

The Insider

Apr 2026



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.*



A Successful 2025 ~ by Brook Phillips

Once again, 2025 was a strong and rewarding year for Universal Mental Health Services. We saw steady growth in the services we provide, and the outcomes tracked through our Quality Management Department showed positive results across the agency.

This progress is a direct reflection of our team. The work we do to support individuals with developmental disabilities takes compassion, skill, and heart, and our staff show up with all three every day. I'm truly grateful for the dedication and teamwork that make our success possible. Universal is filled with talented, caring people, and it's an honor to work alongside you.

Looking ahead, we're excited to keep improving, trying new ideas, and finding better ways to serve the individuals, families, and communities who rely on us. We're committed to building on this momentum and continuing to strengthen the impact of what we do.

Thank you to everyone who helped make 2025 such a positive and productive year for Universal. Your work truly makes a difference.

Brook Phillips
Chief Executive Officer
Universal MH/IDD/SAS



Ashley Angels was incorporated and founded ten years ago by Universal's own AFL, Juvonne Johnson. Her cousin Ashley was a trailblazer in homecare and was also an AFL provider. Juvonne felt compelled to do something in Ashley's honor!

Juvonne wanted to help teenage girls develop better life, social and emotional skills. She and the foundation have speakers to come monthly to educate the young ladies, giving them the opportunity to gain necessary skills needed for resilience and persistence. Some speakers talk about career planning, coping skills, decision making and self-advocacy.

Ashley Angels serves younger children, as well. The foundation helps to get the youth outside and engage in physical activities to improve overall health. The summer months are packed full of various activities to help keep the youth active. The idea is to promote movement such as running, jumping, and climbing.

During Winston Salem State University's homecoming, Ashley Angels bring both groups together and participate in the local parade to demonstrate and encourage excellence within the community. To say the least, Ashley Angels has made an impact with the local youth and teenage girls. They are looking forward to growing and eventually serving another population. Well done Juvonne. Well done!

The Power of Words - NADSP

The services we provide is some of the most important work in our communities. Every day, we help people live full lives in their homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, and relationships. We assist with daily routines, celebrate achievements, support through challenges, and often become a trusted and steady presence in someone's life.

Because our role is so close and so personal, one of the most powerful tools we use is something we do not always think about: language. The words we choose, the tone we use, and the assumptions behind our language all shape how people experience support. For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), language can either reinforce dignity and independence - or unintentionally diminish them. Choose your words carefully!



Congratulations to Pattie Fries on her retirement! After 22 years of dedicated service to Universal, Pattie's impact in both Medical Operations and as a valued member of the Accounting Team has been truly remarkable. Her hard work, commitment, and dependable support have strengthened so many of the processes and people around her. She has been someone the team could always rely on, whether for her knowledge, attention to detail, or her steady presence day after day.

As she closes this chapter and begins an exciting new one, we hope she enjoys every moment of the well-deserved rest, joy, and adventure ahead. Thank you, Pattie for everything you've done and for the legacy you leave behind.

Wishing you a wonderful and fulfilling retirement!

Warmest congratulations,
Universal Mental Health Services



Corporate's Althea Watson will be moving into Pattie Fries' position.



Welcome to the Team, Savannah! Please join me in giving a warm welcome to **Savannah Lail**, who is joining our Accounting team. Savannah will be taking over the duties previously managed by Althea, and we're excited to have her stepping into this role. We're confident she'll be a fantastic fit and an excellent resource for the team. Savannah, we're happy to have you with us! **Welcome, aboard!**

Anna Lundquist – You are an AMAZING team player with such a positive attitude. You always jump in to help without being asked, and your willingness to support others makes a tremendous difference!

Brently Carr – You are ALWAYS willing to go out of your way to help others get the job done - even after hours. Your dedication and selflessness truly set you apart!

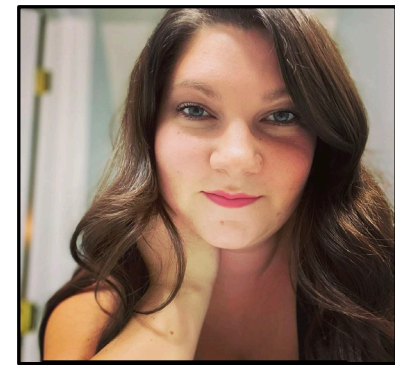
Monique Simmons – You are a FANTASTIC problem solver who can spot issues before they even have a chance to happen. Your proactive approach keeps everything running smoothly!

Tiara De Luca – Your attention to detail is PHENOMENAL, and the genuine care you show your families is unparalleled. The impact you make each day is extraordinary!

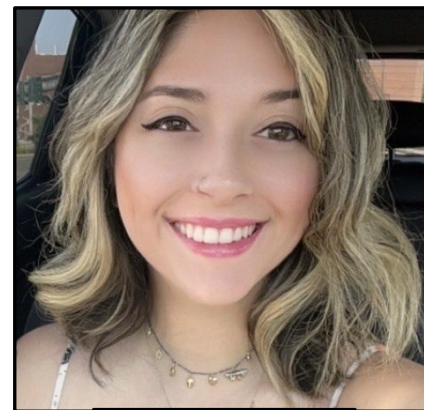
Thank you all for showing up each day and making our team truly AMAZING! Your dedication, positivity, and commitment are what makes our team so special. I appreciate you more than words can express!



Brently Carr



Anna Lundquist



Tiara DeLuca



Monique Simmons



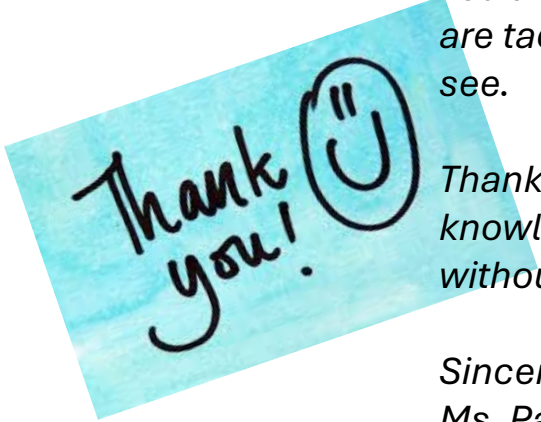
Brittany Clemens would like to acknowledge, Paulette Umstead. She is also the mother of the member that we serve, and we've had them since 2015. She sent me this sweetest email the other day. Families like hers make my job easy and rewarding ♥

Ms. Paulette had this to say about Wilson's Brittany Clemens, *"I wanted to tell you how proud I am of you. I see SO many qualities in you that usually come with age and usually tribulations. You learn from your experiences is what I am saying. I am SO proud of you Brittany as an individual and as a leader in your business endeavors. I can't quite remember being as "together" in so many areas as you demonstrate at your age.*

You are kind, which, to me, is a premium quality. You are tactful and efficient in all your work. This is what I see.

Thank you for your patience and for sharing your knowledge to get the needed job accomplished - without conflict or drama. Thanks for helping us.

Sincerely,
Ms. Paulette"



Emergencies are unpredictable—but how we prepare for them doesn't have to be. Whether it's a medical issue, accident, or natural disaster, having a clear "In Case of Emergency" plan can make all the difference for you and your loved ones.

Here are a few simple steps to create peace of mind:

- **Know Your Contacts**
Keep an updated list of emergency numbers—including family, neighbors, doctors, and a trusted friend who can step in if needed.
- **Share Medical Info**
Make sure your household knows about allergies, medications, and health conditions in case someone needs to speak for you.
- **Plan for the Kids & Pets**
Decide in advance who can care for them if you're unable to. Share instructions with those helpers now, not later.
- **Keep Key Documents Handy**
Documents such as IDs, birth certificates, social security cards, insurance cards, medical directives, and critical legal paperwork should be organized and accessible. If you can, documents such as these should be stored in a fireproof/waterproof safe in case you aren't at home when an emergency strikes.
- **Talk It Through**
Don't just write it down—make sure everyone in your household understands the plan and their role in it. Also, it's a good idea to practice evacuation plans at least once a year.

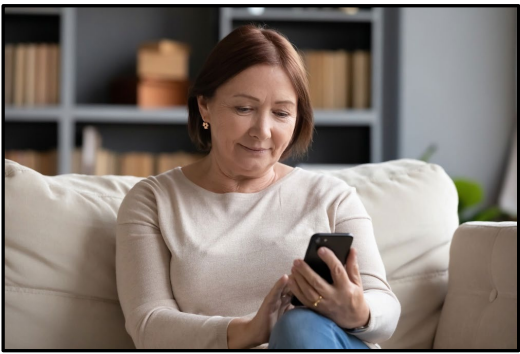


Emergencies may not be avoidable, but confusion and stress in the moment can be. A little preparation now means greater protection later.

<https://www.nami.org/support-education/nami-helpline/family-caregiver-helpline/>



1-800-950-NAMI (6264) Press "4"
to connect with a skilled Family
Caregiver HelpLine Specialist



Text
Text **Family** to **62640**



Email
Send a message
to **helpline@nami.org.**

Here are the Top Ten Note Writer Winners



2026 1st Qt

Sandra Denning
Sindy Gray
Jamal Frazier
Christi Battle
Brian Somers
Veronica McPherson
Colnedia Burke
Marian Morris
Cheryl Lark
Renee Garnett

2025 4th Qt

Roxie Foust
Kay Washington
Adam Smith
Alonzo Reels
Camisha McGee
Debbie Hill
Canaan Parker
Jamal Frazier
Sheetal Deshmukh
Justine Cookson



You guys ROCK!

Spring Safety Tips

1

Spring clean your workstation to eliminate trip hazards.

2

Upgrade worn out PPE that you have from the winter months.

3

Keep an umbrella in your car, work bag, or purse at all times.

4

Make sure your windshield wipers are in good condition.

5

Bring a reusable water bottle to work and stay hydrated.



Due to ongoing global events, cybersecurity experts are warning of an overall increase in disruptive online activity, including phishing, credential harvesting, social engineering, vishing (voice-based phishing), and other opportunistic attacks targeting organizations in the United States.

What to Watch For

- Unexpected emails asking you to click links, open attachments, or verify your login—attackers often use global news to create a sense of urgency.
- Unexpected Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) prompts or password reset messages you did not initiate.
- Unusual behavior on your device, such as sudden slowdowns or strange pop-ups, which may indicate malicious activity.
- Suspicious attachments, especially uncommon file types like **.xlam**, **.lnk**, or **.ppam** used in past phishing campaigns.
- **Social engineering attempts**, including messages or calls that try to pressure you into sharing information, bypassing procedures, or acting quickly.
- **Vishing (voice phishing) calls** claiming to be IT, HR, a bank, or a vendor asking for passwords, MFA codes, or other sensitive information—legitimate departments will *never* request this by phone.

How to Stay Safe

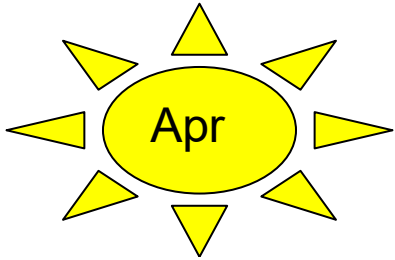
- Report suspicious emails, phone calls, or unusual device behavior to the IT Department immediately.
- Do not click on any links or attachments from an email you do not recognize.
- Never approve MFA prompts you didn't request—report these to the IT Department immediately.
- Do not provide passwords, MFA codes, or sensitive information over the phone, even if the caller sounds official.
- Access company systems and websites only through trusted bookmarks, not email links.

Your awareness is key! Thank you for helping to keep Universal's network and data secure.

As always, please direct any questions or concerns to 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."





On Dec. 29, 2025, the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) [awarded North Carolina \\$213 million through the Rural Health Transformation Program \(RHTP\)](#) to improve health care access for rural North Carolinians.

NC's RHTP outlines six strategies to transform rural health systems over the next five years, which include:

1. Launching locally governed "NC ROOTS" hubs to connect medical, mental health and social supports;
2. Expanding prevention, chronic disease management, maternal health, and nutrition programs;
3. Increasing access to mental health services, including substance use disorder treatment;
4. Investing in the rural health care workforce;
5. Supporting more rural providers in transitioning to value-based care models; and
6. Enhancing technology in health care through artificial intelligence and expanded broadband access.

The RHTP will improve health care delivery for more than 3 million North Carolinians in rural communities, support more than 400 rural health facilities and bring hundreds of millions of dollars in federal investment to the state over the next five years.

[Learn more about the RHTP on the NCDHHS website.](#)



AROUND UNIVERSAL



Training Manager, **Drema Greer's** basketball team won **GOLD** in the 2025 NC Senior Games!

Brittany, Anna and Christina at the Veterans Job Fair in Jacksonville.



Universal's Burlington office honored **Ms. Joyce Ann Neal** (day program staff.) As of January 6, Joyce is a 15-year cancer survivor!



Ann Hensley says "I would like to give thanks to the Asheville Universal staff. They are dependable, professional and sincerely care about the people we serve.

I also recently recertified in CPR/FA which was the best CPR/FA training I've ever taken...and I've taken many other courses through other companies.

I stay with Universal because of the infrastructure and the caring staff."



Lori Wyde says, *"I would like to send a big thanks to the amazing administrative staff at the Raleigh office, ZsaZsa, Audrey and Barbara for the exceptional work they do. Their professionalism, responsiveness and commitment to excellence provides our office the foundation that allows the rest of us to do our jobs effectively. They are appreciated more than they could ever know."*



Lori Gordon says *"I want to acknowledge the Forest City AFL Providers and their excellence in completing their quarterly safety drills. Since 2022, all the AFL Providers have been 100% compliant in completing their quarterly drills not only within the required time frame, but within 2 weeks of notification of the due date. They aspire to excellence in all they do for our members. They are truly caring people, caring for people. Thank you: Andrea Williams, Candy McEntyre, Carmill Whisnant and Robin McDaniel!!"*

Patra Lowe says *"Kudos to Pattie Fries! Have a blast in your retirement Pattie. We will miss you!"*



Raleigh's Justin Rock sways, *"Kudos for the QP Assistant, Brittany Mebane. She has been helpful when working through some staffing issues and when interviewing people. She also does a great job at identifying placements for new staff. I had an incredible run of bad luck staffing a member. Brittany has within in a week or two had a new staff available to meet the family and get the ball rolling again. I think without her help and support our member would have lost a lot of care that they really need."*



Laura Hargitt says "**Kelley Corwin** has been an Employment Specialist for over 9 years! Earning the nickname "Milestone." Kelley is a key player in the vocational game covering Henderson and Transylvania counties. Her rapport with the EIPD counselors and the network she has established throughout the community are invaluable to the integrity of Universal's Supported Employment Program. Just in the last 12 months, she helped 20 people find working placements! We are ever grateful to have her on the team – THANK YOU KELLY!"

Amanda Manis says, "I would like to send a huge kudo to **Amber Anderson** for being an incredible leader and mentor. As I approach my one-year anniversary, I truly reflect on how much she has walked with me every step of the way. She has consistently taken the time to teach, guide, and support me in all aspects of the job. Her leadership, patience, and willingness to share her knowledge have made such a positive impact on my growth and confidence this past year. I am so grateful for her mentorship and the example she sets every day. Thank you, Amber, for everything you do!"

Sherry Douglas says "Kudos to **Denisa Harper** for checking on then working with a member during the January ice/snowstorm; she safely traveled to the home of a member who lives alone to ensure she had food, heat, and her personal care needs were addressed; to **Michael, Taylor, Ryan, Johnea, and Shannan** for checking in on our members during the January ice/snowstorm; ensuring that the members were safe and their needs were met and finally to **Lori and Morgan** for assisting my QP team with the North Carolina National Core Indicators. My co-workers are AWESOME!"



THANK YOU



YOU ARE
THE BEST

