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When Camilla Gilbert became a mother, she stopped hiding her disability and embraced it. Her business, Microtia Life, is celebrating its one-year anniversary. Camilla hopes it helps others discover their strength and their voice.

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Have a question, comment or story idea? Email magazine@hamiltondds.org or call 513-794-3300

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Podcast explores lost Cincinnati history

Urbanist Media recently wrapped the first season of a new podcast, “Lost Voices of Cincinnati.” The four-episode series explores the rich African American history of Cincinnati and focuses on the neighborhoods of Avondale, Evanston and South Cumminsville.

These podcasts feature oral histories from long-time Black residents. They also include expert interviews and other audio to explore why each neighborhood has been underrepresented in our city’s history. The Urban Roots podcast aims to encourage historic preservation, community engagement, and public history. It was funded by a grant from ArtsWave.

Find “Lost Voices of Cincinnati” on Stitcher, Apple Podcasts, and Spotify, or visit UrbanRootsPodcast.Medium.com to listen and learn more.

Cheers to CABVI

The Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI) partnered with West Side Brewing to release Braille Ale this summer. The limited edition raspberry gose features Braille’s characteristic raised dots on the can.



This is the second year of this partnership, a collaboration to make consumer products more accessible. The teams at CABVI and West Side Brewing hope that including Braille will become standard for a wide variety of consumer products.

CABVI receives a portion of Braille Ale proceeds to support and empower those with vision impairment to lead more independent lives.

Creating a more inclusive library space

The Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library is renovating its main library downtown, as well as its 40 branch libraries. This project, called *Building the Next Generation Library*, will update buildings to meet the demands of the 21st century.

For people with disabilities, these updates go beyond basic compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Many branches will be equipped with sensory spaces and include features like wide aisles, quiet spaces, and larger restrooms. These updates will make the library more accessible and inclusive for everyone.



The recently renovated Anderson Township library branch on State Road

“They really took notice of people with disabilities and people with mobility issues and said, ‘hey, this is important,’” said Silverton resident Michael Denlinger about the Library’s plans. “It will be really great to have the library right here and be easily accessible.”

Renovations will take place through 2028.

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *My Life*, a new quarterly magazine from Hamilton County DD Services! It is made for and by people with developmental disabilities in the Cincinnati area. In each issue, you’ll find stories created for you by local experts.

We hope *My Life* is interesting, empowering, and fun! You can pick up a free copy at our offices, local libraries, day programs, and other places in the community.

In this issue, we’re celebrating autumn. I like this time of the year when the leaves change and the air feels cooler. Our experts share fall fashion tips, budgeting advice ahead of the holidays, a delicious recipe, and information about voting in the upcoming election.

We also list places to enjoy the changing season and how you can meet other people who love nature. And just in time for football season, we talked to Ken Anderson, who used to play for the Cincinnati Bengals and now runs a nonprofit.

I’m very excited to share our cover story featuring Camilla Gilbert. She talks about her journey from trying to hide her disability to using her voice to encourage others. She also shares what it was like to start a new business during the pandemic. I hope you find Camilla’s story as inspiring as I do.

Please let us know if you have story ideas, know where we can give out the magazine, or want to help create future issues. You can contact us at magazine@hamiltontds.org.

Enjoy the September 2021 issue of *My Life*!



Leia’s Letter

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

And Your Vote Counts!

By Diana Mairose

Voting is an important way you can take part in your community. We need people with disabilities to have their voices heard! Your vote does count, and voting allows you to be independent while making choices that concern your life.



Sherry Poland

While 2021 doesn't have big elections like the president, there are many local races that will impact the future of your community. On Election Day, which is Tuesday, Nov. 2, you could vote for city council, mayor, the school board or other local issues.

The Hamilton County Board of Elections works hard to make sure voting is accessible to everyone. "During the selection process in 2018, members of the disability community came to the Board offices and tested out the various equipment," said Sherry Poland, director of

the Hamilton County Board of Elections.

"Everyone provided valuable feedback and the accessible voting equipment was first used in 2019."

If you want to practice voting before Election Day, the Board of Elections has demonstration machines you can use during regular business hours. If you don't want to vote in person, you can also vote by mail with an absentee ballot.

"Voters with disabilities have several options," Poland said. "They could have a friend or family member assist them or they could choose to use a remote ballot marking system, in which the Board emails the ballot to the voter."

A lot of work goes into making sure we have accessible voting options, including mandatory training for poll workers and accessibility reviews of polling locations in Hamilton County. Voting is your right and a meaningful way to participate in democracy.

VOTING CHECKLIST

- ▶ You can vote if you are registered and at least 18 years old by Election Day.
- ▶ If you have a guardian, you may still vote. You can ask for support to vote at the polls or at home.
- ▶ To vote in person, you need an ID or document with your name and current address listed, such as a bank statement, paycheck or utility bill.
- ▶ If transportation is difficult, you can vote at home using an absentee ballot. You can then mail your ballot back to the Board of Elections or drop it off in person.



Visit VoteHamiltonCountyOhio.gov or call (513) 632-7039 to learn more. You can also contact Diana Mairose with voting questions at (513) 559-6636 or diana.mairose@hamiltondds.org

Budgeting Basics

By Patrick Ober

Managing your money can be very hard sometimes. That is why it is important to learn how to budget your money wisely. Here are a few tips to help you make good decisions about how you spend and save your money every month.



1. Know the Difference Between What You NEED and WANT

A great budgeting rule is to make sure you spend your money on what you need (like a place to live, food to eat, or clothes to wear) before you spend it on what you want (like tickets to a concert, going out to dinner, or a new TV). Make a list of things you need and want so you know the difference and spend money on your needs first.

2. Be Careful Using Credit Cards

Credit cards can be used to buy things, and many people use them. But if you do not pay your entire bill every month, the credit card company might charge you interest, which is additional money that you must pay. Only use a credit card if you also have the money to pay for it in your bank account.

3. If You Have a Bank Account, Check it Often

Many people do not check their bank account often, and that is a mistake! It is a good idea to check your bank account daily so you always know exactly how much money you have; know how much you can spend on your needs and wants; and make sure your money is not being taken by someone through a scam or fraud.

If you want to improve your money management or other independent living skills, the Center for Independent Living Options can help! Contact Disability Rights and Advocacy Specialist Patrick Ober at pober@cilo.net or (513) 241-8046, or visit CILO.net



Everybody's Treehouse in Mt. Airy Forest; gardens at Bettman in O'Bryonville



By Ann Myres

As the weather gets crisp and the leaves change colors, many people lace up their hiking boots and take to the trails. Southwest Ohio has a variety of parks and activities for you to get outside and connect with nature. Check out some of our favorite spots:

Shaker Trace Outer Loop

9001 Mt. Hope Road; Harrison

One of many paved trails in the Great Parks' system, and fun for long bike rides. You can stroll through prairies and wetlands, and take a break at the wildlife station to view birds, frogs, and turtles.

The Vineyard Golf Course

600 Nordyke Road; Anderson Twp.

Enjoy a round of golf without ever leaving your cart with Solo Rider, specialized single-passenger golf carts. Eight Solo Rider carts available at most Great Parks golf courses.

Bettman Nature Preserve

4 Beech Lane; O'Bryonville

A historic outdoor space tucked away in an East Side neighborhood. This peaceful park has benches, wide walkways, an overlook and beautiful planted gardens.

Burnet Woods

3251 Brookline Ave.; Clifton

Spend a sunny afternoon catching bluegill and other fish at the lake, which has an accessible station. Trails, shelters, and other activities are also available at this 90-acre city park.

Everybody's Treehouse

1212 Trail Ridge Road; Mt. Airy

An accessible treehouse in Mt. Airy Forest. It connects to 12 trees and has six ramps to give all visitors a chance to play among the treetops.

Boat Launch

10245 Winton Road; Springfield Twp.

Launch your canoe, kayak or paddleboard into Winton Woods' 175-acre lake with an ADA-accessible ramp. Another ramp is located at Miami Whitewater Forest.

More to Explore - Ohio State Parks:

- ▶ Caesar Creek (Warren County)
- ▶ East Fork State Park (Clermont County)
- ▶ Hueston Woods (Butler & Preble counties)

Visit the Ohio Department of Natural Resources website to learn more, OhioDNR.gov

Find people who have similar interests on MeetUp.com or with Facebook groups. Free profiles needed to join. You can also reach out to HCDDS Community Navigator Ann Myres at (513) 559-6876 or ann.myres@hamiltondds.org for help making connections.

Two years ago, Kevin Schwieger had an amazing time hiking at Red River Gorge. He was excited to share his adventure with fellow members at Grace Chapel but the words stuck in his mouth. "I realized Debi would never be able to experience that hike because she was in a wheelchair from a car accident," he said. "That conversation that never happened haunted me for a number of days. I wanted to figure out how to get people to experience what I had."

It took time and research, but he found an all-terrain, one-wheeled adapted chair. Schwieger raised money, bought the equipment and took Debi on a hike at Caesar Creek, down through the gorge to Horseshoe Falls.

"It was incredible. It had been 20 years or more since she had been able to experience anything like that," Schwieger said. "I posted pictures on social media and then it blew up."

Since that initial hike, Schwieger founded Luke 5 Adventures, which gives people with mobility difficulties an opportunity to explore parks. They've been on 250 hikes in seven states, thanks to an army of volunteers. "Cincinnati has world-class parks," he said.

Luke 5 Adventures hosts regular hikes, and partners with local organizations to get people outside to experience nature.



Sign up for a hike or learn about volunteering at Luke5Adventures.com

FINDING HER VOICE

By Lisa Danford

In junior high, Camilla Gilbert began wearing cloth headbands in every color and style. They became a staple of her outfits all the way through college. “At the time, I wasn’t thinking about why she wanted to wear the headbands,” said Camilla’s mom, Connie.

Camilla was born with bilateral microtia and atresia, small ears and an absent ear canal. At the time, doctors didn’t know



Photos provided. Portraits by Tyree Gilbert of SkatePhiMedia

much about these rare conditions and provided little guidance to her parents. Camilla was very selective about who knew about her ears. The headbands covered her hearing aid.

“I just knew that I was born differently, and I looked different. I accepted that, but others didn’t,” Camilla said, adding she was occasionally bullied at school. “It taught me to be strong, resilient, and it began my advocacy—being able to explain, in my own words, what I am and what my condition is.”

Over time, she embraced her uniqueness and stopped focusing on her weaknesses. “I began living in my own truth,” Camilla says as she reflects on her long journey from hiding her disability in middle school to accepting it.

In August 2020, Camilla, now 38, was a keynote speaker at a statewide conference. That experience inspired her to start her own business, Microtia Life, LLC, which empowers people with disabilities through education, advocacy, and mentorship.

“I’m not going to sit here and say I was confident all day, every day, because that was not the case,” she said of starting Microtia Life. “I was terrified. But I am learning more about myself and how to be a better businesswoman.”

Becoming an entrepreneur is not easy, and it was even more difficult during the pandemic. But Camilla already created a business plan while pursuing her master’s degree. She also drew on her experience with the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), where she connected with

advocates and started to find her voice.

“I still associated having hearing loss as a stigma, so at first, I just observed. Once I got comfortable and started to have conversations, it helped me with processing who I am,” Camilla said.

“The HLAA community opened my eyes. Now I focus on the intersectionality of being a Black woman, a person with hearing loss, and a person with microtia and atresia, explaining my different identities and how I fit into society.”

Becoming a mother in 2008 also encouraged Camilla to concentrate on her strengths. She wanted to be a role model for her daughter but had been hiding her hearing aids, microtia and atresia for 14 years. “I didn’t want her to think you could just cover up whatever you didn’t like about yourself,” she said.

The responsibility of motherhood, along with her community advocacy translated into her business. She reminds parents of children with disabilities that hearing loss is not a tragic condition, provides resources, and connects them to others who have a shared experience.

“Camilla has always had her hand in a lot of things, but she’s very focused and organized,” said her mom, Connie.

“I AM LEARNING MORE ABOUT MYSELF AND HOW TO BE A BETTER BUSINESSWOMAN.”

Learn more about Microtia Life, LLC, and Camilla by visiting microtialife.com



Clockwise from top left: Camilla with her daughter, Jada; in first grade; her college graduation from the University of Cincinnati; a family portrait

“When she puts her mind to something—it’s been like this since she was young—Camilla is going to do whatever she needs to do to accomplish it.”

As she celebrates the first anniversary of Microtia Life, Camilla is looking to the future. She is currently a doctoral candidate and her research looks at the experiences of Black people who have microtia and atresia. She also plans to publish a book and hopes her business will help make advocacy less intimidating.

“The community is seeking people to just be there. Do what makes sense for you, your purpose and your passion,” she said. “Give yourself grace, trust the process and focus on your strengths.”

5 QUESTIONS

with former NFL quarterback & nonprofit founder Ken Anderson



Top: Ken at the opening of Just Brew Coffee House in Silverton; Inset: During his career as quarterback for the Cincinnati Bengals

Tell us about the Ken Anderson Alliance. Why are you passionate about it?

We started the Ken Anderson Foundation to show support for our nephew Drew, who had a severe form of autism. We wanted him to be able to live his life to the fullest, whatever level that may be. In 2017, we merged with another group to form the Ken Anderson Alliance. Our organization's goal is to help create live, work and engage opportunities for adults with disabilities.

What's your favorite thing about Cincinnati?

The city itself. I always tell people it is big enough to have everything that you want—sports, the arts, recreation—and small enough so it's easy to get around (before the work on the bridge). It is a great city to raise a family and a city concerned about the needs of others.

What are your predictions for the Bengals this season?

I think the Bengals will be much improved this season. Joe Burrow is the real deal. If they can keep him upright, he can lead us to where they want to go. I think Zac Taylor is a terrific coach. The future is bright for the Bengals!

Learn more about the Ken Anderson Alliance and its work at KenAndersonAlliance.org

What is your most memorable moment from playing in the NFL?

Playing in the Freezer Bowl in January 1982—it was the coldest game in NFL history. It was for the AFC Championship and a trip to the Super Bowl, the first in Bengals' history.

How do you spend your free time?

I like golfing, working in the yard, and chasing around my grandkids.

ANNA LEAH SWAFFORD Monfort Heights • 21 years old

"I was wanting to help people and be looking out for them," Anna Leah says about how she recently got more involved in advocacy and joined the HCDDS group Neighbors in Action. Anna Leah cares a lot about transportation. "It's important to be able to get to your job and other places in the community. I can show people how to get reliable transportation and reach out to service providers."



JILL GIBBONEY Spring Grove Village • 43 years old

Jill says she became an advocate almost by accident. "As soon as I dipped my toe in, it became a groundswell of opportunities where I could be helpful and where I could make change happen," she says. One issue on her radar is the proposed income increases for federal disability benefits that could allow more people to get married.

"It's something that has bothered me for a long time since the marriage equality decision in 2015," Jill says. "There is a gap that doesn't cover people with disabilities who get benefits and it makes them feel like second-class citizens. I'm not a current recipient of SSI or SSDI, but I hope this bill gets passed and there will be a change." She encourages others to contact their representatives to voice support for the legislation.



JAMES HARLEY Mt. Healthy • 36 years old

"The biggest issue for me is accessible transportation for people with physical disabilities so we can get to and from work, and make connections to the communities where we live and work," he says. James is active with various local and statewide organizations. He began his advocacy journey in 2010 after meeting a fellow advocate who lived in the same apartment building.



Sweater Weather: It's All About Layers

By Evelyn Ritzi

Dressing in layers is a smart way to stay warm in chilly months. Layering is a styling technique that makes the most of multiple pieces of clothing and expands your wardrobe with new outfit combinations!

FOLLOW A COLOR PALETTE

Layering works best when you follow a clear color combination.

LAYER THIN TO THICK

Order your clothing layers from the thinnest fabric to the thickest fabric.

COMBINE UNIQUE TEXTURES

Part of the fun of layering is wearing clothes with different textures.



Layering gives you a chance to experiment with new combinations and get the most from your wardrobe. Have fun with it and try something new!

You can find affordable layers at any of Ohio Valley Goodwill Industries' 19 regional stores. Shopping at Goodwill supports life-changing job training programs and employment services for people with disabilities, helping them achieve personal and vocational success.

Find locations at CincinnatiGoodwill.org



FRESH FROM THE OVEN

This sweet treat is perfect alongside coffee or hot apple cider. Try mixing in cinnamon & apple or pumpkin & pecan for fall flavors. Recipe makes 12 standard muffins or 24 mini muffins.

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 cup whole milk
- 1/4 cup vegetable oil
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 1/2 cups of mix-ins

1. Preheat your oven to 425°F and lightly grease the cups of a standard 12-cup muffin pan. Or line the cups with papers, and grease the papers.
2. In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the dry ingredients (flour, sugar, salt, baking powder) until well combined.
3. In a separate bowl, whisk liquid ingredients together (milk, oil, eggs, vanilla) until smooth.
4. Pour the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients. Use a rubber spatula to gently mix the ingredients together. Then fold in mix-ins like nuts, fruit or spices.
5. Fill the cups of the pan two-thirds to three-quarters full. Sprinkle with sugar, if desired.

6. Bake the muffins for 15 to 20 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the middle of a center muffin comes out clean.

7. Remove muffins from the oven, and as soon as you can handle them, turn them out of the pan onto a rack to cool. Enjoy!!



Jordan Hamons owns *Tablespoon Cooking Co.* She regularly teaches classes with the *Down Syndrome Association of Greater Cincinnati.* Learn more at TablespoonCookingCo.com

CALENDAR

Mural Tours

Sept. 25, *Varying neighborhoods*

Visit Pendleton, Over-the-Rhine or Downtown for a guided walking tour of ArtWorks murals.

ArtworksCincinnati.org

Great Outdoor Weekend

Sept. 25-26, *Multiple locations.*

Nearly 100 outdoor recreation and nature programs around our region, all free and open to the public.

GreatOutdoorWeekend.org

Sunflower Festival

Oct. 2-3, *Gorman Heritage Farm*

Fall festival featuring hayrides, pumpkins, vendors, mazes and more. Advance tickets required.

GormanFarm.org

Neighbors in Action

Thursday, Oct. 7, *Zoom*

Join teens and adults with DD to learn more about advocacy and get involved in local efforts.

HamiltonDDS.org/calendar

Asian Food Fest

Oct. 9-10, *Court Street Plaza*

Celebrate the culture, cuisine, entertainment, and drinks of Asian communities. Free admission.

CincinnatiUSA.com/events

Go the Extra Mile Walk

Oct. 16, *Winton Woods*

Enjoy a scenic stroll with lunch, games and activities. Free, but registration required.

EnvisionOhio.org

Cincy Holiday Expo

Oct. 23-24, *Sharonville*

Get a jump start on your holiday shopping. Vendors include artisan crafts, jewelry, home decor & more.

CincyHolidayExpo.com

Flying Pig Marathon

Oct. 29-31, *Various locations*

Choose from a variety of virtual or in-person events, from one mile to 26.2 miles. Registration now open.

FlyingPigMarathon.com

PNC Festival of Lights

Nov. 19 - Jan. 9, *Cincinnati Zoo*

Visitors can view light displays, ride the North Polar Express train, and more. Included with Zoo admission.

CincinnatiZoo.org



Always check the event website for the most up-to-date information

MEANINGFUL MOMENTS

Ohio's DD Bill of Rights

By Leah Alexander

Did you know Ohio has a Bill of Rights for people with developmental disabilities? It was passed in 1986 to make sure Ohioans with developmental disabilities had the same rights and protections as other Ohio citizens. This year is the 35th anniversary of the DD Bill of Rights. It means:

- ▶ People in Ohio with disabilities deserve to have respect just like anyone else.
- ▶ People are allowed to have healthy foods.
- ▶ People decide where they want to worship.
- ▶ People deserve to go see the dentist or doctor when they need to.
- ▶ When we don't like what someone says about us, we can ask for help and we won't get in trouble.

See the full DD Bill of Rights at hamiltondds.org/rights

My Life is a publication of Hamilton County Developmental Disabilities Services (HCDDS).

Our magazine empowers people with independent life skills, shares success stories, and promotes opportunities for advocacy and making connections. It's created by and for people with developmental disabilities.



———— HAMILTON COUNTY ————
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES
———— S E R V I C E S ————

