



## About Cantalician Center for Learning

Founded in 1956, Cantalician Center for Learning is a **nonprofit offering individualized services to hundreds of children and adults with developmental disabilities** in Western New York. It provides support in the areas of Academics, Day Habilitation, and Community and Employment Services.



## Challenges

Cantalician Center traditionally used restraint when clients in its care exhibited aggressive behavior that presented significant risk of injury. Teachers, therapists, and other support staff were being trained in a behavior management system that had been adopted by the agency almost two decades earlier. In recent years, administrators **grew to believe that the rate of injuries among staff and clients was too high** and felt the culture of the agency was not headed in a positive direction.

*"We realized that 'tried and true' was not working for us anymore—students and staff were both receiving injuries at a rate that was just too high."*

**TIFFANY SEMONIAN**  
*Behavior Department Head, Cantalician Center for Learning*

While exploring solutions, administrators spoke to similar agencies in the area and learned that they had dramatically reduced injuries by adopting the Ukeru™ method of crisis management. In 2019, Cantalician reached out to Ukeru in hopes of learning new ways to reduce the number of physical interventions it was using with students in its academic building, in addition to reducing the number of student and staff injuries.

## Working with Ukeru

Cantalician initially worked with Ukeru to train staff overseeing one classroom that had been reporting a high number of daily physical interventions. After one year of using Ukeru—while also allowing teachers to use restraint on a case-by-case basis—the data convinced administrators to eliminate the use of restraint entirely.

In 2020, additional Cantalician staff were trained to be Ukeru instructors, enabling them to train all 200 members of the agency's Academic Campus staff. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, training was done in groups of 10 in a large gymnasium over the course of six weeks, with trainers and participants utilizing personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand sanitizer to maintain safety. The agency **made a point to train all staff working directly with students**, which included over a dozen different positions, including special education teachers, classroom aides, therapists, school counselors, and nurses.

"We have found that having everyone on the same page is extremely important to the overall culture of our building and agency," says Behavior Department Head Tiffany Semonian.

*"There will always be hesitation in trying something new, especially something designed to keep you safe. But focusing on relationship-building, earning trust, and consistently not placing your hands on other individuals helps in the long-run."*

**TIFFANY SEMONIAN**  
*Behavior Department Head, Cantalician Center for Learning*

"We anticipated some pushback from those who had been trained in one system for almost 20 years, but surprisingly **trainers heard over and over again how happy everyone was to not have to use physical interventions anymore.**"

When the training was complete, Catalician stopped using its former behavior management system—which included the use of restraint—and focused solely on mastering Ukeru. The agency also began offering additional trainings on trauma-informed care to all newly hired staff.

## Results

Today, Catalician's Academic Campus has **completely eliminated restraint**, and client and staff injuries have fallen dramatically.

"One year after utilizing Ukeru in our Academic program, there has been a huge shift, culturally," says Semonian. "Ukeru made us all focus on putting the students first. Now we think about what happened to them, search for the 'why,' and respond in ways that holistically provide students with support, space, and guidance whenever and however they need or want it."

A number of Cantalician staff have said they love that Ukeru focuses on how the body and brain are directly affected by trauma.

**Employees report feeling much safer** when giving students physical space—while still supporting them with comfort vs. control statements—versus using a hands-on approach.

In the future, administrators plan to send more staff to become Ukeru instructors, with the ultimate goal of training every division of Cantalician in the Ukeru philosophy.

# 100%

Restraint  
Reduction



Client and staff injuries have decreased dramatically



Students are provided holistic support



Staff feel more safe and secure