



**UC** University of CINCINNATI | INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY EDUCATION CENTER

# YEAR IN REVIEW 2023-2024

**CEES • TAP • IMPACT • RAAC**

*Leading Research, Education and Services*

# Our Year of Progress

## 2023 - 2024

The Intellectual and Developmental Disability (IDD) Education Center, within UC's College of Education, Criminal Justice, Human Services and Information Technology, provides life-changing programs for individuals with IDD to further their education and independence. Aligned with the University's strategic initiative, Next Lives Here, the IDD Education Center is dedicated to breaking boundaries and creating inclusive opportunities for employment, social connections and lifelong learning. This past year has been marked by significant progress, including the development of innovative practices, the launch of a new program and the expansion of our dedicated team.

Our commitment to innovation ensures that we not only meet the needs of those we serve but also drives us to continuously seek new and creative solutions that enhance our impact. One of our key initiatives has been addressing the employment needs of individuals with IDD and bridging the workforce gap in Ohio by creating pathways to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers. We do this by expanding access to educational opportunities that include pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships and earning industry-recognized credentials. In addition to creating innovative employment pathways, our Center focuses on implementing interventions that enhance social communication and foster healthy



relationships. Also, our unique staffing model, which employs UC student workers, provides program participants with near-peer support while expanding our influence. This approach creates a multiplier effect, helping to shift attitudes and drive cultural changes that can improve the quality of life for people with IDD.





This past year we also had the incredible opportunity to acquire the Regional Autism Advisory Council (RAAC) as our fourth program. RAAC is a community network dedicated to improving outcomes for people with autism and those with related needs. Now housed within the IDD Education Center, RAAC is poised to continue connecting, collaborating and coordinating to improve resources available to the local community, as well as expand the reach of RAAC within the university and broader community to better serve people with diverse needs.

The IDD Education Center continues to grow and with this growth, our team is expanding. This year alone, we have welcomed several new members with expertise in inclusive postsecondary education, program development, marketing and outreach. Our team is dedicated, passionate and motivated by a shared vision to create life-changing opportunities for people with IDD. Together, we are cultivating

a collaborative and supportive environment that enriches our programs and strengthens our potential to make a lasting difference.

As we reflect on our year of progress, we are proud of the strides our Center has made in advancing our mission and expanding our impact. We are also thankful for the partnerships that support us and make us better every day. Our efforts have not only addressed immediate needs but have also laid the groundwork for long-term success and growth. We look forward to continuing this momentum, driving positive change in our community.



**Read More About the IDD Education Center's Recent Bold Changes Here**

[uc.edu/news/articles/2024/08/bold-changes---idd-education](https://uc.edu/news/articles/2024/08/bold-changes---idd-education)



# Director's Message

***Dr. Christi Carnahan***

As we reflect on the past year, it is with great pride and gratitude that I present to you the IDD Education Center 2023-2024 Annual Report. This year, our journey has been guided by the Center's core values and strategic priorities. I would like to highlight one core value specifically here: building relationships of trust. It is through these relationships that we have been able to achieve remarkable progress and make a meaningful impact.

At the core of our mission, relationships of trust are not merely a value but a fundamental driver of success. Trust is the cornerstone upon which we build our partnerships, engage with our community and foster collaboration. It is this bedrock of trust that has allowed us to overcome challenges, innovate and grow in ways that align with our vision and goals.

## **Strengthening Partnerships**

This year, we have focused on deepening our relationships with key stakeholders, including donors, partners and community members. By maintaining open communication, demonstrating reliability and consistently delivering on our promises, we have strengthened these vital connections. Our commitment to transparency and integrity has not only garnered continued support but also opened doors to new, impactful collaborations that are propelling a national reputation in research, employment and innovative programming.

## **Empowering Our Team**

Internally, we have emphasized creating a work environment built on mutual respect and trust. By empowering our team members, valuing their contributions and fostering a culture of accountability, we have seen increased collaboration, innovation and dedication. This year, we have especially seen this in our student workers – from undergraduate students to those obtaining their doctoral degrees, they are the foundation of our innovative programs and opportunities. These students come together from many different



backgrounds to share their expertise, develop and lead groundbreaking experiences in areas such as computer science, engineering and social communication.

## **Engaging with the Community**

Our outreach initiatives have been guided by active listening and intentional connection, allowing us to address community needs more effectively and create systems that truly resonate with those we serve. The trust we have built with the community has been instrumental in driving our efforts and amplifying our impact. In the coming year, we look forward to increasing our community engagement to promote positive change and inclusion for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

## **Looking Ahead**

As we move forward, our commitment to nurturing relationships of trust will be at the forefront of our strategic priorities which include becoming a leader in research, establishing sustainable employment pathways, ensuring long-term sustainability and developing innovative programming. We are excited about the opportunities that lie ahead and confident that, with the support of our partners and dedicated team, we will continue to achieve our goals and advance our mission.

In closing, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to each of you for being an integral part of this journey. Your trust, support and collaboration have been invaluable and together, we are making a difference. As we enter the fall, I wish you a safe and healthy year.

Gratefully,  
Christi

## Research and Collaboration

The IDD Education Center is committed to developing exceptional programs that are not only driven by, but generate and disseminate innovative evidence based practices. The mission of the IDD Education Center is to provide meaningful quality life experiences for people with IDD. Students and associates in the Center connect with their communities, engage in employment aligned to their career interests, build relationships and develop skills to become more independent.

The IDD Education Center Research Network was established in 2019 and comprises UC faculty and students from across the University and Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center which focuses on conducting and disseminating research to improve outcomes for people with IDD. The research network has several on-going research projects across the programs.

### Outcomes and Social Validity of the Transition & Access Pathways (TAP)

School psychology assistant professor, Dr. Lori Vincent, is leading a longitudinal study with the Transition and Access Pathways (TAP) program staff to evaluate the student outcomes and social validity of the program. The purpose of the current program evaluation is to (1) evaluate outcomes (e.g., adaptive behavior, mental health, cognitive abilities and self-determination) for students who participate in TAP; (2) to evaluate the social validity of the TAP Course Content; and (3) to understand what population of students with disabilities are most likely to be successful with this specific program which includes a hybrid of TAP specific and inclusive university activities.



### Evaluation of the Sexual Health Curriculum of the Transition & Access Pathways (TAP)

School psychology assistant professor, Dr. Lori Vincent and criminal justice associate professor, Dr. Brittany Hayes, are leading a pilot study to evaluate the sexual health course of the Transition and Access Pathways (TAP) program. The purpose of the current program evaluation is to (1) determine if students' knowledge changes about sexuality and sexual health following completion of the sexual health course; (2) determine if students' perceptions change when learning about sexual health after

taking the course as compared to students who have not yet taken the course but are also in TAP; and (3) determine how students' sexual health knowledge impacts their sexual relationships following the course. As this pilot study is completed this year, a neurodiverse research team in UK/Ireland are reviewing the curriculum to provide feedback for use in cross-national communities for people with intellectual disabilities.



## Science/Technology/Engineering/Math (STEM) Careers for People with IDD

Developing employment skills and creating career pathways of interest are critical components in all IDD Education Center programs. Center staff work closely with UC faculty from the School of Engineering and the School of Education to create and evaluate postsecondary programs to increase employment opportunities in STEM fields for people with IDD by systematically addressing participation barriers and implementing, refining and disseminating evidence-based practices across the United States. One specific project, Project Enable, focuses on creating work-based learning opportunities with Enable UC. The goal is to develop a STEM pre-apprenticeship model that will advance the graduation and postsecondary success of at-risk students (low-income youth and English learners) and students with disabilities in our high school transition program, CEES.



## Communication Research Team

Special Education faculty members, Dr. Christina Carnahan and Dr. Kate Doyle, have been working collaboratively with Literacy and Language Studies faculty member Dr. Allison Breit since 2019 on the Communication Research Team. Their focus is on developing and evaluating evidence-based practices that target communication for individuals with complex needs across the IDD Education Center. Current interventions focus on supporting individuals in developing the skills to independently post their thoughts and feelings on social media, send text messages and share experiences with friends and family.

## Dedicated Partnerships

The IDD Education Center staff, students and associates would not find success without the support from the University, the College of Education, Criminal Justice, Human Services and IT, the School of Education and the many dedicated employment and community partners providing inclusive internship and employment opportunities. A special thanks goes out to these amazing community partners.



**Discover More About Our Partners Here**

[cech.uc.edu/idd-ed-center](http://cech.uc.edu/idd-ed-center)



***“The programs at UC IDD are one of a kind. Evidence based with a team like no other. A model adopted across the country.”***

***- Cindy Aardema, Center Supporter***



# CEES

## Collaboration for Employment and Education Synergy (CEES)

### High School Students, Ages 14-22

The Collaboration for Education & Employment Synergy (CEES) partners with local school districts to provide transition services to over 150 high school students with IDD. This year, CEES students engaged in various programming options such as pre-apprenticeships in Information Technology and Hospitality. Through participation in a pre-apprenticeship pathway, students receive technical training and develop on-the-job and industry specific skills. Students participated in many on-the-job training experiences on or near UC's main campus. Some of these opportunities included the United States Geological Survey (USGS), STEMternship (Introduction to STEM Pathways and Concepts), Hampton Inn, CVS, Sodexo/UC Dining Services, UC Greenhouse, UC Biology Lab and many other community integrated work opportunities.

All CEES programming is rooted in the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction. Students engage in meaningful goal setting activities to support their transition from high school to the adult world. The curriculum is tailored to support students in achieving their self-directed goals. Students choose to focus on various domains:

- Development of pre-employment skills
- Budgeting to live independently
- Postsecondary exploration and research
- Development of social communication skills to increase social networking and building peer relationships
- Self-regulation and social emotional learning

### Field Service Opportunities for UC Students

CEES partners with the School of Education and provided eight student teaching opportunities. CEES student teachers work with students from multiple school districts and support these students in internships in an inclusive setting and engage students in curriculum to set personal goals and increase their social communication and vocational skills. In addition, CEES student teachers gain experience with lesson planning, job coaching and creating goals for their students' individual education programs (IEPs). CEES also partners with the College of Allied Health Sciences and provides field service experience for Communication Sciences and Disorder (CSD) students. This is a great opportunity for these pre-service professionals because they get hands-on experiences to implement communication interventions with

CEES students and a unique opportunity to collaborate with special education pre-service teachers to develop a comprehensive curriculum to support the students.



# CEES Summer Programming

## CEES STEM Access for All

The IDD Education Center was awarded an Ohio Department of Education Summer Expansion grant in 2022 that allowed for the creation of CEES STEM Access for All. In addition, CEES received an award from the Jack J. Smith Foundation to provide transportation and meals for 2024 summer students and scholarships for 12 students in 2025. CEES STEM Access for All was designed to offer inclusive programming for high school students with diverse needs, with and without disabilities, to develop foundational skills necessary for STEM career pathways.



CEES STEM Access for All is a six-week summer program on UC's campus where students participate in Developing Spatial Thinking coursework, NX Software training modules and competitive team design challenges. Industry coaches, College of Engineering instructors and peer mentors guide students in accessing the curriculum and learning. In addition to the rigorous content, students enjoy fun social activities at the UC Rec Center and lunch on campus.

The 2024 CEES STEM Access for All was a huge success. The class enrolled four additional students from 2023 for a total of 22 students and 90% of participants earned a UC badge which is a building block to an Industry Recognized Credential (IRC).

## Traditional CEES Summer Program

CEES Summer is a six-week community-integrated summer program for high school students with IEPs, ages 14-22. 23 students engaged in internships, social curriculum, STEM curriculum and were supported with "near peer" staffing on campus. Learning activities are built into programming to develop social communication and self-determination skills. In addition, students can participate in career and STEM exploration activities and curriculum to develop these skills.

***"The program is outstanding and continues to evolve based on the requirements the state pushes down. I have been with the program since the beginning which has been a great experience for students to leave the "bubble" they are in and experience new staff and new environments that will be typical when they leave the education environment."***

**- Michelle Whitmore,  
Madeira City Schools**

## Local School Districts

Special thanks to all our partnering school districts during the 2023-2024 school year: Deer Park, Fairfield, Indian Hill, Loveland, Maderia, Mariemont, Mason, Milford, Monroe, Mount Healthy, Northwest/Colerain, Princeton, Reading, Warren County ESC, Winton Woods and Wyoming.



# Transition and Access Pathways (TAP)

## College Age Students

The Transition and Access Pathways (TAP) program is a four-year residential university-recognized certificate program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). TAP students fully embrace college life by living, working, learning and leading on the University of Cincinnati's campus, becoming independent and active members of the Bearcat community. TAP served 29 full-time students in the 2023-2024 academic year and graduated seven students.

This year has been marked by remarkable growth, inspiring achievements and transformative experiences for our students. Through the collective efforts of our dedicated staff, faculty and campus partners, our students have embraced college life and become integral, contributing members of the Bearcat family. As we reflect on the past year, we celebrate the bold accomplishments of our 29 enrolled students and the seven outstanding graduates who have exemplified independence, resilience and leadership. Their journeys, our program's milestones and the unwavering commitment to inclusivity and excellence define the TAP program.



## Student Leadership

TAP students are leaders in the community. They act as ambassadors for TAP as they follow their individual interests. Here are some examples of how our students exemplified leadership this year:

- **Peer Mentoring:** Serving as mentors to incoming students, helping them navigate college life and providing support and guidance
- **Club Leadership:** Leading or co-leading student clubs or organizations, ranging from academic clubs to interest-based groups
- **Campus Ambassador:** Acting as ambassadors for the program, assisting with campus tours, speaking at events and promoting the program to prospective students and families
- **Internships:** Taking on leadership roles in internships or work-based learning positions that allow them to demonstrate and develop their leadership skills
- **Student Panels and Speaking Engagements:** Sharing their experiences and insights as panelists or speakers at conferences, workshops, or campus events

*“Socially my son has grown more confident. He can make plans with his peers and interact with the group. He will be graduating with a certificate in Horticulture, which means so much to him. He hopes to get a permanent job in Horticulture upon graduation. When he started the program, we were unsure if he would be able to successfully take college courses for credit, yet he has risen to every challenge.”*

- Tracey Grafe, Parent of TAP Student



## Academic Achievements

- **Shelby Akin** (sophomore) and **Alpha Ma** (junior) were recipients of the TAP into the Future Scholarship. This scholarship is awarded to TAP students who exemplify academic achievement, demonstrate leadership and strive to engage in the community.
- Students challenged themselves when selecting their electives:
  - Electives were taken across 17 different academic programs
  - 31 electives taken for full academic credit
  - 4 students pursuing fully-inclusive UC certificates in addition to the TAP certificate

## Employment and Community Partners

The IDD Education Center has established many new and exciting partnerships this year to support TAP students in their person-centered career pathways. Some notable new community partners are the Cincinnati Zoo, the Ensemble Theater and the Civic Garden Center. TAP staff continue to develop person-centered career pathways in areas of interest including Sports Management, Childcare, Creative Arts, Horticulture, Hospitality and Customer Service, Office/Clerical and STEM. For a second year, TAP joined forces with a local

## Promoting Inclusion and Diversity

- TAP students participated in 27 campus clubs and club sports
- 600+ volunteer coaching hours by 17 student volunteers in TAP Courses, Campus Coaching, TAP Activities, Social Groups and Independent Living Coaching
- 33 paid student workers as academic, vocational and life coaches totaling over 4,500 hours
- Student workers and volunteers from over 19 different academic programs across the university

non-profit, Magnified Giving, to teach freshmen students the importance of philanthropy and service learning. TAP students completed research projects on local non-profit organizations of their choice and presented them to their peers, members of the UC IDD Education Center and community partners. Based on votes, three of the non-profits – Pink Ribbon Good, Luke5Adventures and Buddy Up for Life, Inc. – received grant awards from Magnified Giving.

## Alumni Accolades

Our graduates are making an impact in their communities and right here within the University of Cincinnati. Eight alumni are currently employed on the UC campus, with spring 24 graduates, **Dana Laster** and **Cullin McCoy**, being the most recent. Dana is an admission coordinator with the Student Recruitment and Marketing department in the College of Education, Criminal Justice, Human Services and Information Technology (CECH) and Cullin is working with the new catering vendor, Sodexo in one of their many campus locations.

Here are some stats on our alumni:

**49** graduates as of spring 2024


---

**87%** are employed or continuing their education

---

**57%** are living independently

---



***“TAP gives us great opportunities to learn about being independent. If we ever want to live in our own apartment or with roommates, we have the skills when we need to use them. TAP has really great staff who are always willing to help out in any way they can.”***

***- Patrick Carroll, TAP student***

# IMPACT Innovation

IMPACT Innovation is a year-round program at UC for adults with autism and/or communication, behavior, or sensory differences. IMPACT associates participate in meaningful, inclusive experiences throughout the day on UC's campus.

The 2023-2024 year brought about substantial growth and fresh experiences. The IMPACT team continues to advance innovative programming so that associates cultivate skills, establish meaningful connections and participate actively in the community. IMPACT also increased its reach by employing 58 UC students and graduate assistants from various majors including Education, IT, Nursing, Physical Therapy, Speech and Language Pathology, Occupational Therapy, Public Health, Aerospace Science, Women's Studies, Engineering, Business and Psychology.



## Program Highlights

This year, IMPACT benefited from a grant awarded by Good Shepherd Foundation to support meaningful, high-quality programming in the areas of social communication, community access, health and wellness, employment and cultural enrichment. Associates enjoyed classes with New Leaf Kitchen, Ensemble Theatre, music therapy with Keys for Success and art classes with Visionaries and Voices. In addition, the UC Campus Recreation Center offered modified yoga and strength classes.

Increasing meaningful communication continues to be an important focus in the program. The IMPACT team created individualized communication interventions for most associates and set goals that included learning appropriate skills to interact on social media and learning how to convey emotions and choices. Posting and commenting on peers' pictures and posts is becoming a favorite pastime!

Traveling and interacting with the community continued to be a highlight of the summer programming with the return of "Community Access Fridays". Associates and staff safely engaged in off-campus adventures exploring local favorites like the Reds Hall of Fame, BB Riverboats, Newport Aquarium, Glenwood Gardens, National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, Contemporary Art Museum, St. Bernard Community Pool, Cincinnati Fire Museum, bowling at Stone Lanes and Washington Park. Using the SORTA Metro public bus system and the Cincinnati Connector were highlights for many of our associates and staff, demonstrating their increased independence.

## Enrollment

IMPACT is proudly supporting 28 adults in our program and employment support services. While our current capacity is limited due to space and funding, please visit our website and complete the form if you are interested in joining the waitlist.

## Interdisciplinary Partnerships

- Three Special Education students are student workers in the program and actively participate in curriculum modifications and interventions.
- Five Communication and Sciences Disorder students supported the communication interventions and research initiatives.
- Two School Psychology students are also IMPACT student workers and supporting research efforts in this focus area.

## Employment

Employment experience and the development of essential job skills are key aspects of IMPACT. While many associates participate in paid employment, others focus on vocational skills development and career exploration at various community sites.

- Employment experiences and internship sites this year included: Ace Hardware, Adrian Durbin Florist, Aramark/UC Dining Services, Teachers Café, United States Geological Survey, University Christian Church, UC Bearcat Pantry, UC Biology Lab, UC Bookstore, UC Facilities, UC Greenhouse, UC's College Conservatory of Music, Marketing and UC Human Resources
- Travel training continues to be an important component to the vocational development program. Associates are using the UC Shuttle and the Cincinnati Metro system to access internship placements on and off campus. This year associates also practiced navigating the Cincinnati Connector and the TANK (the Transit Authority of Northern Kentucky)
- IMPACT provides Individual Employment Supports to 7 IMPACT Associates working with Aramark/UC Dining Services, UC Police Department, UC Campus Events and E-Curriculum
- IMPACT associates continue to participate in Vocational Skills class to experience various work skills in a fun and meaningful way. This year a UC Student Worker Lead was responsible for teaching the class, modifying the curriculum from the Ohio Department of Workforce and Education's Career Clusters and creating hands on exploration activities

## Transportation

IMPACT operates three routes, transporting 16 associates daily to and from campus and offering community access throughout the summer. With the addition of a Transportation Program Coordinator, the program has become more efficient and expanded community integration opportunities.

IMPACT staff are now part of the Tri-state Transportation Equitable Opportunity Team coordinated by OKI. IMPACT was awarded an ODOT grant for 2024 to purchase a fourth vehicle and has applied for an additional grant for its maintenance.

## Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD)

DODD has been a key partner in providing grant funding to enhance outcomes for adults with complex support needs. IMPACT received a grant for the Pathways to Careers Project, which focuses on bridging Ohio's workforce gap by creating employment pathways in STEM fields for individuals with developmental disabilities. This initiative increases access to inclusive postsecondary education, apprenticeships and industry-recognized credentials.

IMPACT also participated in the Quality Pilot Project, aimed at improving programmatic systems through technology.

Most recently, IMPACT was awarded funding for the Inclusive Supports Project. This initiative brings together a network dedicated to transformative change, promoting evidence-based practices that empower individuals with significant support needs. The project includes developing open-access materials, offering in-person training, establishing a community of practice and ensuring widespread dissemination and sustainability.

***“Participating in the IMPACT Program has been a significant experience for me. It has allowed me to develop a deeper understanding and empathy for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Even though this work isn't directly related to my major, it has taught me valuable interpersonal and communication skills that will be beneficial in any professional setting. Personally, it has given me a sense of fulfillment and purpose, knowing that I am contributing to the well-being and growth of others.”***

**- Sam Adhikari, Student Worker**

# RAAC

## Regional Autism Advisory Council (RAAC)

The Regional Autism Advisory Council (RAAC) was founded in 1999 in response to the critical need for supports and services for people with autism and their families. Over the years, RAAC has evolved into a premier model of regional collaboration, bringing together experts from various disciplines to work collectively rather than in silos. RAAC has historically coordinated training, education and professional development opportunities to better serve people with autism and those with related support needs. In addition, RAAC has provided community connections and resource sharing. This approach has significantly enhanced our region's capacity to serve the autism community effectively.

In January 2024, the IDD Education Center acquired RAAC as its fourth program with the goal to continue the program's mission and to position the University of Cincinnati as a leader. We aim to leverage the university's resources to forge new partnerships, enhance services for individuals and families and expand the reach of RAAC within the university and broader community. To do this, the leadership team has identified the following strategic priorities:



### Ensure Long-Term Sustainability

- Develop and implement a new membership structure
- Revise branding and messaging
- Create and implement a fundraising plan

### Become a Leader in Training and Research Partnerships

- Identify existing regional and national best practices and gaps in training offerings
- Create a structure to provide monthly or bi-monthly training opportunities
- Plan and implement the RAAC Training institute, a multi-day training opportunity for the community
- Become a research partner by sharing resources and connecting research opportunities to the RAAC network

### Provide Intentional Community Connection

- Engage the mis- and/or unrepresented members of the community
- Provide a platform for networking, sharing resources and addressing challenges
- Foster connections and collaboration in the community to promote positive change

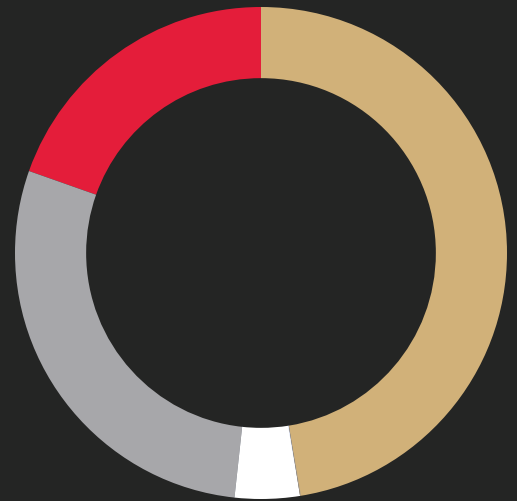
### To Learn More About and Participate in RAAC

*please email [RAAC\\_cincy@uc.edu](mailto:RAAC_cincy@uc.edu)  
or visit [cech.uc.edu/RAAC](http://cech.uc.edu/RAAC)*



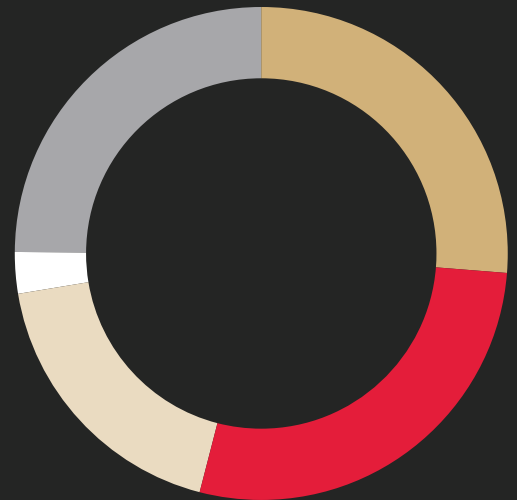
## IDD Education Center Operating Expenses

Staff	\$ 792,170.05		48%
Student Workers	\$ 474,894.48		28%
Operations	\$ 327,018.18		20%
Part-Time Faculty	\$ 72,464.66		4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 1,666,547.37</b>		



## IDD Education Center Revenue

Ohio DODD Medicaid Waiver	\$ 530,608.93		28%
Tuition	\$ 503,870.00		26%
District Transition Dollars	\$ 475,922.23		25%
Donations	\$ 354,310.00		18%
RAAC Memberships	\$ 52,940.90		3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 1,917,652.06</b>		



## Grants

National Science Foundation:

**\$ 300,000**

Department of Developmental Disabilities:

**\$ 147,337**

Ohio Department of Education and Workforce Development:

**\$ 25,000**

**\$ 472,000+**

dollars awarded during FY 2023 - 2024



# RED & BLACK BLAST

The **7th Annual Red & Black Blast** was a huge success with 400 guests in attendance and raising over \$125,000! Guests enjoyed bidding on silent auction prizes, celebrated the life-changing IDD Education Center programs and honored some amazing individuals and teams. A special thanks to our Platinum Sponsors, Alexander and Anna Polenok and RESLV; and our Gold Sponsors, the Berninger Family, Elizabeth and Brian Burress, CECH, Deloitte, Terri and Bayley Hogan, Mastercard, the Matta Foundation, the Oyler Family and P&G. **Visit this site** for a full list of our generous sponsors!

Roger Grein, founder of Magnified Giving, received the Champion for Inclusion Award for his dedication to empowering the next generation of philanthropists.

Drs. Christopher Atchison, Aaron Burdette, TJ Murphey and Sheryl Sorby received the Chuck Altenau Outstanding Service Award for their innovative initiatives for people with disabilities to have access to STEM educational opportunities.

Siemens received the Employment Partner of the Year Award for their dedication in creating meaningful employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Guests also heard stories and celebrated the achievements in our programs CEES, TAP and IMPACT.

If you weren't able to join the festivities, we missed you and hope you will join us next year! In the meantime, please **visit this site** for videos and photos from this memorable night.

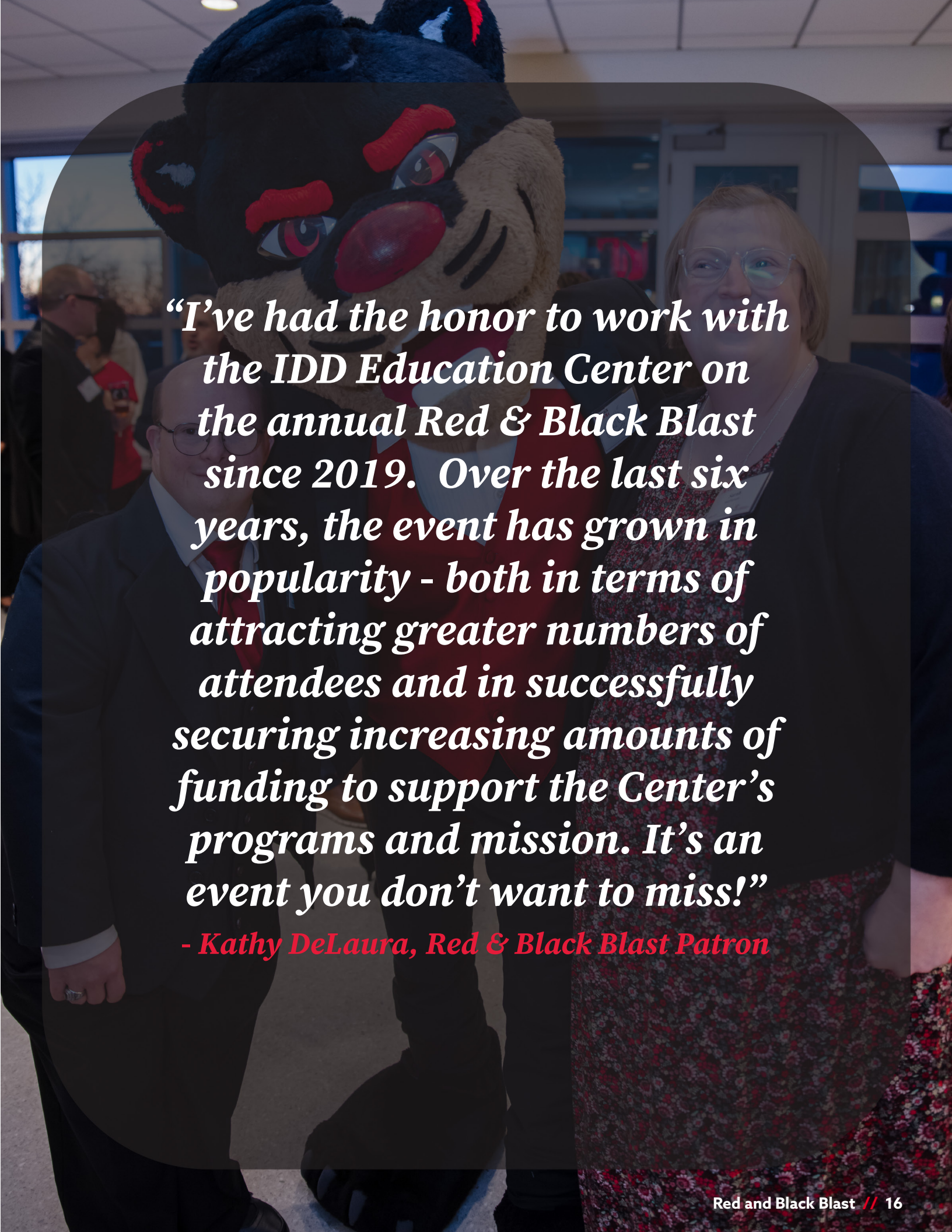
## Save the Date

*The 8th annual Red & Black Blast will be on Thursday, February 27, 2025 at Tangeman University Center, Great Hall!*

*For sponsorship information, please email: [sadie.everett@uc.edu](mailto:sadie.everett@uc.edu).*







*“I’ve had the honor to work with the IDD Education Center on the annual Red & Black Blast since 2019. Over the last six years, the event has grown in popularity - both in terms of attracting greater numbers of attendees and in successfully securing increasing amounts of funding to support the Center’s programs and mission. It’s an event you don’t want to miss!”*

*- Kathy DeLaura, Red & Black Blast Patron*

# Vision, Mission, Core Values

---

## Our Vision

To promote inclusive communities where people with diverse abilities can thrive in all aspects of their lives supported by innovative programming driven by research and collaboration.

## Our Mission

To create meaningful, life-changing experiences for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) through innovative research, education and services.

### **1 We inspire positive change.**

We create a safe place to nurture personal growth by making intentional decisions to break down barriers, model accountability and promote inclusion throughout the communities we touch.

### **2 We promote self-determination and self-advocacy.**

We provide experiences that cultivate freedom and authority for individuals to make choices and decisions to create happy, productive and well-rounded lives.

### **3 We build relationships of trust.**

We believe trusting relationships are the foundation for growth and learning. We recognize each other's unique strengths and challenges and use these to guide our interactions. We listen carefully, communicate openly and respond thoughtfully.

### **4 We are dedicated to research, and evidence-based practice.**

We are dedicated to research designed to cultivate rich opportunities for learning and growth and using evidence based, individualized supports to create inclusive communities and improve the quality of life for all. Research drives our practice, and practice drives our research.

### **5 We see and value each other's humanity.**

We believe that all people are contributing members of their communities and that dignity comes from the opportunity to engage in meaningful relationships with others. We see beyond labels, barriers, or superficial challenges to the unique strengths and gifts of each individual.

# Strategic Priorities and Goals

## Become a Leader in Research

Our global aim is to be a research center that generates and implements practice-based research to enhance the lives of transition age adolescents and adults with IDD.

- Systematize processes across the IDD Education Center research studies
- Align budgets to prioritize practice-based research
- Create a system for disseminating data/outcomes to a variety of stakeholders

## Establish Sustainable Employment Pathways

Employment is a continuum that includes work-based learning experiences, community integrated internships and paid employment. Establishing sustainable employment pathways promotes independence and builds inclusive communities.

- Develop programming that leads to sustainable employment post-program completion
- Recruit and maintain employment partners

## Ensure Long-Term Sustainability

Sustainability is having the breadth to innovate, operate efficiently and fulfill the need for our services in our community. Sustainability is financial success and having sufficient resources to achieve our mission and make strategic decisions for the future.

- **Financial Sustainability:** Ensure the financial success of the IDD Education Center by securing diverse funding sources/mechanisms to fund ongoing and future initiatives
- **People and Knowledge:** Ensure the sustainability of our programs and initiatives by employing a team dedicated to the IDD Education Center vision, mission and core values
- **Community Sustainability:** Engage with stakeholders (students, families, alumni, participants, employers, community partners and donors) to ensure awareness



## Develop Innovative Programming

The IDD Education Center is committed to developing inclusive, engaging, meaningful and evidence-based social, vocational and educational programming to improve outcomes for people with IDD.

- Develop a sustainable, fluid staffing model that allows for the implementation of evidence-based practices and innovative research across programs

## Giving Opportunity: Next is Now

What's next starts with our our generous donors, supporters and community partners. This is your chance to change lives, turning aspirations of college, employment and independent living into a reality. Embrace the opportunity to support a community of inclusion, diversity and belonging where everyone is valued for their contributions.

**Next is Now.**

 [foundation.uc.edu/iddedcenter\\_fund](https://foundation.uc.edu/iddedcenter_fund)



## The IDD Education Center Team

---



**Christi Carnahan**  
*Director of IDD Education Center*

Dr. Christina R. Carnahan is Professor of Special Education in the School of Education, College of Education, Criminal Justice and Human Services at the University of Cincinnati. Christi has served as the director of the IDD Education Center for nearly ten years. She has extensive expertise in supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in inclusive settings, including developing programs focused on employment supports for adolescents and young adults with IDD. Christi's research interests include literacy and communication interventions for individuals with autism spectrum disorders and other complex communication and behavioral support needs and creating efficient and effective instructional practices across the lifespan. She has a strong history of mentoring students at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Christi has published in journals such as *Exceptional Children*, *Journal of Special Education* and *Focus on Autism and Developmental Disabilities*. She is the co-author of two books including *Quality Literacy Instruction for Learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder* and *Facilitating Evidence Based Practice for Students with ASD: A Classroom Observation Tool for Building Quality Education*. Christi and her husband have three children and enjoy traveling as a family.



**Shelbie Collopy**  
*Business Manager*

Business Manager Shelbie Collopy has her Master's in Business Administration from the University of Cincinnati's Carl H. Lindner College of Business. Before joining the IDD Education Center in 2019, Shelbie was a member of the College of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning's Business Office. She also has experience in early intervention therapy for children with autism spectrum disorder and an undergraduate degree in Psychology from UC. As the IDD Education Center Business Manager, Shelbie merges her business skills with her passion for helping people. When not working, Shelbie loves to cheer on the Bearcats and hopes to visit all 50 states by the time she turns 50.



**Nikki Murray**  
*Marketing Coordinator*

Nikki Murray is already diving into all of the programs as the Marketing Coordinator for the IDD Education Center. Nikki joined from Pure Romance, LLC, where she worked in

the Sales and Training team as a Field Training Specialist. Nikki has an MBA from Thomas More College, with an extensive marketing background from previous career positions, which makes her a great addition to the IDD Education Center. Nikki has experience in marketing, sales, nonprofit organizations, event planning and working with those with disabilities. She is an active member of her alumna sorority group, the Cincinnati Alumni Chapter of Delta Gamma and an advisor for the Delta Gamma women at NKU. Nikki fosters the ideals of always staying a student to learn as much as she can. Originally from Philadelphia, PA, Nikki resides in Northern Kentucky with her husband Jamie, two dogs Spike & Snoop and a growing family of identical twin girls on the way. She enjoys traveling, kayaking, attending networking events and Zumba in her free time.

## Collaboration for Employment and Education Synergy (CEES)

---



**Cadi Dart**  
*Director of CEES and Job Development*

Cadi Dart brings transition services expertise to the IDD Education Center Team. Nine years ago, Cadi collaborated with colleagues, community partners and local school districts to pilot CEES and established the high quality transition program for high school students with disabilities at UC. Cadi's career took her in a different direction and she worked for Warren County Educational Service Center as an intervention specialist and transition coordinator. Cadi returned to the IDD Education Center team to continue her work with developing CEES into a valued program for the community and now is focusing on developing the employment services and supports across all of the Center's programs. When Cadi is not working, she enjoys time with her wonderful husband, Garrick and two sons Noah (16) and Julian (6) in Clarksville, Ohio. She loves adventure and travel and takes every opportunity to show her kids the awesome world we live in.



**Maddie Baumer**  
*Program Manager*

Maddie Baumer has a Bachelors in Special Education from the University of Cincinnati and has spent the last 5 years as an Intervention Specialist working with students with intense behavioral and communication needs. One of her student teaching placements was with CEES in 2017. Since then, Maddie

has become very passionate about transition services for students with disabilities and is excited to be part of the CEES team again. When Maddie is not at work she enjoys cooking, going to concerts and spending time traveling or hiking with her husband Chris and a beloved dog, Basil.

## Transition and Access Pathways (TAP)



**Katie Norland**  
*Director of TAP*

Katie Norland is the Director of the Transition and Access Pathways (TAP) program. Before coming to UC, she worked at The College of the Florida Keys where she served as the Director of Student Success Services. In her role, she worked as the director of Project ACCESS and was responsible for grant management, student accessibility services, career and internship development and many other student success-focused service areas. Katie is passionate about working in inclusive postsecondary education and having the opportunity to advocate for students with disabilities with the belief that education is for all. Her professional experiences extend beyond inclusive education with a background in marketing, social media, hospitality and event management. Katie is currently serving as the Vice Chair of Communication on the Great Lakes Inclusive Postsecondary Education Alliance (GLIPSEA) leadership team, a regional effort to improve inclusive postsecondary education options in the Great Lakes region. Outside of work, Katie enjoys spending time with her partner Collin and their dog Finn, reading, traveling and spending time exploring Cincinnati.



**Lisa Claypool**  
*TAP Academic Coordinator*

Lisa Claypool holds a bachelor's degree in special education from Ohio University and a Master of Education in literacy education from The Citadel. She was previously an adjunct instructor in TAP and is enjoying the collaboration and partnerships involved in her work as Academic Coordinator. Lisa is a licensed intervention specialist with 15 years of experience working with students with disabilities in middle and high schools in Charleston, SC and Cincinnati, OH. She lives in Cincinnati with her husband and two young children.



**Emily Johnson**  
*TAP Vocational Coordinator*

Emily Johnson joins the TAP team with 10+ years of experience with students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Emily holds a bachelor's degree in Special Education from The Ohio State University. She spent 8 years as an intervention specialist at a local Cincinnati high school focusing on students' career opportunities and success outside of the classroom. This is Emily's second year as the Vocational Coordinator for TAP, where she can continue to provide access and support to students with IDD that align with their personalized career pathways. She lives in Finneytown with her husband.



**Kerri Wolfer**  
*TAP Campus Life Coordinator*

Kerri Wolfer is a Licensed Independent Social Worker and holds a Master of Social Work degree from Michigan State University. Kerri is the Campus Life Coordinator for the Transition and Access Pathways (TAP) program at the University of Cincinnati. As the Campus Life Coordinator, Kerri collaborates in developing, managing and researching the social and independent living instruction and initiatives of TAP. She is involved in the strategic development of the program and works across the university to help facilitate accessible and inclusive college experiences for students in TAP.



**Jill Benzinger, MOT, OTR/L**  
*TAP Faculty*

Jill Benzinger is a licensed occupational therapist with over eight years of experience working in a variety of settings. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees from Xavier University where she completed research on how the environment impacts participation of young children with cerebral palsy. She currently works as a school-based occupational therapist working with students of diverse needs building sensory processing, executive function and motor skills. Jill also works at a local inpatient rehab hospital serving patients in both individual treatments and group settings. She also has experience in acute care, hand therapy and mental health settings. Jill is passionate about working with students in TAP because of her Uncle David. David was born with Down Syndrome and spent his adult life working at New Perceptions, Inc. in Northern Kentucky. Upon his passing, they established the David G. Benzinger Employee of the Month to recognize New Perceptions's employees who have adopted David's positive work attitude and his spirit of self-motivation, persistence and joy of living. In her free time, Jill enjoys reading and watching FCC soccer games.



**Alison Rubel**  
**TAP Faculty**

Alison has over 15 years of experience teaching students with developmental disabilities in both K12 and post-secondary settings. She earned a Master of Science in Education from Purdue University. Alison began her career as a special educator with the Carmel Clay Schools in Carmel, Indiana. During this time, she served on an interdisciplinary committee to develop a curriculum for district K-5 special education classrooms. She was responsible for the development and implementation of academic and behavioral interventions for students with multiple disabilities as well as the management of instructional assistants in the special education setting. Alison joined the TAP team in 2017 and is currently an adjunct assistant professor teaching courses including College Success, Writing Basics, College Writing, First Aid Basics and Financial Literacy. Alison lives near Kings Island with her husband, two daughters and two Schnauzers. She loves developing new recipes, gardening and spending time with family at her favorite Cincinnati spots, Pyramid Hill and Washington Park.



**Terri Schermerhorn**  
**TAP Faculty**

Terri Schermerhorn has been a licensed intervention specialist since 2008 and has experience in serving students of all ages. She has a bachelor's degree from Purdue University and a master's degree in special education (mild to moderate disabilities) from Xavier University. Terri joined the IDD Education Center team in 2022 and has served as an adjunct professor teaching in the TAP program and also provides employment support services to students in the CEES, TAP and IMPACT programs. She is originally from Cincinnati and lives in Anderson Township with her husband and their three children, ages 15, 13 and 9. She enjoys watching her children play sports, cheering on her favorite teams (the Bearcats, Bengals and Reds), going to Kings Island and vacationing with family and friends.

**IMPACT Innovation**



**Genna Kieper**  
**Director of Impact**

Genna Kieper is excited to join the IDD Education Center as the Director of IMPACT Innovation. Genna is joining from Washington State University, where she has worked as the Employment Services Coordinator for the WSU ROAR Program, an inclusive postsecondary

education program for college-aged adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, much like our TAP Program here at UC! Genna has experience in program development, supported employment, program evaluation, disability awareness training and person-centered planning. She is also nearing completion of her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from Washington State University, where her research is focused on defining and promoting self-determination with and for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Originally from Eastern Kentucky, Genna is excited to show her partner and pets the beauty of this region as she enjoys hiking, kayaking, music and art in her free time!



**Meredith Finn**  
**Transportation Program Coordinator**

Meredith Finn has 25+ years of experience in coordinating projects, events and volunteers through her work with Hamilton County Environmental Services, the Research Triangle Foundation, the Ohio Bicentennial Commission and many years serving on PTO's and various boards. Meredith most recently owned and operated her own t-shirt and apparel company. Getting to know and creating connections with the Associates is Meredith's favorite part of her job. She lives in Anderson Township with her husband, two sons and two Bernese Mountain dogs. Meredith enjoys spending time with family and friends, reading and any activity where she can be outside.



**Joann Ramsey**  
**Program Manager**

Joann Ramsey brings so much experience to the IMPACT team. She began her career as a para-professional and worked for 11 years at the Warren County Educational Service Center (WCESC) working with children with intense behavioral needs. After departing WCESC, she decided to join the IDD Education Center team at UC as the program coordinator for IMPACT Innovation. She finds working with the IMPACT associates extremely rewarding and loves coming to work every day. When Joann is not at work, she is juggling a busy life as a foster mom. For fun, she enjoys listening to a good live jazz band, singing a few notes at Karaoke and her absolute favorite pastime is dancing!



**Erica Thompson**  
**Program Manager**

Erica Thompson joined the IDD Education Center in the spring of 2024. Her prior experiences include the role of an intervention specialist, behavior coach and program supervisor for various districts and organizations in the Cincinnati area. Her areas of professional interest include vocational and transition opportunities for individuals with Autism and

other low-incidence disabilities, specifically focusing on independence and self-advocacy. Erica is a Cincinnati native and lives with her husband, 4 children, three cats, 2 dogs and a turtle. She enjoys all Cincinnati sports, camping, live entertainment and organizing. Erica is a proud UC alumnus - CECH '08 and '10!

## **Regional Autism Advisory Council (RAAC)**

---



**Sadie Everett**  
*Director of RAAC*

Sadie Everett holds a bachelor's degree from Miami University's Richard T. Farmer School of Business and a Master of Arts in Teaching from National-Louis University. Sadie

has served as an Adjunct Professor in the School of Education and as the Community Relations Manager for the IDD Education Center supporting the marketing, communications and fundraising efforts. Sadie was named the director of RAAC in 2024 when the IDD Education Center acquired this program and she is very excited to lead the efforts in improving outcomes for the autism community and for those with related needs. Outside of work, you can find Sadie on a field or court watching her sons play sports. She also enjoys vacationing to the beach or mountains, exploring the great parks of Cincinnati and watching football with her husband and boys.

---

**A very special thanks goes out to our former team members Lee Ann Emmons and Diane Weinbrandt.**

*Wishing them all the best with their new endeavors!*



 University of  
**CINCINNATI** | INTELLECTUAL AND  
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY  
EDUCATION CENTER

*@uc\_iddedcenter*



*@uc\_iddedcenter*



*IDDEdCenter@ucmail.uc.edu*



*cech.uc.edu/idd-ed-center*

