

**Returns
abound:**

Volunteers at UCOM helped prepare nearly 300 tax returns this season. A grand total of over \$330,000 in refunds were the result. 100% of this goes directly to our neighbors.



Resources for living. Hope for life.

Spring 2016

United Church Outreach Ministry

1311 Chicago Dr. SW, Wyoming, MI 49509 616.241.4006

www.UCOMgr.org

Life is Getting Better!

**By Bonnie Rencher—
NOW Program Assistant**

Several months ago, Maria, one of our bilingual clients enrolled in the NOW (Nutritional Options for Wellness) program coordinated by Access of West Michigan. She was referred to UCOM's NOW pantry (one of ten sites in Kent county) following a diagnosis of diabetes. Her doctor hoped that with greater access to healthy fresh foods and exercise Maria might be better able to manage her condition.



Eating for health: NOW program participants shop once a week and choose only healthy and fresh food options to help them better manage chronic illnesses.

Recently, Maria came in to do her weekly grocery shopping and participate in the Sit and Be Fit Class. Flashing a wide beautiful smile and sporting a cute short pixie hair style Maria told me, "Life is getting better." She was so excited about meeting some of her health goals such as losing weight, increasing physical activity and eating

healthier foods that she chronicled those in a video. Maria has even taken her physical activity to the next level and participates in Zumba and Kick Boxing through the YMCA.

Maria enjoys coming to UCOM and offered to volunteer her services. Since she began volunteering Maria has helped UCOM in so many areas; in the kitchen where she weighs and packages food, stocking the pantry shelves, at the grocery checkout, and providing custodial support. Through her volunteerism she developed a work record and sought assistance in obtaining employment from UCOM's Community Development Manager, BettyBeth Johns. Her job search was successful and Maria is now employed in custodial services.

Maria is still working on a few more personal goals, but is happy with her progress and quality of life. She has become more self-sufficient and continues to use UCOM and other resources in the community.



Sit and Be Fit: Students exercise at their own pace at UCOM



Moving forward and Owning an Imperfect Past

By BettyBeth Johns –
Community Development Manager

Incarceration can be a time of healing, learning, and personal growth when supportive services are invested in rehabilitation and not just restitution. For multiple offenders, or persons convicted of felony offenses, even the best intentions to “fly straight and live right” upon release from prison can be complicated when housing and employment are out of reach. Through UCOM’s workforce development services, reentry participants are given the opportunity to practice interviewing skills that include owning an imperfect past and crafting a future visioning statement. As a partner organization with the Kent County Employment Services Collaborative, UCOM leverages resources for transitional work experiences, mock interviews, computer classes, literacy services, GED testing, and employer connections.

Dale had been in prison for more than fifteen years. His crime was serious, but so was his determination to better himself and return to society as a productive, self-sufficient citizen. While incarcerated, Dale completed a college degree,

Workforce Development

UCOM’s Workforce Development program has helped hundreds of our neighbors accomplish their career goals. From returning to school to finding work, UCOM tailors our program to each participant.

Your support ensures that more people like Dale can get the help they need to continue their path to success.



received teaching credentials, and facilitated classes for other inmates. Upon his release, Dale wasted no time connecting with Criminal Justice Chaplaincy and the Veterans Administration. He was able to secure housing and counseling services, and reached out to UCOM for workforce development services. He obtained employment within a month of reentry, but is not stopping there. Dale dreams of teaching and counseling others who are returning to society. He works diligently to present a portfolio of positive recommendations from coworkers, supervisors, and community members who know that the “new” Dale is positively invested in his community. He is confident that he has a bright professional future and UCOM is proud to continue to support his journey.



Until we meet again



Diana DeYoung
October 1951—March 2016

**By Erik Keener –
Assistant Executive Director**

For nearly 20 years Diana DeYoung had been a constant at UCOM. A faithful servant of the mission, warm and welcoming presence, and friend to neighbors, staff and volunteers, Diana touched many lives.

Sadly that time has come to an end. Though Diana may be gone from our lives, her presence will live on at UCOM in the spirit of kindness and generosity that she so thoroughly embodied. She will be greatly missed, but never forgotten. We love you Diana and we know that you are watching us now from a better place.

Diana Gail DeYoung, age 65, of Grandville, was taken from us unexpectedly on Thursday, March 24, 2016. She was a loving mother, sister and friend. Diana was a dedicated servant to UCOM and the community. She will be dearly missed by her children, Steven D. DeGroot, Todd (Hillary) DeYoung, Deidre (Andrew) DeYoung-Tittle, Arianne (Eric) Mattone, Jessica DeYoung (William Clawson); grandchildren, Max DeYoung, Korra, and Rya Mattone; father, Robert Stalsonburg; siblings, Karen Young, Terry Stalsonburg, Dale Stalsonburg, Valerie Schleh, Sallie Youell; several nieces and nephews. Condolences may be sent online at www.mkdfuneralhome.com.

Jose and Marina love *Preparando para su futuro*

**By Erik Keener –
Assistant Executive Director**

Sometimes it can be difficult for the staff at UCOM to explain to our friends just how much their support means to our neighbors. No amount of statistics, anecdotes, or stories we tell can drive the point home. Sometimes, you just have to hear it from our neighbors themselves. Thankfully, we have no shortage of enthusiastic neighbors who'd like to let you know what UCOM's programs mean to them.

"I learned a lot during Jackie's financial skills class! This class helped me tremendously. We have been living in the USA for many years and still this class is beneficial for us.

We learned great resources and tips. We got knowledge about how to plan and how to manage our money in a smarter way. We have learned how to use resources, to save money and to reduce expenses.

I want to thank UCOM for a very interesting class/course! It was fun and it has been a good investment for me, my wife and my entire family. We strongly recommend attending this useful class. This is something we all need."

--José and Marina



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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.

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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.