

ABILITY MATTERS

Empowering People Living with Disabilities

June 2020



SHE'S WALKING!

Something very special happened during a physical therapy session at United Ability: **Opal took her first steps.** "It was a truly magical moment. **To see your child accomplish a goal that she has worked so hard to attain is...well, there aren't words,**" said MaireJo Padgett, Opal's mom.

United Ability has been part of the Padgett's life since the very beginning of Opal's journey that began in a local NICU. She was diagnosed with a rare congenital brain condition known as Dandy-Walker Malformation as well as hydrocephalus, and an uncommon bone condition called Cleidocranial Dysplasia. During the first five years of Opal's life, she endured fifteen major medical procedures, three of which were emergency brain surgeries. Thanks to you, United Ability's staff was there every step of the way providing support and encouragement.

Opal's first brain surgery occurred at nine weeks of age when she developed hydrocephalus. It was just one week later that Opal began receiving Early Intervention services from United Ability — **that's how important early intervention is!** United Ability CEO, Dr. Gary Edwards has for decades proclaimed that **"babies can't wait!"** Opal's journey validates that passionate mantra.

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"Every parent wants the best for their child, and for Opal, that is United Ability."

– MaireJo Padgett



**UNITED
ABILITY**

72 Years of Serving our Greater Community

OPAL *Continued from page 1*

From that day to age three, she received Early Intervention services that included physical, occupational, speech-language therapies, and service coordination. Upon aging out of the program, Opal began receiving outpatient physical and occupational therapy at the United Ability Clinic.

She is currently a student in the inclusive Hand In Hand Early Learning Program where she receives therapy sessions right in her own classroom. Opal is also a patient of Dr. Charlie Law in our Ability Clinic.

Opal's family has participated in the Parents As Teachers, now First Teacher Home Visiting Program, for many years and found it to be very beneficial and educational in teaching and supporting the entire family to care for Opal.

Opal's mom states, **"We could not be more grateful for all the services and care United Ability has provided our daughter.** Opal's therapists are a part of our family now. They have visited us in the hospital, taught us how to care for her mobility and feeding needs, encouraged me on rough days, and celebrated Opal's victories right alongside her."

Opal would not be where she is today if it weren't for the loving care provided by United Ability **"Every parent wants the best for their child, and for Opal, that is United Ability,"** said MaireJo Padgett.

Your support helps make it all possible. Thank you!



Opal is loving her independence on our fully-accessible playground.

SAVE THE DATE – AUGUST 29, 2020

JOURNEY of HOPE 2020 "AT HOME"

HONORING THE STAFF OF UNITED ABILITY

This year, join us virtually from anywhere and show your support!

Presented by Medical Properties Trust

Hope Endures online campaign sponsored by Zuriel Technology Group

Visit www.unitedability.org/journeyofhope for details, sponsorships and updates or contact Alison Berman at 205.944.3907 / aberman@unitedability.org.



BELINDA IS LIVING HER DREAMS

Belinda Dorough is a strong, determined woman with a sparkling personality. It's no surprise that she has a job she loves, a man she adores, and a life she lives to its fullest. What you might find surprising is that she has cerebral palsy.

Belinda uses a powered wheelchair for mobility, controlling its movement with her head. To communicate with others, she relies on an assistive device, and she operates it with her foot. **Through therapy and enrichment sessions at United Ability, Belinda has gained the tools and freedom to shine,** sharing her outgoing personality with others. Just ask the Belk customers she has greeted for the past 12 years.

Belinda's level of confidence and independence increased dramatically after she connected with United Ability 28 years ago. And **your support of our Adult Day program made it possible.**

Enter Daniel Creech, who also has cerebral palsy and is the love of Belinda's life. Like Belinda, Daniel uses a powered

wheelchair controlled by head movement. Daniel also uses a device to communicate with others. He controls his device, which speaks for him, using his eyes. Talk about technology! Daniel puts his skills in use working as a greeter at United Ability and for its Community Integration Academy.

People with disabilities have the same wants and desires as everyone else. For Belinda and Daniel, falling in love was inevitable.

Daniel proposed to Belinda using his communication device. She said "yes," and they have been a happy couple for over 4 years. With the help of numerous advocates, Belinda and Daniel recently were able to secure a home together.

Moving in together was a long, very challenging process. This experience spurred Belinda to want to educate others with disabilities about their rights. She entered the Miss Wheelchair Alabama competition. More than a pageant, the program's mission is to provide an opportunity for women who use wheelchairs to advocate for others with disabilities.

Belinda spoke passionately about freedom for people with disabilities to get married, live in their own home, and have all the rights that every other married couple enjoys.

Her activism and speech earned her second place in the competition. With that win, to bolster her determination, and armed with and a message to share, Belinda continues to be a vocal advocate for the rights of people with disabilities.



With their anniversary on the horizon, Belinda and Daniel are grateful for all you have done to help them fulfill their dreams. Thank you for your partnership!



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EVERY DAY IS PERFECT

Every day upon arrival, Eric makes the rounds in United Ability's Adult Day program. He stops by each office and greets staff by name using his communication device. Before he even rounds the corner, you know he's coming. It's like clockwork, and you just feel his happy presence!

Eric has been a part of the United Ability family for 18 years, and if you ask the staff to describe Eric using one word, you will hear, "servant." Seeking out ways to make people's lives better captures Eric's true essence.



Always eager to expand his vocabulary, Eric works tirelessly during speech therapy.

Through his long-time work with United Ability's speech therapy team, Eric has developed a wide range of communication skills to support his limited speech. He is often overheard greeting guests who tour, playfully teasing his peers, and encouraging others to stay on task.

His mother is extremely thankful for the device and wishes that it had been available to Eric throughout his childhood. She **considers this technology to be life-changing** because it gives him a voice. Recently at his parents' anniversary party, Eric brought tears to the eyes of all when he gave a moving speech using his communication device.

Eric is employed in the vocational area at United Ability and attends every Community Outing offered. Because of YOU, our adult participants enjoyed over 1,300 outings last year to places like the Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham Barons games, and more. Eric and his friends love the outings that connect them to the community.

Eric's love of people and life also extends outside the doors of United Ability. Eric serves as an usher at his church, where he arrives early to help set up and pass out programs. He often stays late to help clean up.

When asked what United Ability means to him, Eric grabbed his communication device. He went to the "people" page on his device and named every person he could think of, also expressing pride about his job at United Ability helping to shred documents.

He then burst out in song. For Eric, it was **just another perfect day at United Ability.**



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OUR MISSION

United Ability provides innovative services connecting people with disabilities to their communities and empowering individuals to live full and meaningful lives.

OUR VISION

United Ability envisions a world where disability is neither defining nor limiting.

GIVE FOR ABILITY



Every gift you make to United Ability brings poss-Ability. The possibility of a toddler taking steps never imagined... of a child unable to speak finding his or her voice... of a young adult embracing a second chance at life through physical medicine and therapy... and more. Your support enables individuals not just to dream, but to dream BIG.

With help from friends like you, more than 5700 individuals in our community received services from United Ability last year. Thank you! With your ongoing support, the possibilities are endless.

When you send a gift today of \$35 or more, ask for our 2020 United Ability t-shirt. A very popular item, the t-shirt will demonstrate your commitment to helping neighbors with disabilities. Please send your generous gift today!



You can **Enable, Empower, Educate, and Encourage** people with disabilities by wearing the 2020 United Ability t-shirt. Get your shirt **FREE** with a donation of \$35 or more. Your donation and **reply must be received by July 6, 2020.** Allow 6 weeks for delivery.