

UCP Kids – Helping Children Reach New Heights!

David enjoyed watching basketball on television and understood the basic rules of the game and, therefore, it made sense to find an activity that somehow related to basketball. We spoke to a director of a local recreation club, who reiterated about “special programs for kids like David.” But, after meeting with us and learning more about UCP Kids, he agreed to meet David and his family. David was overwhelmed and nervous as his mother pushed his wheelchair into the club for the first time. The director reassured David that he would soon feel at ease and invited David to meet the players on the team. The director took the time to get to know David and his mother, as well as presented opportunities for the other members to interact with David. David became the team manager and scorekeeper and sat on the bench with the team. He was *one of the guys*. He had a role to fill – one that matched his interest. The season lasted six weeks. At the last game, David received a shirt and a trophy. He cried tears of joy when the team invited him onto the floor to be recognized. The director encouraged David to come back. David’s teammates and the staff learned that everyone can be part of a team, even if they do not have fully developed skills. This experience was not only beneficial to David and his family, but also to the staff and other members of the club.



Cindy is a delightful little girl. She wanted to participate in a dance class, however, she also has two brothers and thought she might like to try out some sports, as well. We decided to initially start with dance, and Cindy became involved with a dance program taught by a wonderful instructor who helped Cindy shine in the class. The instructor capitalized on Cindy’s strengths, often asking her to demonstrate particular moves to the other girls in the class. Cindy had a great time in the dance class. She then became involved in a recreation program at a local university, where graduate students offer sports instruction to children as a part of their studies. Cindy had the opportunity to swim, play basketball, do obstacle courses, and participate in other sports-related activities. As a result of Cindy’s participation, the staff of the program ultimately participated in a training offered by UCP Kids, which focuses on friendship facilitation, adapting activities and a variety of other topics. “We are going to make changes to better adapt the program for the kids because of the training you provided to us,” stated the program director. Cindy’s participation paved the way for positive changes to the program that will benefit other children who participate into the future.



Tommy loves the game of baseball. He can tell you anything you want to know about the Pittsburgh Pirates™, including every player’s name, average, position and the town where they lived before coming to Pittsburgh! But due to the competitive nature of high school sports, Tommy preferred not to physically participate on a team. UCP Kids explored options with Tommy and his mother, including the possibility of him helping out in some way with his high school team. Tommy’s mother gave us permission to speak with his teacher to get her thoughts on the subject and inquire about Tommy’s relationships at school. After speaking on several occasions with the teacher and discussing various options, it was time to meet with the IEP team. We suggested that Tommy could either be the student manager and/or help with the stats. Everyone on the IEP team agreed that with their support and the coach’s support, this would be great for Tommy. Tommy’s teacher has gone above and beyond her job of teacher. She has worked with the coach to determine expectations, discuss Tommy helping with equipment, and scheduling when Tommy will submit the stats books. Tommy’s teacher has been the driving force behind him becoming involved in a school-based activity that centers around his true passion. It has been a wonderful opportunity for him to explore career interests and expand his social skills.



Anthony is a teenager who wanted to participate in a fun activity with other teens. He was somewhat interested in sports, but not enough to solely want to pursue a particular sport. It was decided that he would attend a youth group held at a local community center. This would give Anthony the opportunity to interact



not only with teens from his own school who attended the group, but also with teens from other surrounding school districts. The teens gather to play basketball, foosball, air hockey and talk about issues facing today's teenagers. They also enjoy listening to a live band, dancing, and socializing at the center's café, where they can buy sodas and snacks. The first time Anthony attended the group, the director introduced him to two other boys who attend Anthony's school. The boys immediately began "shooting hoops" and having a good time. Anthony doesn't like very loud noises, so when the band began to play, it proved to be a bit overwhelming for him. But the program director and the two friends Anthony had made assured him that it wasn't a big deal if he didn't want to listen to the

band, that he could simply go into another room and hang out, which is what Anthony did, along with his new friends. Anthony began participating in the group in early 2004 and continues to attend today. He even goes to listen to the band for short periods of time!

Brandon loved playing a computer baseball game. He and his dad would play the game and his dad would teach him baseball terminology and rules. Therefore, we decided to get Brandon involved in an activity that had to do with baseball, as he would already be familiar with many of the necessary skills. Brandon's family signed him up for whiffle ball at a community center. We met with the coaches, shared Brandon's enthusiasm for the game and discussed some adaptations that would be necessary for Brandon. The coaches felt certain that, because Brandon already knew some terminology and rules, that he would probably already be one step ahead of the other kids! Brandon had a lot of anxiety on the first day of practice, but he took his place in the outfield where the coach asked him to play third base. Brandon did a super job chasing down balls in the outfield! And when batters made their way to third base, they and Brandon would "strike up" a conversation while waiting for the next batter. At the second game, Brandon was thrilled to see another boy from his class at school join the team! Brandon had a great experience in whiffle ball. After that, Brandon attended a summer camp where his mother reported that he seemed to have a lot more confidence in initiating interactions with the other kids. Brandon is now enjoying a scouting program. UCP Kids was a good learning experience for the whole family, and Brandon's parents plan to continue getting Brandon involved in their community, using the strategies they learned from UCP Kids.



Lauren was a fourteen-year-old girl when we met her who wanted nothing more than to be a babysitter. She loved being around young children, and it was her goal to work at a preschool someday. UCP Kids began to search for a volunteer opportunity in Lauren's community that would not only allow her to work with young children, but also give her the opportunity to interact with her peers. With the help of UCP Kids, Lauren began to volunteer as a helper in a Sunday School class at a church near her home. As it turned out, two of the other teenage volunteers at the church attended school with Lauren. After a couple of months of volunteering with Lauren, the two girls suggested that she start coming to the youth group offered at the church. Lauren was very nervous about going to the youth program, but the two girls that she volunteered with introduced her to other kids, and Lauren soon felt like part of the group! Not only did Lauren have the opportunity to make friends, but she also was able to hone her babysitting skills, possibly paving the way for a future career.



Patrick is a sweet boy who likes swimming, riding the school bus, and crafts. Patrick's mother very much wanted him to attend a summer camp in their community, but she was instead referred to a segregated camp for children with disabilities outside of the community. After UCP Kids met with the summer camp director, it was decided that Patrick would indeed attend the camp in his own community. UCP Kids attended the camp's staff training to be certain that everyone was knowledgeable and comfortable and that Patrick would be fully included in the camp. Patrick has a knack for remembering names, so by the second week of camp, he knew everybody and everybody knew him! In particular, two of the other campers befriended Patrick and made sure that he participated in activities to the level that he could or wished to participate. Patrick enjoyed swimming, crafts and games at the camp with other kids from his community and school. He particularly enjoyed music time and would come home singing camp songs. The camp leaders shared that "having Patrick at camp was good for everyone!"



Christopher is a very personable and easygoing child who is always smiling. He loves the water and his #1 interest is swimming. Christopher uses a wheelchair, but we did not want that to deter him from becoming involved in an activity that he loved. We had to find a swimming pool that was close to home, fully accessible and a program that would have someone in the water with Christopher at all times. We ultimately enrolled Christopher at a recreation center that held swim lessons at a hotel by Christopher's home. We not only talked with the director of the recreation center, but we also met with the owner of the hotel to make sure everything was in order. Christopher started classes and everything was great the first week. The instructors were very willing to do whatever was needed to help Christopher in the pool. However, Weeks 2 and 3 were more challenging, as some of the instructors from Week 1 were absent. We knew that for this to be a pleasant experience for Christopher, he needed to have the same person work with him every week. UCP Kids worked with a local university to identify a student majoring in special education who would be willing to volunteer to work with Christopher over the course of 6 weeks. The volunteer did a great job and, after receiving guidance from UCP Kids on facilitating friendships, she not only helped Christopher with swimming techniques, but also made sure he was interacting with the other children. In the beginning, Christopher did not want to get splashed, but by the end of the classes, he was the one doing most of the splashing!



Elizabeth is a sweet, shy little girl who was interested in dance and gymnastics. After exploring various gymnastics programs in the area, we were able to find a program that focused on building and refining motor, communication, and social skills, through singing and movement. Elizabeth and her instructor formed a very special bond, and Elizabeth seemed to "come out of her shell" while at the program. Not only was Elizabeth accepted by the instructor of the class, but because of the example set by those in charge, she was also embraced by the other children and their families, and even scheduled play dates outside of the program with children from her class. The staff of the program participated in UCP Kids' training which covered topics of inclusion and adapting activities. Since forging a lasting relationship with UCP Kids, the director of the program wants to continue to do trainings as new staff are hired and even has a "global vision of inclusion" for her organization!



When we initially met ten-year-old Shawn, he had never participated in a recreation activity before. His mother thought he might like to participate in an arts and crafts program because he loved to draw, but she wasn't really sure what his true interests were. During our first meeting with the family, Shawn presented us with lots of pictures that he drew. Something we immediately noticed was that every picture had a basketball in it! His mother shared that Shawn's older brother plays basketball and that



Shawn has always gone to his brother's games as a spectator. Because Shawn obviously had such a passion for basketball, it was decided that we would identify a basketball program so he could hopefully go from being a spectator to an actual player. UCP Kids found a nearby basketball league and discussed the possibility of Shawn participating in their program. The coordinator was very open to placing Shawn on a team, however, we learned that Shawn's coach had never worked with a child with a disability before. The coach was very open to suggestions that UCP Kids staff made during both practices and games and even commented on how many of the suggestions

helped not only Shawn, but also the entire team! After one of the last games, Shawn was presented with a "Good Sportsmanship" pin, his entire team cheered for him, and Shawn had the biggest smile ever! Identifying Shawn's true passion for basketball allowed him to participate in a program with other kids who love basketball, where their commonalities outshined their differences and paved the way for fun and friendship.

The above stories are true narratives of children who have participated in UCP Kids' Family Partnership program (names have been changed). These accounts truly demonstrate that when we are together, we are better. Read more stories of both children and adults and learn more about UCP Kids in *Together is Better*, an interactive how-to guide that provides step-by-step instructions on how to facilitate friendships and create successful community inclusion for individuals with disabilities, available at www.ucppittsburgh.org.

"When I think of why my daughter should be included in education and recreation activities in our community, many things come to mind. I know that she will have fun and is motivated by learning from other children. Most importantly, through these experiences, my daughter will be making vital connections within the community by meeting the children who may someday be her neighbors, employers or fellow employees. Becoming linked as children will broaden future opportunities for both my daughter and for children without disabilities by allowing their tolerance of differences to grow and fear to fade away." – Robin Foley

UCP Kids (Unique Community Programs for Kids)

"Helping children reach new heights!"

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