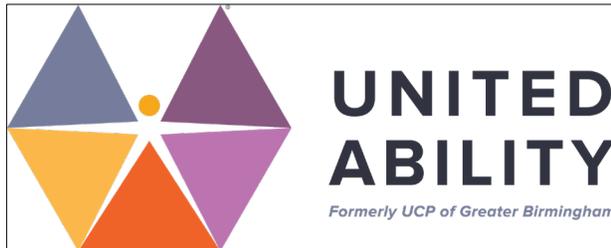




LEADERSHIP PROFILE



Chief Executive Officer
United Ability
Birmingham, AL

“Empowering people living with disabilities”

THE CONTEXT

Since 1948, the staff and supporters of [United Ability](#) have provided innovative services that connect people with disabilities to their communities and empower individuals to live full lives. Its state-of-the-art programs and campus of purpose-built facilities are designed to promote self-reliance, introduce choices and improve the quality of life for children and adults with disabilities.

The largest and most comprehensive agency of its kind in Alabama and a leader in the field nationally, United Ability serves more than 5700 children and adults each year.¹ What brings them to UA may differ—cerebral palsy, spina bifida, autism, Down Syndrome, Rett Syndrome, limb loss/deficiency, closed head injuries, a variety of intellectual and developmental disabilities and more—but all find there a dedicated and caring team informed by a common vision:

“A world where disability is neither defining nor limiting.”

¹ Two anecdotal examples of the unmet need: “There are over 700 individuals with disabilities on the waiting list in Jefferson County alone,” and “80% of the school-aged children who need our services are not getting them today.”

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In the midst of a summer already made exceedingly challenging by Covid-19, United Ability had to face the loss of its beloved leader of 38 years, Dr. Gary Edwards, who died in early June. His untimely death would have been a shock regardless, but the separations imposed by the pandemic made the loss even harder for staff and supporters to process, as normal interactions had already been disrupted for so many months.

Within a few weeks, United Ability's Board of Directors announced the appointment of Lee Yount as Interim CEO. Ms. Yount, a respected colleague and professional peer of Dr. Edwards for many years, had recently retired after four decades as CEO of [Glenwood](#), a Birmingham-based leader in autism and behavioral health programming. With United Ability in such excellent hands, the Board has launched the search for a permanent Chief Executive Officer.

"He treated us like the experts we are."
--A long-time UA manager,
speaking of the late Dr. Gary Edwards

THE ORGANIZATION

Now in its eighth decade, United Ability is both mature and innovative, committed to supporting the fullest lives possible for the children and adults it serves. Known for many years as United Cerebral Palsy of Greater Birmingham, in 2017 the organization adopted a new name, United Ability, reflecting the organization's expanded focus.

United Ability's ten distinct programs are renowned across the state and beyond for their effectiveness, and the range of services is extensive. A fuller summary is available [online](#), but here are some highlights from last year:

- Nearly 800 infants, toddlers and families benefitted from over 8000 therapy and special instruction sessions in home, day care and community settings, all at no cost to the families ([Hand in Hand Early Intervention](#))
- Over 200 children, aged six weeks to five years, were served in UA's award-winning, NAECY-accredited inclusive child development environment ([Hand in Hand Early Learning Program](#))
- 55 families received financial assistance to cover the cost of a caregiver while they took a break from the rigors of caring for children with disabilities ([Hearts Respite](#))



- Over 1500 children and adults received direct medical services, either on the main campus in Birmingham or at one of UA's ten satellite clinics across the state ([Ability Clinic](#))
- Over 1200 adults were enrolled in UA's employment programs, and over 800 high school students engaged in pre-employment classroom training ([United Ability Enterprises](#))
- UA staff conducted nearly 5000 therapy sessions, and over 400 patients received speech, physical or occupational therapy services ([Outpatient Therapy](#))
- 955 teachers in childcare settings received training and support in providing quality services to children with special needs. 29 programs reported being more prepared to accept more children with special needs while 61 daycares received ongoing training and support in servicing children with special needs ([Childcare Enhancement with a Purpose](#))
- Some 170 adults received daily life enrichment training, therapy, work skills training and employment ([LINCPoint Adult Day Program](#))
- Just under 1000 teachers received training and support in childcare settings ([Childcare Enhancement with a Purpose](#))
- 215 children, ages birth to five, and their family members received home-based training and support to improve parenting skills and strengthen relationships within the family and community ([First Teacher Home Visiting Program](#))



**LINCPoint,
UA's Adult Day Center**

The statistics are impressive, but more impressive is the care and compassion with which UA staff render these services. No one forgets these are people, not just data points.

Providing United Ability's comprehensive range of services is a full-time staff of about 185, down only slightly because of the pandemic. Collectively, the staff is a healthy mix of highly tenured leaders and relatively newer members of the organization. UA benefits from associations with several colleges and universities, sources of early-career professionals on normal rotations.

The budget for fiscal 2021 is about \$12 million, consistent with 2019 and 2020 performance. Revenues from state and federal sources make up about half the total. Additionally, UA is the beneficiary of an irrevocable perpetual trust that in recent years has provided just over \$1 million annually. Consolidated

audited financials for FY 2019 (available [here](#)) show net assets just under \$43 million, and there is essentially no debt.²

In short, revenues are stable, and the balance sheet is strong. The long-term impact of the pandemic is still being assessed, but a small reduction in force earlier this year and careful stewardship of the assets over time have ensured UA's ability to weather the current crisis with relatively little financial disruption.

United Ability is governed by a volunteer board of 26, comprising a mix of community leaders with decades of service and a regular influx of new enthusiasts. Many board members first encountered United Ability because a family member or friend benefitted from its services. Board members' regard for the organization may have been born from individual experience, but their commitment is informed by UA's impact on thousands of individuals and families.

United Ability also profits from active participation by members of the 24-person Junior Board. Among other roles, the Junior Board hosts two signature fundraising events each year while spreading awareness of UA's services and impact.

Additional support is provided by the United Ability Foundation, a supporting organization for estate planning and endowments. Most of UAF's 14 board members are former United Ability board chairs or board members.

The CEO search is being led by a ten-person committee consisting of current and former board members, an officer of the Junior Board and a senior member of the UA leadership team. Collectively, they represent a variety of roles and perspectives, but they share a common passion for the mission.

In addition to its [website](#), United Ability maintains an active presence



² Per FASB regulations, United Ability must show the market value of its irrevocable beneficial interest in the perpetual trust as an asset, even though it will never realize its interest in the trust's principal assets. The value of UA's interest at year-end 2019 was \$25.5 million.

on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#); visit all four to get a full feel for the organization. (One example: [“Why we do what we do,”](#) a short video posted just this month, hints at the special joy from sharing first sounds and first steps.)

THE MANDATE

The next CEO of United Ability will join a highly respected and solidly resourced nonprofit with seven decades of success to its credit, yet one that is still rebounding from the twin developments of the pandemic’s months-long service disruptions and the CEO’s passing.

The death of a beloved leader in the midst of the pandemic could have decimated a less healthy organization, but at United Ability it unleashed a spirit of resiliency, determination and pride that is truly extraordinary. There may be issues to resolve, grief to process and hurdles to overcome, but the heart of the organization is solid, and the people who do the work every day continue to do so with care, gusto, determination and pride.

For the next CEO, there are five overlapping priorities of special interest to the board:

- 1. Relationships.** Relationships are key to United Ability’s effectiveness and support, and the ease with which the CEO cultivates and strengthens them, both internally and externally, will be an important determinant factor in the CEO’s overall impact. Credibility with employees, supporters, government agencies, program partners and families of program participants will always be important to the agency’s success, but it is especially so as United Ability emerges from the unique challenges of 2020.
- 2. Leadership, management and organizational development.** More than just the face of United Ability, the CEO must model the principals of leadership, management and organizational development that an organization of UA’s scale and aspirations deserves.

In creative collaboration with the board, the leadership team and other stakeholders as appropriate, the CEO must refine the strategy, align the resources and empower the staff to produce the desired results while



optimizing the impact for program participants and advancing the reputation for excellence United Ability has honed over the decades.

The “why” of UA’s work is firm, but the “how” continues to evolve, informed by UA’s own experience, developments in the field, advances in technology, and shifts in government funding. Accordingly, the CEO must foster an atmosphere in which curiosity is honored, continuous improvement is supported, and creative solutions are embraced. Such an approach requires awareness of market needs, the financial resources to take smart risks, and the occasional willingness to say no, all part of the new CEO’s mandate.



The Multisensory Environment (MSE) Room, used in some 2000 outpatient therapy sessions last year

3. Resource development, public relations and communications. By definition, UA’s CEO is the mission’s most visible champion. S/he need not be at the center of every message or meeting, but s/he must be a thoughtful and compelling advocate for the cause, ensuring that resource development, public relations and communications efforts are strategic, targeted and effective. Directly and through others, the CEO must create and capitalize on material opportunities for increased awareness and support. UA’s friends are numerous and passionate, but too many potential friends have yet to hear the story.

4. Public policy and advocacy. A dynamic approach to public policy and advocacy is essential, in part because of the significant role the state plays in UA’s funding. Additionally, there are extensive opportunities to advocate for support—legislative, operational, financial, programmatic—on behalf of individuals with disabilities and their families.

5. Board engagement. The board/CEO dynamic is of special interest, as both the board and UA’s next CEO will be new to this particular relationship, with each exploring how best to support the other’s needs for information, candor, autonomy and impact.

Success will depend in part on an effective working partnership, in which challenges are discussed freely, solutions are explored thoughtfully, and strategies are assessed respectfully—even as boundaries between

governance and management continue to evolve from historic patterns to best practices.

There are other pressing issues, of course, such as expanding possibilities in telehealth and telemedicine, the need for succession planning, and the field’s shift from congregate settings. All call for a CEO equally attentive to current needs and future opportunities, geared to enhancing connections with community for people with disabilities and empowering them to live full and meaningful lives.

THE RELATIONSHIPS

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>The CEO reports to</p> | <p>United Ability’s Board of Directors</p> |
| <p>And manages an organization of some 185 employees through four direct reports:</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Operating Officer • Chief Development Officer • Chief Financial Officer • Chief Medical Officer (who also has dotted-line relationship to the COO) |
| <p>While nurturing key relationships with</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UA’s own staff • Diverse sets of donors, volunteers and community groups • An extensive array of funders, partners and stakeholders at national, regional, state and local levels, particularly including relevant state legislators and government departments • Peer leaders and organizations in UA’s footprint and beyond • Families of UA’s students and program participants |



THE LOCATION

United Ability's purpose-built campus is off Lakeshore Parkway, a few miles southwest of downtown Birmingham, Alabama.

With more than one million residents, greater Birmingham is Alabama's largest metro area. The Cradle of the American Civil Rights Movement, the metro area is home to six major academic institutions, two important automobile manufacturing plants, and a host of standard-setting cultural, civic and athletic resources, including the [Southeastern Conference](#).

Of special relevance to United Ability, Birmingham is also home to an array of first-tier medical and health-related nonprofits, such as the [UAB Health System](#) and its [School of Dentistry](#), [Children's of Alabama](#), [Lakeshore Foundation](#), [Glenwood](#) and [Children's Harbor](#).

Birmingham boasts more green space per capita than any other US city, and its residents are proud of the local farms and gardens, which in turn have helped Birmingham become known as a magnet for foodies. The area has received substantial publicity for its restaurants and chefs (one example [here](#)).



Birmingham has earned a national reputation as one of America's "[most exciting food cities](#)"

A fuller view of Birmingham, its attractions and its history can be gleaned from such sites as [InBirmingham](#), the [Birmingham Business Alliance](#), and [Wikipedia](#).

THE CANDIDATE

United Ability is an unusually complex organization, and it has just concluded an unusually stressful year.³ Perhaps more than at most nonprofits, therefore, the next CEO must respect both the science and the soul behind the organization's work, combining a compassionate heart with disciplined judgment.

³ United Ability's fiscal year ends on September 30.

UA has long taken a holistic approach to its mission—leaving no one behind, doing what it takes to be of service to those in need—and thus a CEO with a holistic approach to management will be well-received. The board does not require the next CEO to be a subject-matter expert, although such could be additive, but a demonstrated respect for people with disabilities and for the special challenges they and their families face is essential. In short, UA seeks an advocate for the population it serves—and for those providing the service.

Among other assets, the search committee will be seeking the best possible combination of the following experiences, values and characteristics:

Competence: The most appealing candidate will be

- An experienced nonprofit executive or board leader with the breadth and depth of experience to succeed an iconic CEO under unusually challenging circumstances
- Financially savvy, politically astute, and both tenacious and resilient in pursuit of bold goals
- A leader accustomed to developing strategy, setting clear priorities, delegating with confidence and guiding investments in people and systems
- A board-savvy executive with the experience and maturity to lead the organization through major transitions; someone who embraces best practices in governance and management
- Broadly experienced in multiple functions central to a nonprofit's success, such as board development, fundraising, marketing, fiscal management, and the development of people and teams. Experience gained within complex, multifaceted operating environments would be especially additive
- A coalition-builder for whom relationships and community connections are natural assets; a leader whose influence extends well beyond the walls of his or her current organization
- A persuasive communicator at ease as UA's chief champion in multiple contexts, capitalizing on diverse opportunities and media to reach diverse audiences
- An innovative leader with the vision to inspire a bold future, the courage to pursue that future, and the financial and operational skills to achieve it.



Culture: The ideal candidates will demonstrate

- Deep affinity for United Ability’s work, its history and its opportunities, whether informed by professional engagement or personal experience
- A passion for service to others and an unwavering commitment to excellence
- An energizing, inspiring management style: a self-aware and self-directed leader
- Comfort inviting broad input on key decisions combined with the confidence to make timely decisions
- The ability to meet staff and stakeholders where they are, honoring the great work already being done while embracing an even more robust future
- The business and people savvy to run a major nonprofit
- A motivating approach to leadership that energizes people dealing with some of life’s toughest issues as well as the supporters who make the work possible

For potential consideration or to suggest a prospect, please click
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or call

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Messages left at our main number, 404-BoardWalk (404-262-7392),
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