

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT

Patti Hetkey
Community Relations Coordinator
Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities
330-725-7751 ext. 273

Families “Take Flight!” with Help from MCBDD and United Airlines

Medina, Ohio, August 23, 2018 – On Saturday, August 11, local families gathered at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport for their chance to practice flying on a plane. The Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities (MCBDD), in collaboration with United Airlines, hosted “Take Flight!”, an event which helped over 119 people with disabilities and their family members experience all the steps necessary to navigate the challenges of air travel in today’s world.

“Take Flight!” participants practiced entering the airport, getting boarding passes, going through TSA security, waiting for a flight, and boarding a plane. Once aboard the plane, families experienced typical in-flight activities such as hearing preflight instructions, a simulated take off, pilot announcements, snack and beverage service, and a simulated landing. Families familiarized themselves with all aspects of the airplane including seats, tray tables and aircraft restrooms. After the plane “landed” the participants were able to visit and take photos with the pilots and flight crew and ask questions.

The “Take Flight!” event was specifically designed to help families discover and learn ways to alleviate stress that may occur when traveling with a person with a developmental disability. The experience proved very useful for families that were concerned about the ability of their family member to travel by plane. Dawn Thompson, who attended the event with her son, said, “When we need to travel our only option seems to be by car, which limits where we can travel to, but after today I have learned there may be other options for us. I learned with some extra help and planning we may be able to consider air travel.”

This was the MCBDD’s first time to offer this program to local families. “We were thrilled to be a part of this event. Air travel can be a wonderful gateway to many exciting adventures and we are happy to be able to work with a great community partner like United Airlines, to provide the chance for people with disabilities to experience those adventures,” said Jon Bluebond, MCBDD Superintendent. “All people deserve to feel confident and comfortable when they travel. If this event helps one family to expand their travel opportunities then this will have been time well spent.”

But families were not the only participants who benefited; airport, airline, TSA professionals and other personnel had the opportunity to learn how to interact and deliver services to people with disabilities in a more supportive learning environment. Over 15 United Airlines employees including flight desk attendants, boarding crew, pilots and flight attendants volunteered to help with the event. "I cannot begin to express my appreciation for the work United Airlines volunteers did today in order to make our Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities special guests and their families feel welcome and have a magical experience. Each of them gave their time and care and that is what made the difference. There were a lot of smiles today," stated Jon Gooda, United Airlines Cleveland General Manager.

###

Photos Included:

MCBDD Take Flight 1 – United Airlines volunteer Tammy Andes (l) welcomes Carrie Koenig (r) as she boards the plane for the "Take Flight!" program.

MCBDD Take Flight 2 – Flight attendants Julie Ackerman (l) and Christy Matthey (r) take a moment to pose for photo with passengers Zach and Nancy Baird (seated l to r) as part of the "Take Flight!" event

About the Medina County Board of DD

The Medina County Board of DD is the community resource responsible for connecting, coordinating and funding services for individuals of all ages with developmental disabilities. We help with everything from early intervention and education opportunities for children to employment and community inclusive living for adults. The mission of the Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities is to promote and empower over 1250 individuals with developmental disabilities, from birth to death, to live, learn work and socialize in their communities.