

Springtime means gardening at UCOM. Whether it's the raised garden boxes provided by UCOM and tended by our neighbors at their homes, the on site hoop house managed by the community groups that visit UCOM each week, or the community garden at Marquette park where our neighbors grow their own plots side by side, new growth is bursting forth at UCOM in the Spring.



Resources for living. Hope for life.

Spring 2018

United Church Outreach Ministry

1311 Chicago Dr. SW, Wyoming, MI 49509 616.241.4006

www.UCOMgr.org

Unity in Community

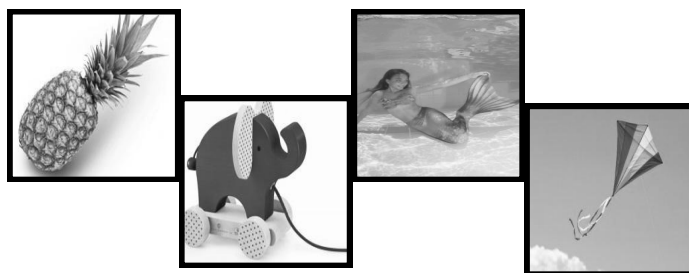
BettyBeth Johns – Community Development Manager

A blue elephant pull toy, a multi colored kite, a pineapple and a mermaid. Three of the objects have a TAIL – the pineapple does not. It doesn't mean the pineapple is useless. It just means that *when we look for it, we can find common ground.*

A former refugee from South Sudan, Carl* spent his 'formative years' fleeing machete-wielding terrorists. He witnessed the gruesome murders of his brothers, father and countless others before his rescue and transport to Michigan. More than a decade later, these memories and this 'strange' culture in the U.S. challenge Carl to maintain stability and wholeness. A hard worker, Carl has been able to find jobs to pay his bills, but is not yet able to vision a future for himself as disturbing and upsetting news from his homeland and those he left behind continue to haunt him.

Karen* quit her job in retail to make more money at a local factory. She's a good worker, receiving numerous accolades before she sustained an injury and was assigned to the Re-employability program to rest and rehab. She regrets quitting her former job, as she can see now that 'fast money' does not replace promotion and career-focused sustainable employment. She's excited to explore, for the first time in her adult life, what her future might hold.

Joe* has experienced social exclusion his entire life. As an adult with cognitive impairment, he consistently seeks approval and validation from those around him. He's eager to learn, careful to remember what he's learned, and hopeful to learn more. He gets along well with others but he has trouble with boundaries and needs kind and



consistent mentoring.

Mary* is about to finish college. She's energetic, smart, motivated to succeed. She is eager to practice her social work degree in 'real world' scenarios and is quickly learning that the college classroom did not adequately prepare her for the tears, frustration and bitterness that often accompany hurting people in a lagging economy.

FOUR of these people belong together. Four of these people work together...at UCOM. Here, these four find support for their journeys. They share stories. They explore opportunities. They learn new skills and challenge old stereotypes. They learn to navigate a path to self-sufficiency and practice humanity in a safe and nurturing environment.

Without your support UCOM could not provide this nurturing and supportive community for these four and so many more. Building a community is a challenge. It requires constant and intentional investment in 'finding the common ground' of our humanity. It means being a place of UNITY and healing and it can often mean sacrificing what is easy for what is meaningful and lasting. With your help UCOM is able to do just that.



Who Doesn't Love a Good Party?

**By BettyBeth Johns –
Community Development Manager**

Imagine you are planning a party for 25 of your closest friends. Choose the entertainment, the food, the venue...the works!

Now, look over the price list. Add it all up. WOW. That was a surprise!

Wait! We've had an unexpected family financial emergency. Your party budget has just been CUT IN HALF. What will you do??

Conversations commence...invite fewer people, don't serve food, don't serve so much food, have friends bring the food, use a streaming music service instead of a DJ, have the party in the backyard instead of a hall...choices that are hard to make, but keep the focus on friends and fun. Not getting what you thought you "must have" isn't so bad when you can see it all laid out in a budget.

Welcome to week four of the UCOM/Junior Achievement/Lee High School personal finance adventure! Through a series of hands-on real world financial scenarios, 11th and 12th graders in Mrs. Kramer's Personal Finance class had an opportunity to think through their past, current and future money management skills. In addition to party planning, the students "purchased" groceries from local ads, "invested" in stocks, reviewed credit



Lee High School students learn about making smart money choices and personal finance with UCOM and Junior Achievement

offers, and worked on goal setting.

Many of these students live in ALICE* homes – they have working parents and may be working themselves, but their families find it difficult to meet even basic financial needs each month. Learning how to manage meager assets empowers these engaged learners and helps them envision a future time when money choices may mean which movie to see rather than which mouth to feed.

Following the eight week course, several of the students made their way to UCOM to volunteer their time and talent. UCOM is delighted to be a community connector and to share the resources we have to build capacity in future generations.

*Asset Limited Income Constrained Employment (low wages that don't meet basic financial needs)

Interested in Volunteering?

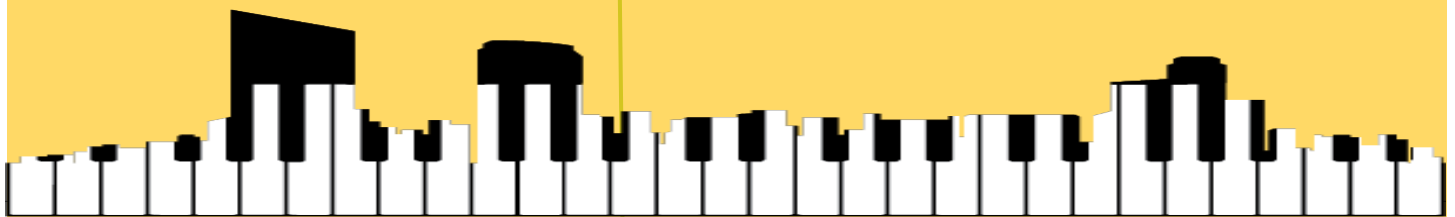
UCOM is currently in need of drivers to help make weekly pickups from our donating partners. We also need volunteers to work in the food pantry and, clothing area.

Wherever your passions lie, UCOM has a volunteer opportunity for you. Give us a call today to get started.



15th Annual Friends of UCOM Benefit Concert & Silent Auction

Come celebrate with us **Sunday, April 22nd** at the 15th Annual Friends of UCOM Benefit Concert. The evening starts with our **silent auction at 6:00 pm followed by the concert at 7:00 pm**. Light hors d'oeuvres and refreshments will be served after the concert. Join us as we celebrate and embrace the diversity of our community, our supporters, and our neighbors. This year's concert features music from acclaimed Jazz duo *Edye Evans Hyde and Michael Hyde* and American Pianist *Mark De Zwaan* as well as a performance by ArtPrize 9 finalist, spoken word artist *Kyd Kane*. Tickets are \$25 and all proceeds from the event go directly to UCOM. Your donations support life-changing programs for our neighbors. **Tickets are available now online or by calling UCOM and asking for Bruce.**



How Are We Doing?

**By Dr. Bruce Roller—
Executive Director**

We say it often to our donors, volunteers, neighbors and other supporters: **UCOM only works because of YOU.**

We often use this space to tell you what we are doing. Stories, ministry updates, works in progress, our attitudes and philosophy are all things that are meant to keep you, our most important mentors, in the loop.

This time YOU write the article. Please take a moment to write me your honest responses to some of these questions or go to our website UCOMgr.org, and comment on my blog posting by this same title.

How are we doing? Is UCOM's emphasis where you want it to be? Do we treat people well? Are we on the right track when we emphasize nutritious eating, healthy activity, and coaching for people who are preparing to succeed in careers or trades? Are we using

the right programs to help people to assess their strengths and to fulfill their dreams? What are we doing right and what should we be doing differently to help to create healthier, happier, and more economically stable communities?



I hope to hear from UCOM staff, volunteers, program participants and other interested parties. If you shy away from a public forum, you can still help me to hear your voice by addressing me at Bruce.Roller@UCOMgr.org. Thank you for taking the time to help UCOM to be more relevant, more committed and more focused on our mission.



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MISSION

UCOM values individuals and builds community in southwestern Kent County by providing material and educational assistance to meet basic needs, improve quality of life, and promote self-sufficiency.

Please accept my donation in the amount of \$ _____

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UCOM makes it easy for you to donate at UCOMgr.org
My friend gave me a copy of your newsletter,
I would like to share "love" with our neighbors too.