

SPOTLIGHT ON

UCP Seguin

of Greater Chicago



July 8th marked the 10th birthday of UCP Seguin of Greater Chicago, which was formed through the merger of UCP of Greater Chicago and Seguin Services. The UCP Seguin community celebrated our milestone anniversary and reflected on the accomplishments of the last decade — ***made possible by the tremendous support of so many.***

Create Life Without Limits for People with Disabilities!
GIVE AT [UCPSEGUIN.ORG](https://ucpseguin.org)

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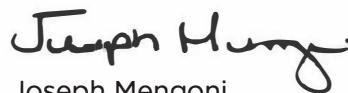
As you know, UCP Seguin of Greater Chicago believes that all people, regardless of ability, deserve to achieve their potential, advance their independence and act as full members of the community. I'm so thankful for your dedication to our work, which includes employment, community day and residential services, foster care programs, assistive technology and accessibility services, and more, including advocacy efforts through the They Deserve More Coalition.

In November 2021, I moved into the role of President and CEO of UCP Seguin of Greater Chicago. The past year has given me much to be grateful for, including our skilled and dedicated leadership team, our first home specifically for young people with autism and an evening of celebration and support at The Big Event, which brought together 200 guests who raised approximately \$125,000.

This issue of *Spotlight* shares these stories and others—stories of perseverance, belonging, and the remarkable things that can happen when people come together in community to support a worthy cause. In this issue, you'll meet Zenia, Emily, and Sid, who provide safe, stable, and loving homes. You'll also meet our friend Gary, who hosted a bowling event for his friends in order to raise much-needed funds. This issue is jam-packed with pictures from other events and participant outings—I hope you can find a familiar face or two!

Wonderful things happen here every single day, made possible because of the determination of our participants and their amazing network of support, of which you are an essential part. *Thank you.*

With gratitude,



Joseph Mengoni
President/CEO

Front cover photo: David Llamas, Jason L., Maria Alamaras, and Andrea S. are all smiles: Alma D. is ready to party in a festive hat: and Akil C. sneaks a bite of a celebratory cupcake.

Summer Fun at UCP Seguin

Spring and summer bring so many opportunities to come together. Participants here at UCP Seguin take full advantage of the warm weather! The past few months have been full of fun, providing participants with a chance to come together, celebrate diversity, and experience community.



This summer, participants from the Carr Center and the Betty Scheck Center tried out to join their respective basketball teams. Every Friday, our two basketball teams faced off at Veterans Park in Lyons, cheered on by UCP Seguin's own cheerleading squad. Though the basketball season has ended, participants are practicing their swing and perfecting their pitch as the fall softball season begins.

Photos left to right: Logan S. cheers her team to victory and the teams face off in a friendly—but competitive—match.



In the spirit of our Equity Statement (which reads “Be your authentic self, always”), our community came together in June to celebrate and recognize Juneteenth and Pride Month.

Photos left to right: Our Juneteenth gathering at the Levinson Center in Oak Park included art by participants and staff, a cookout, and a program that featured a gospel choir and a fashion show of African-inspired clothing. Our community celebrated Pride Month by participating in the Chicago Pride Parade.

2nd Annual Stroll & Roll

Despite a chill in the air and a drizzle of rain, over 225 UCP Seguin participants, family, and friends joined together at the North Riverside Village Commons to raise over \$14,000 in support of our mission during the 2nd Annual Stroll & Roll on Sunday, June 11th! Everyone had a great time during the Stroll where they received a finish line medal and enjoyed a picnic lunch provided by past UCP Seguin Board Member Terry Carr and current Board Member Terry M. Carr, owners of the Steak 'N Egger restaurants.



Photos top to bottom: Larry M. Team Lacing up for Larry are all smiles during Stroll & Roll: Ruben M. and his team want a “pizza” the Stroll & Roll action: and Jeff R. is unstoppable as he races towards the finish line.

August Advocacy

FROM THE DESK OF LORI OPIELA

AUGUST is...enjoying the excitement of heading back to school, sneaking in a last minute end of summer getaway, enjoying the abundance of garden harvests, and so much more.

For UCP Seguin, August is our month dedicated to advocacy—August Advocacy—when we visit our state and federal elected officials who are back home in their local offices. We reach out to meet face-to-face and, through storytelling, share the key issues facing people with disabilities, their families and the staff who support them—our valuable Direct Support Professional workforce.

Our elected officials may not remember our name, a bill we want supported, or maybe even our organization, but they will remember our stories as they introduce, amend, and pass legislation that impacts the UCP Seguin community.

We need more storytellers! Are you the single mom who does not have a place for her 22 year-old child to go after high school? Does your sibling live at home with your aging parents and you worry about their future? Maybe you are the person with a disability who can't get to work since you don't have staff to assist you to get to work or learn new job skills. Go to ucpsegin.org/get_involved/advocacy or scan the QR code in order to join the UCP Advocacy Network and share your story.

All the best,

Lori Opiela

Lori Opiela
Chief Policy, Research and Advocacy Officer
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We want to hear your story!

Join the UCP Advocacy Network today!



This August, state and federal lawmakers visited UCP Seguin to meet with staff, participants and families to better understand how they can support our important work.

Photos left to right and top to bottom clockwise: State Senator Javier Cervantes visits UCP Seguin. Pictured: Joseph Mengoni, Sen. Javier Cervantes, Emmanuel H., parent Irma Hermosillo, Lori Opiela, Jesse Castro and Laura Anderson: Kathy Hansen, the mother of a participant at UCP Seguin, speaks with Congressman Sean Casten: State Representative Lisa Hernandez visits Seguin Gardens & Gifts: State Representative Jenn Ladisch Douglass chats with Alex Polk, Intermittent Coordinator at UCP Seguin.



Shining a Spotlight on Foster Parents

The McConnell Family



Emily and Sid McConnell had never been foster parents when Trayveon was placed in their care at 11 months old. We met Emily and Sid when they transferred to UCP Seguin in April 2019. Though both Emily and Sid hold demanding, full-time jobs, they quickly took on the roles of medical doctors, caseworkers, early intervention therapists, and advocates in order to care for Trayveon, who has significant medical needs.

Trayveon became a McConnell in March of this year, legally joining the family who has supported him as he's grown. Francee Henley, Case Management Liason at UCP Seguin, shared that Trayveon has the "happiest disposition" and that he frequently pulls Emily and Sid in for a "family hug" so he can embrace both of his parents at once.

Their love for Trayveon extends far beyond their family of three. Emily and Sid have worked to preserve Trayveon's family connections, and they celebrate birthdays, Christmas, and other special occasions with Trayveon's young birth mother, who has now become an honorary McConnell, too.

Emily and Sid are wonderful advocates for their son, who continues to make amazing progress. Trayveon is now able to independently use his wheelchair, and the McConnell family is learning sign language so their family can better communicate.

We know that Trayveon has such a bright future because Emily and Sid have always chosen what's best for him—supporting his medical needs, embracing his birth mother and literally surrounding him with love when he pulls them in for a family hug.

Zenia Vidal



Zenia Vidal, who goes by Sandy, made the decision to become an adult foster parent (AFP) nearly 12 years ago. Zenia is one of 25 AFPs at UCP Seguin, and our adult foster program is just one of the residential options available, all of which are designed to meet the specific needs of each participant.

Yolanda Gardner, Director of Adult Foster Care, shared that Zenia is a great foster parent who "does so many things" for Ken and Jeffrey, the participants in her care. She, like other AFPs, helps with medical appointments and transportation, prepares meals, and plans outings and other activities. "If she sees something they like to do, she's going to make sure they have the opportunity to do it. She's selfless... she's the first one up and the last one to go to bed."

Zenia and her husband Ray work to make sure that "the guys" (as both Zenia and Yolanda call them) are truly at home and a part of their family. They eat meals together, often in their backyard, which is filled with Zenia's lush landscaping. (When they eat indoors, they're surrounded by the fish Ray keeps throughout their home.) The guys are invited to events with Zenia's family, too, like birthday parties and Christmas. "They all love the guys," Zenia shared. "My grandkids, they all love them. My children love them."

Zenia does more than offer a warm, loving home to the guys. As an AFP, she's gone through extensive training so she can offer the right support for the participants. Yolanda said that Zenia is "one of those people who sees the big picture—for [the participants] to be more independent."

FRIENDS HELPING OUT

Gary Bowls Us Over with His Generosity

Gary Alvinito, who was born with cerebral palsy, knows firsthand how important a strong support network can be for people with disabilities because his family, especially his mother Stella, was such an instrumental part of Gary's success.

Gary retired as a statistician and accountant years ago and now spends much of his time with friends at bowling alleys—though he himself gave up bowling in 2011.

A fundraiser benefitting an employee of Wood Dale Bowl inspired Gary to plan a fundraiser of his own. In March, Gary, with the help of his good friends Alicia Giamarusti and Angela Aschoff, brought those friends and others together to fill the Wood Dale Bowl alley's lanes to raise much-needed funds for participants here at UCP Seguin.



Through ticket sales, competitions, an auction and raffle items, Gary and his philanthropic friends raised

\$4,000



Gary is proud to support UCP Seguin because of his personal connection to our mission. Gary intends to make this event an annual affair, and plans are in the works for March 2024.

“ *I'm happy I'm associated with you guys because you have a wonderful organization.* ”

Photos left to right: Gary Alvinito and friends at Wood Dale Bowl, all of the attendees had an unbelieva-bowl time, and a guest peruses a variety of wonderful raffle items.

THE BIG EVENT Makes a Big Difference for People with Disabilities

Nearly 200 people came together in April at the Bridgeport Art Center Sculpture Garden to celebrate the accomplishments of the UCP Seguin community at The Big Event. Emcee Greg Dutra, meteorologist from ABC 7, led an awards ceremony where Representative Jesus “Chuy” Garcia and Senator Richard J. Durbin received the President’s Award, Proviso Township and Proviso Township Mental Health Commission received the Life Without Limits Award, and where two amazing participants, Casey and Jayla, received Shining Star Awards.

After the awards ceremony, guests mingled while playing casino favorites, bidding on silent auction items, participating in raffles, and enjoying delicious food. All told, guests at The Big Event raised nearly \$125,000 for people with disabilities.

Photo top to bottom: Sammy Gutierrez, Joseph Mengoni, Casey M., and Board Vice Chair Mike Maher celebrate Casey’s Shining Star award. Michael Corrigan, Proviso Township Supervisor, accepts the Life Without Limits award.



Generosity is Par for the Course at the LIFE WITHOUT LIMITS CLASSIC

This August, 115 golfers hit the links at our 3rd Annual Life Without Limits Classic held at Riverside Golf Club. After golf, guests gathered on the patio in the perfect weather to enjoy dinner, a silent auction and a spirited live auction. Awards were given for the longest drive, highest score, and even the craziest golf pants (won by UCP Seguin’s own Richard Brown, who attended the event in vibrant red-and-blue argyle). The foursome from Alden Network took home the top prize after 18 holes of skillful play. Sponsors, golfers, and guests raised over \$100,000 in support of UCP Seguin’s mission.

Photo: The foursome from Alden Network takes home the top prize.



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Share Warmth This Season!

Every year, UCP Seguin ensures that everyone served by our agency has a gift to open on Christmas morning. The more than 125 individuals on the Secret Santa list do not receive Christmas gifts from family or friends. These gifts are donated by volunteers from our wonderful staff and other community members.



Scan The QR Code to
**Become a
Secret Santa!**

