

The Insider

July 2025



UNIVERSAL MH/DD/SAS Mission Statement

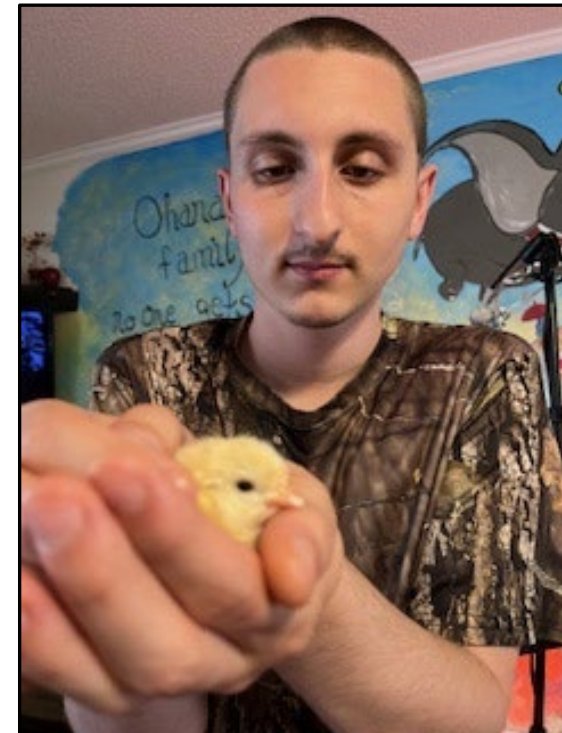
Universal MH/DD/SAS is dedicated to helping individuals and families affected by mental illness, developmental disabilities and substance abuse in achieving their full potential to live, work and grow in the community.

WHY THE NEED FOR THE INSIDER ? *The purpose of this newsletter is to provide specialized information to all Universal MH/DD/SAS employees. The intent is to develop an informed workforce, to foster a greater sense of community and to build morale.*



Austin's World, A Symphony of Feathers, History and Heart ~ Crissy Oravits (Mom)

“In our little corner of the world, where the sun paints the fields with gold and the air hums with the gentle clucking of chickens, lives my son, Austin. Austin is a special soul, a young man with a heart as vast as the open sky, and a love for animals that knows no bounds.



Our small farm is his sanctuary, his kingdom of feathered friends. Here, he is the benevolent ruler of a bustling community of chickens, ducks, and bobwhite quail. Each afternoon, Austin is out there, his face lit with pure joy, feeding his beloved flock. He knows each bird by name, their personalities as distinct to him as the stars in the night sky. Although his memory is very poor in most areas he certainly shines with animals. He cradles them gently, his touch a silent language of love, and they, in turn, respond with soft coos and contented chirps. It's like they know he's extra special because they do nothing special in return to the rest of the family.

It's not just about feeding them; it's about the connection. He cuddles them, plays with them, and shares a bond that transcends words. He understands their gentle needs, their quiet joys, and their simple presence fills his world with a sense of purpose and profound happiness. He mimics their chirps, calls and songs.


Beyond the farm, Austin's world expands to embrace the echoes of history. He has a keen interest in military history and historical battlefield sites. These places, where time seems to stand still, resonate deeply with him. He loves the vast open spaces, the paths that wind through fields and forests, allowing him to walk as much as his heart desires. Who really knows what he's thinking but he seems to get mesmerized by the relics left behind.



We often find ourselves exploring museums near military bases, where he can immerse himself in the stories of the past. He wanders through the exhibits, his eyes wide with wonder, absorbing every detail. Then, we venture to historical battlefields, where he can walk freely, tracing the footsteps of those who came before and finding the dog tags of his Uncle Jon who was tragically killed in action long before he had the opportunity to know him.

There's a quiet contemplation in his stride, a respect for the land and the stories it holds. What makes these trips truly special is the freedom they offer him. Austin loves to walk, to explore, to feel the earth beneath his feet as shoes are very complicated and troublesome for him to wear most days. The open spaces of the battlefields allow him to do just that, without constraints or limitations. He moves at his own pace, taking in the sights, sounds, and smells, connecting with the history in his own unique way.

Austin's world is a beautiful tapestry woven from the threads of love, nature, and history. He teaches us every day about the power of gentle kindness, the joy of simple pleasures, and the importance of embracing the moments that truly matter. His love for animals reminds us of the pure, unconditional affection they offer, and his passion for history shows us the importance of remembering and honoring the past even though he lacks the words to string together you can see it in his smile.



Watching him interact with our fantastic Q.P. Monique Simmons in Wilson, NC is purely on another level he's not had since the loss of our dear Marilyn Porter. However Austin adores Monique's visits, she knows exactly what he needs and Austin always has a baby chick to show her.

Austin is my eldest son, he turns 25 in May, no matter the complex issues he faces daily Universal provides a good service to us as we have been with the agency a long time. Thank you to Monique for always fighting for us and being in our corner. Thank you to all the workers who do this job with your whole heart as we appreciate each one of you."



Flowers from the greenhouse where Austin grows Venus Flytraps and gathers fresh eggs.



“I enjoy working in Early Intervention because I take pride in knowing that I can be a helping hand in the lives of my families through my experience, knowledge and skills. Knowing I can help mold these children in the first three years of life, brings me true happiness. Thank you to Universal for giving me this beautiful opportunity!

“If you love what you do, you’ll never work a day in your life.”



Anna Lundquist is so proud of **Ryan** from the Wilmington office. Ryan just graduated from North Brunswick High School! His mom said that he was so excited that he ate dinner with his graduation cap still on!

Here are the Top Ten Note Writer Winners

2025 2nd Qt

Tonya Carpenter

Haeju Hong

Randolph Kearns

Jamal Fraizer

Kimberly Michaels

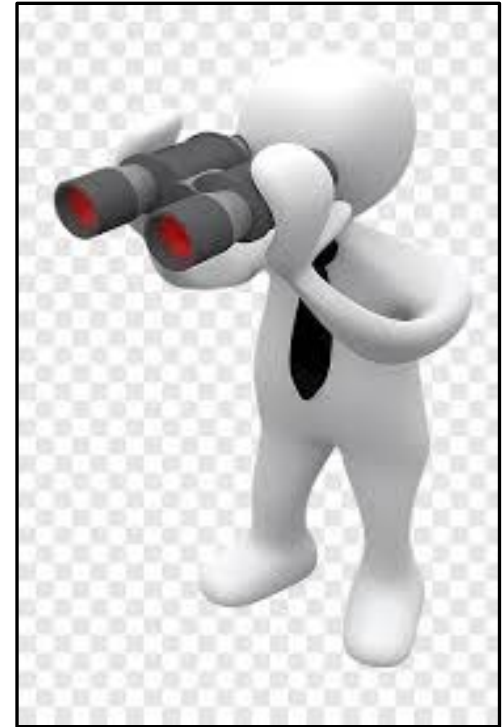
Sandra Rogers

Julie Jones

Mary Cooper

Anne Dowling

Laura Gaddis



**Be on the lookout for
Universal's New
Online Training
Experience:
Launching July 1, 2025**

You guys ROCK!



Enough Said ~ obtained from Facebook

<p>196.97 79</p> <p>Au</p> <p>Gold</p> <p>Valuable & Rare</p>	<p>47.87 22</p> <p>Ti</p> <p>Titanium</p> <p>Incredibly Strong</p>	<p>150.36 62</p> <p>Sm</p> <p>Samarium</p> <p>Useful Many talents</p>
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Strategies for Supporting Children with Autism + ADHD ~ obtained from Facebook

Area of Support	Challenges Often Observed	Practical Strategies	Tools/ Resources	Why It Works
Transitions Between Activities	Difficulty shifting focus, meltdowns, refusal	Use visual schedules, 2-minute warnings, transition songs	Timers, picture cards, routine strips	Helps prepare the brain for change and reduces anxiety
Attention and Focus	Easily distracted, misses instructions	Break tasks into chunks, use visual cues, movement breaks	Checklists, fidgets, seating options	Reduces overload and supports executive function
Sensory Regulation	Over- or under-sensitive to noise, light, touch	Provide sensory tools, quiet zones, sensory diet plans	Noise-cancelling headphones, sensory bins, weighted items	Supports self-regulation and reduces sensory overload
Social Interactions	Misreads social cues, impulsive, intense emotions	Role-play, social scripts, structured peer interaction	Social stories, emotion cards, peer buddies	Builds understanding and improves peer connection
Impulsivity & Hyperactivity	Interrupts, touches everything, can't sit still	Offer choices, use calm-down corners, allow movement	Flexible seating, task cards, "brain breaks"	Provides outlets for energy and fosters autonomy
Emotional Regulation	Mood swings, frustration, shutdowns	Teach emotion vocabulary, use regulation visuals	Zones of Regulation chart, feelings thermometer	Increases self-awareness and emotional control
Task Initiation & Completion	Avoids tasks, forgets steps, overwhelmed	First-Then boards, guided starters, visual task maps	Visual schedules, timers, reward charts	Boosts motivation and reduces executive dysfunction
Communication Support	Delayed or scattered expression, misunderstood	Visual prompts, sentence starters, AAC if needed	Visual cue cards, communication boards	Enhances expression and reduces frustration
Strength-Based Approaches	Seen as "problem behavior" rather than differences	Celebrate neurodiversity, offer choice-based learning	Interest-led projects, autonomy boards	Encourages engagement and builds self-esteem
Collaboration with Adults	Mistrust, meltdowns during adult-led tasks	Establish predictable routines, use co-regulation	Home-school notebook, positive reinforcement charts	Builds trust and consistent support across settings





Down Syndrome was named after John Langdon Down, a British doctor who, in 1866, was the first to classify this condition. Langdon Down began his career as the chief physician at the Earlswood Institution, which cared for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Although he had no prior experience in caring for people with such disabilities, Langdon Down showed a profound interest and empathy for them. At a time when many ignored their value and humanity, he recognized their dignity and was outraged by the inhumane treatment they received.

Physical punishment, poor hygiene, and high mortality rates were common in institutions of that era. Determined to change this reality, Dr. Langdon Down implemented transformative measures. He hired new staff, demanded proper care and strict hygiene, banned physical punishment, and introduced activities such as crafts and hobbies for the patients. Moreover, he photographed his patients with care and sensitivity, portraying them in elegant attire and favorable poses. These images, part of a collection of over 200 photos, supported his clinical descriptions of Down syndrome, detailing physical characteristics and other relevant medical observations.

In 1868, Langdon Down took an even greater step by acquiring a mansion to house people with Down Syndrome. He did not treat it as a mere institution but as a space that met the highest standards of comfort and hygiene. Residents received private education and learned activities such as horse riding, gardening, crafting, and other creative practices. To further enrich their lives, the doctor built a small theater attached to the mansion, promoting artistic and social development among the residents. This mansion, named Normansfield, still stands today in the United Kingdom. It is now known as The Langdon Down Centre and houses the Normansfield Theatre, preserving the legacy of care and respect initiated by John Langdon Down.



As summer approaches, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services is reminding residents to take simple, proactive steps to enjoy outdoor activities safely. With the arrival of warmer weather, NCDHHS is highlighting key tips on water safety, heat protection and food safety to help prevent illness, injury and death. May is National Water Safety Month, and a timely reminder that drowning remains the [leading cause of death for children ages one through four, but it is preventable](#).

"Every North Carolinian deserves to enjoy the summer season without risk to their health or safety," said Dr. Kelly Kimple, Interim State Health Director and NCDHHS Chief Medical Officer. "By taking small, thoughtful actions — like supervising children near water, staying cool during extreme heat and practicing safe grilling — we can all stay safe this summer."

Water Safety: Preventing Tragedy Before It Happens

As families head to water, NCDHHS urges everyone to keep these water safety practices in mind:

- **Actively Supervise:** Drowning can happen silently and in seconds. Keep an eye on children near water.
- **Secure Pool Areas:** Keep gates and doors closed and locked. Remove pool ladders when not in use.
- **Know the Water:** Be aware of currents, depth changes and undertows at beaches, lakes and rivers.
- **Stay Healthy:** Don't swim when ill with diarrhea to prevent spreading germs.
- **Check Water Quality:** Ensure pools are properly disinfected. Local health departments routinely inspect public pools, spas and splash pads.

- **[Be Cautious in All Recreational Waters](#):** Lakes and rivers may carry bacteria or harmful algae blooms.
- Check advisories before swimming.

Heat Safety: Protecting Against Rising Temperatures

According to the North Carolina Climate Science Update, the state continues to experience an increasing number of extreme heat days — those reaching 95 degrees or higher. From [May through September 2024](#), North Carolina recorded over 4,600 emergency department visits for heat-related illness.

NCDHHS encourages all residents to:

- **[Watch for Symptoms](#):** Nausea, dizziness, headache, confusion or a rapid pulse could indicate heat exhaustion or heat stroke.
- **Hydrate and Cool Down:** Move to a cooler area, sip water slowly and seek medical help if symptoms persist.
- **Know Who's at Risk:** Children, older adults, pregnant individuals, outdoor workers, athletes and those without air conditioning are most vulnerable.

To stay informed, sign up for the NCDHHS Heat Health Alert System on the [NC Climate and Health team webpage](#).





The SUN Bucks food program is back for 2025 and is expected to provide benefits to more than 1 million school children in North Carolina this summer.

[SUN Bucks](#) provides a one-time payment of \$120 per eligible child on a debit-like card that can be used to buy nutritious food at retailers and farmers markets that accept EBT, including most major grocery stores in North Carolina.

Notifications from NCDHHS have been sent to eligible families in recent weeks alerting them that their child is automatically certified to receive SUN Bucks benefits. If you receive a call, email, or text from NCDHHS, please do not disregard it.

For eligibility information or questions, visit the [SUN Bucks website](#), or call the NC SUN Bucks Call Center at 1-866-719-0141, select a language, then select option 2 to speak with a SUN Bucks representative.

Last year, the SUN Bucks program had a major impact in NC during the first year of operation, with 1.1 million NC children receiving food benefits and nearly \$130 million in SUN Bucks food assistance issued.

With the rapid rise of publicly accessible AI platforms, it's easier than ever to get instant answers, generate content, or brainstorm ideas. However, it's crucial to understand how these tools work behind the scenes. Many AI systems are trained on user interactions, which means that the information you provide—whether it's a business idea, personal detail, or sensitive data—could be stored and potentially used to improve future responses. In some cases, fragments of your input might even appear in answers to other users.

While these platforms are powerful and convenient, they are not private by default. Always avoid sharing confidential, proprietary, or personally identifiable information. Take a moment to review the platform's privacy policy and data usage terms to ensure you're making informed decisions. Responsible use helps protect your privacy and contributes to a safer digital environment for everyone. Universal Mental Health Services uses Microsoft 365 Copilot as its only approved AI platform, chosen for its security, compliance, and data privacy protections.



If you have any questions, please contact Universal's IT Department by emailing trackit@umhs.net

Universal's Cultural Sensitivity Mission Statement

"Universal MH/DD/SAS strives to develop awareness and respect in order to celebrate the diverse backgrounds of people."



Sept



Aug



FUN Times at the Offices!

Winston's Ice Cream Social – FUN times!



Burlington's Journey to Success Celebrated Easter!





Amber Anderson, Layla Anderson and Tracy Frye representing at Kinderpalozza / ChildFest!



Winston's Melissa Abshire is certainly proud of her relatives. They are both first generation college graduates who have managed to succeed academically while managing to balance school, work, and motherhood. Now THAT is dedication and perseverance!



Forest City's Employee Celebration

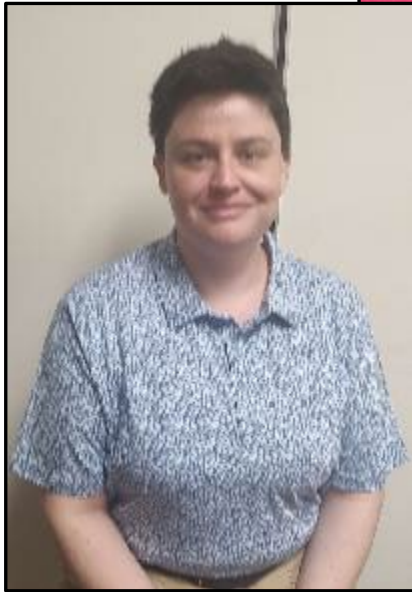




*New Bern's OA
~ Arlene Croto*



*Raleigh's QP
~ Lori Wyde*



*Raleigh's QP
~ Emily Richardson*



*Winston's QP
~ Stephanie Revels*

Brittany Clemens says “Kudos to **Jennifer Rowe**. She’s been an amazing addition to the team and is always there to help with anything I need.” 😊



Tamara Bedford says, “Kudos to **Tracy Frye** for always supporting me and answering my many questions!”

Brittany Clemens says “Kudos to our new OA, **Mrs. Arlene Croto**. She’s not afraid to jump in there and ask questions. She has been a great addition to our team and is just absolutely the sweetest!”

Tracy Frye says “Kudos to **Audrey Cobb** for going over and above to ensure CQI receives the items needed for internal review corrections. Thank you Audrey!”



Sarah Gupta says, “Kudos to **Rod Ethridge, Carmen Mueller, and Justine Cookson** for always working towards making the lives of the members they support better!”



Ingrid Freeman says “Kudos **to Zsa Zsa Johnson** for her innate capacity for organization, pleasant disposition, and willingness to go the extra mile without being asked.”

ZsaZsa Johnson says “Kudos to the Raleigh team for doing well on the audit. Kudos to **Garry** and **Tamara** for their organization and staying calm under pressure.” 😊 Also to Ingrid for always being supportive and providing helpful feedback, when it is needed.



Arlene Croto says “KUDOs for **Brittany Clemens**. Brittany has been a wonderful trainer in helping me adapt to my OA position. She is very thorough and always reachable to answer any questions I may have. In my opinion after working with her, she is such a powerhouse, filled with so much working knowledge and it is a pleasure to have her as my Trainer.”

Drema Greer says “Kudos to **Jonathan Euper** for his hard work with our new online AI generated training. This was no small feat, and he handled it with excellence and professionalism!”

