or wants, this lack of a guardian can result in a disruption of care or a delay in services.

Because guardianship is such a complex issue, over 70% of cases managed by the UCP Seguin Transitions team receive guardianship assistance, and it has become the primary service they provide.



To learn more about the services UCP Seguin provides for young adults transitioning to adult services or the other services UCP Seguin provides, visit ucpseguin.org/what-we-do/adult-services.

Honoring a Generous Spirit

It's easy to speak of someone's generosity as a number at the bottom of a giving statement. It's more difficult to describe someone's generous spirit. John Miniutti has a generous spirit.

John's involvement with UCP Seguin began as a parent and advocate for his son Fritz. Fritz joined us in 2011, and we had the honor of supporting him with vocational training and other services in the last years of his life. John joined our Board of Directors in 2012 and served for nearly a decade. He still lends his expertise to our organization as an active member of our Program Committee.

During the holiday season, John joins a group of individuals to put together a matching gift through contributions big and small. Their generosity sparks generosity in others, doubling their gifts to the Holiday Appeal and the impact their giving has on the individuals served by UCP Seguin.



To honor John's generous spirit and his steadfast commitment to individuals with disabilities, UCP Seguin will dedicate a home in Oak Park in his honor. The Miniutti House will be a testament to the indelible mark John's kindness leaves on the lives of others.

SEGUIN GARDENS & GIFTS...

Growing Something Special for 15 years!



In 2009, an asphalt parking lot was transformed into a fertile ground full of color, life, and purpose: Seguin Gardens & Gifts.

Seguin Gardens & Gifts was established to provide meaningful employment opportunities for UCP Seguin participants. Thanks to a strong community following, Seguin Gardens & Gifts has created and provided meaningful jobs for more than 60 UCP Seguin participants over the past 15 years. Participants gain hands-on experience with plants, customer service, and teamwork while working in a retail environment so that they can eventually find a job within the community with their new skills.

The shelves and greenhouse of Seguin Gardens & Gifts are stocked with UCP Seguinmade handcrafted ceramics and jewelry as well as plants and organic herbs and vegetables grown from seeds and cuttings by participant employees. The store also offers a curated selection of local gifts, garden supplies, and plants.

In the next month, Seguin Gardens & Gifts will be filled with holiday cheer - and holiday decorations. Participant artists have been hard at work for months carefully crafting handmade ornaments perfect for your tree or your gift list. (If you can't make it to the store to shop - because the ornaments sell quickly - you can get your holiday shopping done at seguingardens.com!)

Our dedicated community has made Seguin Gardens & Gifts a Cicero shopping destination - each "purchase with a purpose" allows people with disabilities to blossom into their full potential and live life without limits.

RESPIRE CARE

An opportunity to rest and recharge

“It’s one of the most awesome things I’ve ever done.”

That’s how Penny describes being an Adult Foster Parent. “I love my guys. I love what I do.” Penny became a foster parent in December 2022 after decades of working in the social services sector.



Adult Foster Care, in Penny’s words, “gives the guys a sense of belonging.” As a licensed Adult Foster Parent (AFP), Penny provides 24-hour care for and shares a home with Lance and Donald. She prepares meals, maintains the home, and offers specialized support to Donald and Lance - holding them accountable so they can live as independently as possible.

Penny feels as though having an AFP is a better fit for individuals who need that consistency to help them feel comfortable and to reach their full potential. “They already know who you are... they’re with the same person, so they know who to depend on.” Lance and Donald’s families depend on her, too. Donald’s mother JoAnn effusively praises Penny’s efforts. “We feel very fortunate to have her.”

But “sometimes it can be a little overwhelming” for a single person to provide around-the-clock care, which is why Penny looks forward to Saturdays, when she schedules 10 hours of respite care for Lance and Donald, offering her a much-needed break from caregiving responsibilities.

On Saturdays, Penny has a chance to run personal errands, hang out with friends, or get her nails done while Donald and Lance spend time with Ben, Janita, or Maria, members of UCP Seguin’s respite team. The guys appreciate respite because they often have a chance to go out in the community - going shopping at garage sales or enjoying a picnic when the weather is nice. “They get a break from me!” Penny shared. She compares it to having a substitute teacher.

“You get to decompress and come back rejuvenated. You know, so do Lance and Donald,” Penny shared. Because Penny coordinates care with only three respite staff members, they’re able to provide much-needed consistency. They also have a chance to bond and understand Lance and Donald while building trust and a strong working relationship with Penny. “I can now go for 10 hours and feel like my guys are safe, my guys are taken care of.”

By offering a chance to recharge and a need break from daily routine, respite care clearly benefits caregivers like foster parents and the individuals in their care alike and is a vital part of offering the consistent care individuals like Lance and Donald deserve so they can live life without limits.

GOLFING WITHOUT LIMITS!



We had an absolute blast on Monday, August 26 at the 2024 Life Without Limits Classic – **RAISING OVER \$135,000** and exceeding all goals!

A massive amount of gratitude goes out to the incredible golfers and our generous sponsors for making the day a success – Alliance Bernstein, Busey Bank, Great Computer Solutions, The Horton Group, Jim & Sandy Napolitan, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois, Enterprise Holdings, Tarrytown Expocare Pharmacy, and Nobs Towing. And a huge thank you to the Classic Committee Byron “Scooter” Andreas, Robin Bettenhausen, and Tom Mikrut as well as the countless volunteers who made the day a rousing success.

The golf cannon was a crowd favorite, with everyone eager to test their aim—despite the heat cranking up the challenge. The excitement didn’t stop there! The silent auction had some heated bidding wars, while the live auction brought serious competition for those must-have items. A huge shoutout to everyone for bringing their energy, excitement, and competitive spirit!



UCP Seguin's Got Talent!

UCP SEGUIN PARTICIPANTS AND STAFF DO AMAZING THINGS EVERY DAY!



Congratulations to our UCP Seguin Idol winners!

CANDICE - 1ST PLACE
TIMBERLY 2ND PLACE
LJ - 3RD PLACE

Our participants took us on a trip to Disney from the comforts of Cicero at the UCP Seguin Idol competition. All of the performers were stars, which made choosing the winners incredibly difficult.

Congratulations to our staff talent show winners!

THE BERKELEY BEES - 1ST PLACE
THE POWERPUFF BOSSES - 2ND PLACE

We knew our staff were capable of incredible things at work, but we had no idea you were so talented. From singing, to hula hooping, to dancing, UCP Staff really let their inner talents shine at the first ever UCP Seguin Staff Appreciation Talent Show. Robert Hughes, Tamara Gates, and the entire UCP Seguin Staff Appreciation Committee for hosting and coordinating!

Shining a Spotlight on UCP Seguin Foster Parents

The Salmeron Family



It takes special people to become foster parents. Especially when the youth in their care have challenging behaviors, complex medical conditions, or have suffered severe trauma. For more than 20 years, Georgina and Francisco Salmeron have opened their home to just such children in need.

The Salmerons never give up on a child. They are committed to understanding each child's specific needs and supporting them through tough times. Georgina and Francisco are fierce advocates for ensuring that the schools and the community provide all the resources their children need and deserve. Their dedication to the children in their care extends to the children's biological families, even driving them out of state for family visits.

The Salmeron home is a loving, nurturing, and supportive place for every child that passes through its doors. The children in their care are family in every sense of the word, adding to the love and joy of their biological children. After 20 years of compassionate care, Georgina and Francisco are about to make their family complete. The 4 children currently in their home will become permanent members of the Salmeron family later this year.

For always providing a warm and welcoming home for children in need of love, UCP Seguin presented Georgina and Francisco Salmeron with the Fostering Excellence Award at the 2024 Big Event.

Lisa Vito



Lisa Vito joined UCP Seguin as a program supervisor in 1987. She loved having a positive impact on the lives of the people we served, and when the Adult Foster Parent program began in 1989, Lisa decided to dedicate her time there.

Lisa's first charges were Jose, Richard, and brothers John and Sebastian. Lisa has devoted her life to caring for people with disabilities. She has never shied away from taking on even the most challenging cases. She is always committed to "her guys," supporting Jose, Richard, John, and Sebastian during the end of their lives.

In addition to running her home in Stickney, Lisa has given her time as a volunteer with our Special Olympics athletes. She has led discussions on caregiver burnout in partnership with Riverside Township and participated in videos for the State of Illinois highlighting the benefits of transitioning individuals from state institutions to community-based settings.

When the Jacksonville Developmental Center closed, Lisa welcomed former residents into her loving home. She showed them what life was like as part of a family, taking them on weekend trips to her cottage for fishing and fun.

For over 37 years, Lisa has created a family with the men in her home. Today, Lisa's "guys" include David, Keith, and Mike. According to Keith's sister Nancy, "Lisa Vito is the rarest of human beings! She is platinum, gold, diamonds, and emeralds all forged together with rays of sunshine." It takes a special soul to live day in and day out with endless perseverance and, sometimes, barely any breaths of calm.

For her endless perseverance and constant calm, UCP Seguin was pleased to present Lisa with the Fostering Excellence Award at the 2024 Big Event.



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