



The Insider

Oct 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.*

The Beauty of Self-Advocation – submitted by Regional Program Manager Sherry D. Wilkins

I would like to introduce three amazing people from our Morganton office. The first is Raisha. She is new to Universal because she wanted to expand her community knowledge and challenge herself to become a recognizable member in her community to feel welcomed, respected, and included. She spoke up and advocated for herself to exist beyond the routine of attending her day program.

Raisha did not have an issue with her day program. She said, *"all my friends are there,"* but she just wanted more and wanted the experience of living beyond those four walls. She insisted that her Care Manager change her entire service plan, giving her the opportunity to spend each day in her community, developing new friendships with people in town, community cafes, gyms, and other integrated social groups.



Self-Advocation

The second person is Rita Hardin (photo not available.) Rita started the process with Raisha and stepped up to become a caring person on Raisha's team. She agreed to drive over an hour every day, arriving at Raisha's home to ensure she was able to truly experience her community.

After several months, Rita stepped aside to allow the third amazing person, Angela Burgess to continue what she started. Angela committed to maintain all the social connections Rita understood to be important to Raisha, while also pursuing additional inclusive opportunities for her.

Three amazing women connected by their commitment to ensure community living is not just a phrase but a way for people to live a life with meaning and purpose!

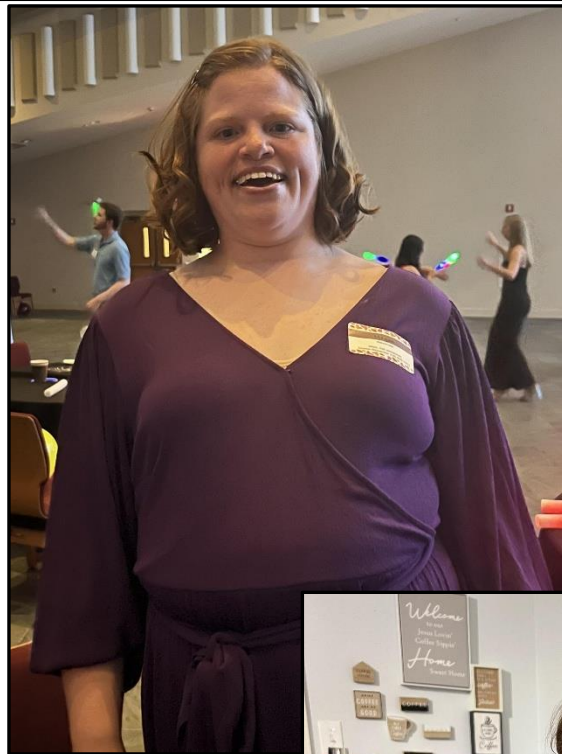
THIS Is Why We Do What We Do!



The Burlington day program Journey to Success has had the absolute privilege of watching Megan transform her life in the most inspiring way. Living with an intellectual and developmental disability (IDD) comes with its own unique challenges, but Megan has never let that define her limits. Through her dedication, resilience, and the support of the Weight Watchers program, Megan has achieved something truly remarkable — she has lost a tremendous amount of weight (over 90 lbs.) and gained so much more in return: confidence, energy, and a renewed sense of self.

Megan approached her wellness journey with courage and consistency. She embraced the Weight Watchers plan with enthusiasm, learning how to make healthier choices, track her progress, and celebrate every small victory along the way. Her determination has not only led to a significant physical transformation but has also inspired everyone around her. Megan's story is a powerful reminder that with the right tools, support, and mindset, anything is possible. She is a shining example of strength and perseverance, and we couldn't be prouder of all she has accomplished.

Way to go, Megan — you are truly amazing!



Marilyn Porter was a Regional Director for the eastern region of Universal Mental Health. For those who knew her, she was a dynamic personality with endless dedication to the people that she served as well as her family. When you worked with Marilyn, you became family. Marilyn came to Universal in September of 2011 and through her time at the agency impacted countless employees and people that we serve. Her advocacy and spirit embodied the mission of "Caring people, Caring for people", both employees, and the people we serve. Marilyn passed away on March 27, 2020, after a courageous fight with cancer. Her loss was one that was felt statewide and farther. Her legacy will live on through this scholarship.



This year's winner of the \$1000. scholarship isColby Oravits from our Wilson office. Colby is in pursuit of an Associate's Degree in HVAC and Electrician work. Colby says: "growing up as the middle child in a family with two brothers who have autism, I have learned resilience, responsibility, and the value of service from a young age." Colby's long-term goal is to establish his own business, a parts store and service company specializing in heating, ventilation, air conditioning, and electrical repairs that will have a mission to hire individuals with special needs, providing them with stable employment and a supportive environment where their skills can thrive. Colby says his vision was inspired by Marilyn Porter, who was his family's Case Manager for 19 years.



"Marilyn's influence cannot be overstated. She was more than a Case Manager; she was a mentor who believed in my potential when others may have overlooked me. Her encouragement to pursue work that helps others shaped my career path. After her passing, I felt a renewed responsibility to honor her legacy by supporting families like mine".



Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia Evidence suggests that the prevalence of Alzheimer's disease in those with IDD, especially Down Syndrome, is higher than in those without IDD, and may develop at younger ages. The average age of onset of dementia for adults with IDD is in the late 60's; however, the average age of onset for adults with Down Syndrome can be as early as 35. It is estimated that at least half of all people with Down Syndrome who live into their sixties will develop Alzheimer's disease. Risk factors for dementia include age, family history, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and multiple medication use. The recommended age to begin dementia screening is 50 in adults with IDD and age 40 for adults with Down Syndrome. A baseline of current functioning is usually completed and then compared with assessments of functioning, memory, and behavior change over time.

Prevalence and Risk Factors:

- While the general population has a 6% chance of developing dementia after age 60, this rate increases with age.
- Individuals with Down Syndrome are at a higher risk of developing dementia, including [Alzheimer's disease](#), and may experience it at a younger age.
- Other conditions, like [Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders \(FASD\)](#) and [Williams Syndrome](#), may also be associated with an increased risk of dementia.
- Age, the severity of intellectual disability, duration of education, hypertension, depression, stroke, and traumatic brain injury are significantly associated with the presence of dementia in individuals with IDD.

Recognizing the Signs:

- Wandering or getting lost in familiar places.
- Loss of bladder or bowel control.
- Difficulty following instructions.
- Changes in personality or behavior.
- Long periods of inactivity or apathy.
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering things.
- Loss of daily living skills.
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits.



As the new school year approaches, managing the demands of work and family life can become overwhelming for parents, caregivers, and guardians. This guide offers practical strategies to help you prioritize your mental well-being during this transition period. Utilizing these techniques will help teach your child stress management, too.

Tips for Managing Stress:

Establish Routine:

- a. Create a family calendar together. Block off time for school drop-offs, extracurriculars, and family events.
- b. Look for an app that can help you prioritize tasks and track chores.
- c. Establish time to reconnect with family and friends throughout the day. This can look like reading to your children at night before bed or texting a friend about your day during lunch.
- d. If you or your child are managing a mental health condition, maintaining your routine is especially important. Continue following your treatment plan and see your provider regularly.

Practice Self-Care:

- a. Include plans for self-care in your daily schedule to recharge and stay resilient. This can look like exercise, meditation, or hobbies, but take the little opportunities for yourself, too.
 - i. Listen to a podcast or your favorite music.
 - ii. Reclaim time that’s just for you, whether that’s in the car or in the shower.
 - iii. Try going for a daily walk or simply giving yourself peaceful moments like sitting quietly with an afternoon cup of tea or taking deep breaths in your car before entering your home.

Set Realistic Expectations:

- a. Notice what control you do have and where you might be able to ask for help. Setting realistic expectations can help you notice what you can do, rather than all the things that feel impossible.
 - i. Write down three sensible goals you want to achieve during the transition for both work and home, allowing room for adjustments.

Find Your Network of Helpers

At Work:

- a. Let your employer know about your family responsibilities and any adjustments needed during the transition.
 - ii. Discuss sharing workloads with colleagues to help each other out.
 - iii. Chat with managers about the upcoming temporary transition time and be clear about expectations.

At Home:

- a. Set aside time each week to discuss schedules, responsibilities, and concerns, ensuring everyone feels heard and supported.
 - i. Let each family member know the importance of their role in the transition, how they can be helpful, and set clear expectations.

At School:

- a. Have a conversation with your child’s teacher to establish expectations and develop the parent/ teacher partnership.
 - i. Keep an eye out for “Meet the Teacher” nights before school starts or shortly into the new school year.
 - ii. If you don’t have time to meet with your child’s teacher, sending an introductory email can also help build a connection.
- b. Consider discussing Individual Education Programs (IEP) with the school if your child needs additional support in the classroom.
 - i. Find more information on NAMI’s website.

In Your Community:

- a. Connect with other parents or support groups to share experiences and gain valuable insights.
 - i. Join a carpool with trusted parents and caregivers.
 - ii. Introduce yourself to other parents at parent/ teacher conferences.
 - iii. Join online groups for local parents or follow parenting accounts on your chosen social media.

We're excited to announce the launch of our new Employee Assistance Program (EAP), a valuable resource designed to support your well-being both at work and in your personal life.

Starting August1, 2025, all employees meeting full time criteria [all active full-time salaried employees and hourly employees who work 32.5 hours or more per week] will have access to free, confidential counseling services. This program is here to help you navigate life's challenges and includes support for:

- Stress, anxiety, and depression
- Family or relationship issues
- Substance use and addiction
- Workplace conflict
- Grief and loss
- Parenting and caregiving challenges
- Major life changes or transitions
- Referrals to community or private resources
- Guidance on work-life balance



Services may include up to three free confidential counseling sessions per calendar year.

How to Access the EAP:
Please click on the link for more information:
<https://umhs.net/employee-assistance>

We believe that taking care of yourself is the first step to doing your best work, and we're here to support you in every step of the way. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to HR.

As Universal employees, we're all responsible for safeguarding Protected Health Information (PHI). Here's how:

Secure Your Workstation

- Lock your screen (Ctrl + Alt + Delete > Lock).
- Don't share or write down passwords.
- Save PHI only to encrypted OneDrive. USBs are blocked—contact IT for help.

Email Smart

- No PHI in subject lines.
- Use \$encrypt in the body to secure messages.
- Double-check recipients before sending.

No PHI via Text

- Texts aren't encrypted. Use email or call instead.

Paper Records

- Shred unneeded PHI.
- Lock up physical records.
- Pick up printed PHI immediately.

Keep It Confidential

- Avoid discussing member info in public.

Report Issues

- Suspect a breach? Tell your supervisor right away.

Privacy is everyone's job. Your actions build trust and ensure compliance.



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

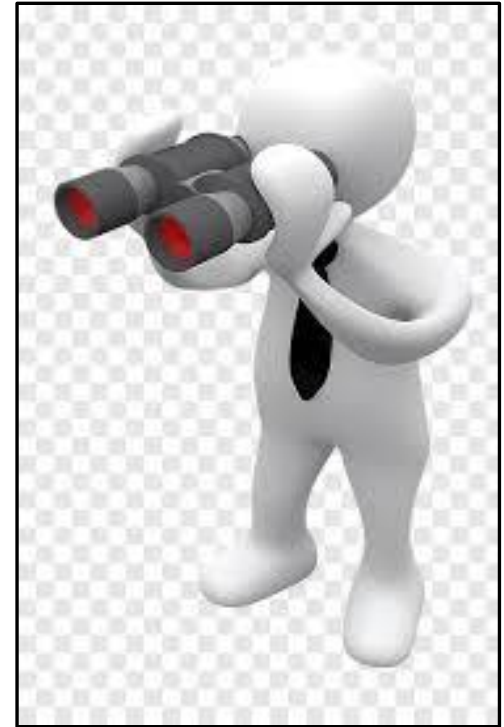
Here are the Top Ten Note Writer Winners



2025 3rd Qt

Doris Bumgarner
Marian Morris
Haeju Hong
Equarn Oden
Mary Primous
Alfreda Steward
Ricki Bartley
Mary Moore
Vanessa Cooper
Shanika Russell

You guys ROCK!



**Experience Universal's
 New Online Training:
 Launched July 1, 2025**

- 1. Be Cautious of Back-to-School Traffic
- 2. Don't be Fooled by Falling Leaves
- 3. Get Your Fire Safety up to Speed
- 4. Avoid Slips and Falls From The Rain
- 5. Be Prepared For Unexpected Cold Weather
- 6. Wash Your Hands Constantly
- 7. Make Sure Your Batteries Are in Order
- 8. Practice Caution When Taking Your Kids Trick or Treating
- 9. Wear Something Reflective When Walking at Night





Keeping it all in the family! Welcome mother and daughter Ghaheidi and Watashar Terry to our Raleigh team!



Equality is everyone getting a pair of shoes.



Diversity is everyone getting a different type of shoe.



Equity is everyone getting a pair of shoes that fits.



Acceptance is understanding we all wear different kinds of shoes.



Belonging is wearing the shoes you want without fear of judgment.

At Universal, we get to wear the shoes we want without judgement!

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."

Oct



World Inclusion Day

Nov



Dec





FUN Times And Talent!



This is what a day at the beach looks like for Thomas and his AFL Provider, Laura Davis. Fun, fun, fun!!

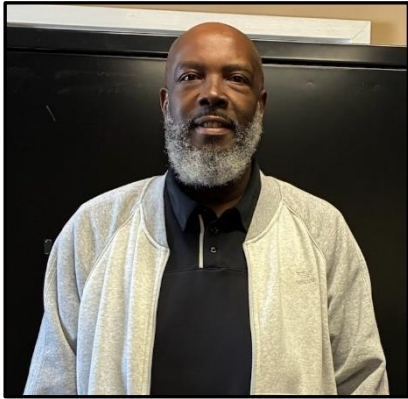


Daniel demonstrating his grilling skills. It was hamburgers and chicken for dinner!



Fabulous artwork by Cynthia!





Burlington's QP ~
Stanley Davis



Morganton's QP ~
Shannan Herndon



Raleigh's QP ~
Justin Rock



Wilmington's QP ~
Tiara De Luca



*Supervisor Supported
Employment VR ~*
Laura Hargitt



Burlington's QP ~
Shania Black

The CQI Dept. would like to give KUDOS to the **Wilson Office** for their Coordination of Care notes. The details listed were very impressive! Your work is noted and appreciated!



Barbara Hardy in the Raleigh office says, *"Kudos! to **Zsa Zsa** who has been very patient with me through my transition into the OA role. She has been and still is a wonderful person and Supervisor. I have reached my 1 year as an OA and things are great! KUDOS ZSA ZSA !"*

Tony Yingling says, *"Kudos to **Garry Wiley** for always lending a listening ear, to **Garland Greene** for his support of a Member who was moving into a new home, and to **Brianna Taylor** for always being empathetic to staff and the people she serves."*



Christina Clatterbuck says, *"I would like to give HUGE kudos to **Anna, Arlene, Brittany, Monique, Mrs. Carr, & Tiara** for their hard work each day to keep our region running smoothly! Y'all are the best of the best! :)"*



Sarah Gupta says, "Kudos to **Helen King** for being a wonderful AFL Provider and putting the needs of the members she supports ahead of her own, time after time; to **Rachel Marcus** for being a great staff for the members on the TBI Waiver. She does a great job of working with the Specialized Consultative providers to assist the members with their brain injury rehabilitation; to **Myra Blackwell** for being an excellent AFL Provider and representing Universal is such a positive way.; and finally, to **Pamela and Dewayne Branch** for working so well together to support the member living in their home and all that they do to support him and his family during so many ups and downs throughout this past year."



Garry Wiley says, "Kudos to all of the **Central Region team members**, for your tireless efforts to support of our members!"



Audrey Cobb says, "Kudos to the "Dynamic Duo" of **Sabin Carroll and Jonathan Euper**. They are always readily available to clear up my computer situations. What great assets they are to Universal and me. Also, to **Zsa Zsa Johnson** for her patience during the Raleigh Office move. I personally thank her for all her support regardless of the situation."

Zsa Zsa Johnson says "A huge kudos to **everyone** who contributed to making the move to our new Raleigh office smooth and painless. Your hard work, coordination, and positive attitude made all the difference. From planning and logistics to setup and support—every effort was noticed and appreciated. Here's to new beginnings in a beautiful space!"

