

Ability in Action: How UCP Central PA Is Reimagining Inclusion, Independence, and Opportunity Across Pennsylvania

DECEMBER 12, 2025



For more than seventy years, [UCP Central PA](#) has lived one simple belief: every person has abilities worth celebrating and a future worth investing in.

What began in 1953 as a therapeutic clinic for children with Cerebral Palsy has grown into one of Central Pennsylvania's most innovative disability service organizations. Today, its services span employment, assistive technology, independent living,

residential services, early intervention, family support services, advocacy, and more, each one designed to open doors that society too often feels are better left closed.

Inclusive Employment That Changes Lives

Across the region, thousands of Pennsylvanians are living more meaningful, independent lives because UCP Central PA meets them where they are and supports them in reaching their goals.

And for many, that journey begins with the chance to work.

Just ask Molly Hosey, who lives with an intellectual disability. After years working in retail, Molly longed for a job that felt more purposeful.

With help from UCP Central PA's Employment Services, Molly discovered her calling as a childcare worker at [Inspiration Station Early Learning Center](#), where she now spends her days nurturing infants in the "Snuggles" room. Her compassion and dependability have made her an essential member of the team, and a shining example of what happens when inclusion meets opportunity.

"UCP Central PA helped me find a job that fits who I am," Molly said. "I feel needed, I feel respected, and I am part of something that really matters. This is the first time I've ever loved going to work, and it has changed my life."

Her impact is easy to see, said [Jennifer Peck](#), Owner and Director of Inspiration Station. "Molly's cheerful spirit shines with the children, and she brings positivity to her team every day," Peck said. "She embraces feedback, continues to grow, and is a reliable team member who demonstrates our core values."

Behind Molly's success is the steady support of UCP Employment Specialist **Shannon Batchelor**, who helped her prepare for interviews, understand job expectations, and build confidence.

"Molly already had the ability, the heart and the work ethic," Batchelor said. "She just needed someone to help her take that next step."

Today, Molly is one of 52 individuals UCP Central PA is currently supporting in meaningful, competitive employment across 33 local businesses, including childcare, retail, hospitality, food service, and more. These partnerships are advancing Pennsylvania's Employment 1st initiative and strengthening workplaces across the region, prioritizing ability over disability.

“When people’s abilities are recognized, everyone benefits,” said **Bridget Pugh**, Senior Director of Operations at UCP Central PA. “This work is about building stronger workplaces and stronger communities. When you pair someone’s natural ability with the right opportunity, it transforms not just their life, but the workplace around them.”

Molly is living proof of that transformation. She found a job she loves, a team that values her, and a place where her abilities shine.



Leighton with her dad reacts to bubbles

Assistive Technology Is Making the Impossible Possible Across Pennsylvania

For many individuals with disabilities, independence hinges on access to the right tools. That is why [assistive technology \(AT\)](#) is not an accessory at UCP Central PA; it is a foundation.

“For most people, technology is a convenience,” said [Marci Walborn](#), Director of Childhood and Ancillary Services at UCP Central PA. “For the people we support, it is freedom. It is communication. It is possibility.”

One of UCP’s most popular programs, [Changing Hands](#), refurbishes donated equipment, from walkers and adaptive toys to power wheelchairs and communication systems, and redistributes them free of charge to anyone who needs them.

One recent recipient, Max, who has Cerebral Palsy and cortical visual impairment, received a tandem bike worth eight thousand dollars.

For Max, biking is both a physical and a social exercise. Unfortunately, he recently outgrew the adaptive bike he had been using for years. Both Max’s independence and his social life were hindered by not having an appropriately sized bike... until he connected with Changing Hands. According to Mike, Max’s father, “The tandem bike has been a game-changer for Max. Not only is he able to enjoy group rides again, but the design of the bike allows Max to have a better workout, and a safer and more exciting experience.”

UCP’s innovative Independent Living Technology (ILT) service uses remote monitoring tools to help older adults and people with disabilities live safely in their own apartments rather than restrictive environments.

The goal is simple: more independence, more dignity, and more choice.

UCP’s two Assistive Technology Lending Libraries allow Pennsylvanians to borrow devices and test what works before committing to a long-term purchase.

“These lending libraries make an enormous difference for families exploring assistive technology,” Walborn said. “Being able to try devices at home, at school, at work, or in the community helps families see what truly works. The right device can open doors, but it is never one size fits all.”

This commitment to hands-on, person-centered technology extends beyond lending devices.

UCP Central PA's recent collaboration with Messiah University's Master of Occupational Therapy program led to a breakthrough: a workshop where 3D printed adaptive switches allowed infants to activate toys on their own for the first time.

"When those little kids pressed the switch and saw the toy light up," Walborn said, "the room erupted in laughter. That moment, that spark, is what assistive technology is all about."

UCP Central PA is also in the process of obtaining SHIFT Certification, a national accreditation that trains organizations to integrate technology into all levels of support. As an Assistive Technology Resource Center for the Central Region of Pennsylvania, some of UCP's AT services are supported by funding from TechOWL.



Nate with parents at Pathways graduation

Pathways Academy: A Road to Independence

Just as technology opens doors, UCP Central PA's independent living programs help people walk through those doors with confidence.

One of the most transformative of these is Pathways Academy, UCP Central PA's innovative residential learning environment designed to help adults build the skills they need to live independently. Residents spend nine to eighteen months practicing real life skills such as budgeting, cooking, cleaning, transportation, and health management. Staff are there to teach, not do, and support gradually decreases as residents gain confidence and independence.

For Nate, Pathways Academy was the turning point he had been waiting for.

He became one of the first residents back in March of 2014. He stepped out of his father's truck, looked up at the house, and said: "It's taken me 31 years to get here, but I made it."

Fifteen months later, he graduated and moved into his own apartment in downtown Carlisle, where he still lives today.

To date, twenty graduates have moved into their own homes or apartments, each following a path shaped by their own goals and strengths.

Nate often reflects on how far he has come since that first day.

"To be honest, I thought I would be living with my parents the rest of my life. There was nothing I wanted more than to live independently, but when it hadn't happened by the time I was 30, I figured it never would. Then we learned about Pathways Academy. And the rest is history."

Community Inclusion in Action: Advocacy, Volunteering, and Engagement

Inclusion at UCP Central PA is not just about the services they offer, it is also a philosophy that extends to every part of community life.

UCP organizes quarterly legislative visits where individuals from day and residential programs share baked cookies, artwork, or plants they have grown. These moments remind lawmakers that their decisions have real, human consequences.

"Putting a face and a story to policy matters," Pugh said. "Our participants are powerful advocates for inclusion and advancing access to life-changing services."

Individuals also participate in letter writing campaigns, legislative rallies, and social media advocacy, ensuring their voices are heard throughout the state.

Across Central Pennsylvania, UCP participants also volunteer at local nonprofits including food banks, animal rescues, community gardens, thrift shops, and more.

“The community sees their kindness, their dedication, their heart,” Pugh said. “And our participants gain pride, purpose, and connection.”

A Future Built on Ability

Across Central Pennsylvania, UCP is rewriting what inclusion looks like in workplaces, in homes, in classrooms, and in communities.

“People often underestimate what individuals with disabilities can do,” Pugh said. “But when you remove barriers and provide the right support, their abilities shine. We see it every day.”

For Molly, that ability looks like a purposeful job in a childcare center.

For Max, it looks like freedom on a tandem bike.

For Nate, it looks like a front door with his own name on the mailbox.

These stories, and thousands more, prove the same truth: When people with disabilities have the tools, trust, and opportunity to thrive, entire communities grow stronger.

UCP Central PA is not just opening doors, it’s building a world where those doors will remain open.

<https://www.citybiz.co/article/783590/ability-in-action-how-ucp-central-pa-is-reimagining-inclusion-independence-and-opportunity-across-pennsylvania/>