

JUNE 2025

GHAzette

Official Newsletter of
GHA Autism Supports

CARF Glowing Results Announced

GHA Autism Supports is excited to announce the results of our recent accreditation survey by CARF, the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities. April 2-4, 2025, a team of on-site surveyors evaluated our services against rigorous international quality standards, including reviewing policies, observing organizational practices, reviewing records and documentation, and interviewing individuals, guardians, staff, board members and community stakeholders.

The surveyors praised GHA for our “transparency” and “commitment.” Surveyors indicated our staff were described by others as “compassionate and dedicated.” They said GHA was consistently referred to as “visionaries, innovators and leaders in the field.” Guardians expressed “strong trust in GHA” to the surveyors. The surveyors offered glowing praise for GHA’s impact on the lives of the individuals we serve.

The surveyors indicated their recommendation will be a 3-year accreditation award, the highest possible. CARF accreditation demonstrates our commitment to quality, efficiency and service delivery. Thank you to all who supported us during this process and most importantly, everyone who contributes day in and day out to our success!



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carf INTERNATIONAL

Autism Acceptance Promoted and Celebrated During Month of April



April provided a wonderful opportunity to celebrate Autism Acceptance Month by spreading awareness and acceptance about autism to a variety of groups in the communities in which we operate our programs. We displayed our large autism acceptance banner across First Street in Albemarle, while tabletop displays at Second Street Sundries were made to provide information about autism and specifically the programs at GHA Autism Supports.

GHA's Director of Social Work Araceli Mondragon and Director of Finance Stephanie Brown, joined the kindergarten classes at both Richfield and Aquadale Elementary Schools to share "All My Stripes", a wonderful story about Zane the Zebra that teaches us to embrace not only who we are, but to also embrace the people who are brilliantly different thanks to their own amazing, colorful stripes! Many thanks to Stanly County Schools for allowing us this wonderful opportunity to share an important message.

We wrapped up our Autism Acceptance Month festivities with GHA Autism Supports CEO Dawn Allen presenting two copies of "Autism Out Loud" to Stanly County Public Library Director Sara Hahn as a contribution to our organization's ongoing efforts to promote understanding and inclusion.

"Autism Out Loud" is an incredibly moving narrative written by three mothers of children with autism that includes a powerful collection of stories that offer insight, empathy, and inspiration. We're thrilled to partner with our local library to ensure these voices are heard and shared. We appreciate the Stanly County Library team for their commitment to fostering awareness and acceptance in our community!

"Autism Acceptance Month is important because it moves us beyond awareness to true understanding—embracing neurodiversity, celebrating unique perspectives, and creating a world where every individual feels seen, valued, and included."

**--DAWN ALLEN,
GHA AUTISM SUPPORTS
CEO**



EMPOWER ADVOCATE CELEBRATE

Scenes from

AUTISM ACCEPTANCE MONTH



"Different,
not less."

--TEMPLE GRANDIN



GHA Autism Supports gratefully acknowledges the following individuals who made memorials and honorary gifts between March 1, 2025 and May 31, 2025. Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this list. If you feel an error has been made, please contact the Development Department at 704-982-9600, x 125.

In Honor of Dawn Allen
Thomas & Marie Southerland

In Memory of Jean Belt
Tom & Sue Jasinski

In Memory of Ann Ivey Cranford
Dale Ivey Stoehr

In Honor of Denise Drye
Thomas & Marie Southerland

We appreciate the late
Mrs. Barbara Link
for her generosity for designating a
legacy gift from her will to GHA
Autism Supports.

In Honor of Ryan McIntyre
Thomas & Marie Southerland

In Honor of Beth Olivieri
Thomas & Marie Southerland

In Honor of Melissa Rivera
Thomas & Marie Southerland

In Memory of Jane Scheer
Deborah Bennett
Gina Martin

In Honor of Marcus Shankle
Thomas & Marie Southerland

In Memory of Craig Skeffington
Denise Drye
Frank Gilliam
Beth Olivieri
Al & Ann Sadowsky

In Honor of Rev. Thomas
Southerland
Paul Gerald, Jr.

In Honor of Alex Whitten
Libby Siceloff

In Honor of Marsena Williams
Thomas & Marie Southerland

Pfeiffer Fun Field Day Enjoyed by Carolina Farms Residents

The residents of Carolina Farms had an awesome morning in early May enjoying lots of activities facilitated by the faculty and students of the Pfeiffer University Occupational Therapy program, with assistance from GHA Director of Recreation and Safety John Fields. The morning was jam packed with sensory activities, games and sporting events for everyone. The OT students learned first-hand that engaging in sensory play opened up new ways to express needs and emotions and discovered that the activities were powerful tools that did not just teach skills, they assisted in unlocking potential for every individual! The Pfeiffer Fun Field Day wrapped up with snacks and fellowship for all! We always appreciate our community partnerships to enhance the quality of life for the individuals that we serve.



OUR EDITORIAL TEAM

The GHazette Newsletter is released quarterly. For feedback or to share story ideas, contact:

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17th Annual Rubber Duck Derby Huge Success

We certainly made a BIG splash for GHA Autism Supports at our 2025 Rubber Duck Derby on May 17th! We had fun gathering, dumping and watching 7,354 ducks race to the finish line! Congrats to all of our winners!

Fundraisers take a team of volunteers and staff. The GHA Rubber Duck Derby is fortunate to have an army of volunteers that help move, dump, sort and count 7,354 rubber ducks...and they do it with a smile! We are especially thankful for our parents, guardians and siblings that show up when we need them most. In addition, a BIG thank you to the Stanly County Family YMCA for use of their facility and providing lifeguards, our fundraiser sponsors and community members for coming out to support GHA!



AND THE WINNERS ARE...

\$75 WINNER - RONNIE MICHAEL

\$100 WINNER - REBECCA HUDSON

\$250 WINNER - JEFF CHANCE

\$1,000 WINNER - THE MORRELL FAMILY

AND THE GRAND PRIZE WINNER IS...

\$3,000 - BRAD HUGHES



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& Rebecca Stern
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Cody Zeller-Townson



Theatrical Group Empowers Wilmington Residents



Wilmington non-profit Theatre for All was born out of a realization that people with disabilities who were passionate about theatre had very little access to the arts in the Cape Fear area. Volunteers organized and released their first production in 2015. Most recently, Theater for All presented “The First Day of Spring” in Thalian Hall on May 2-3 and our very own Wilmington resident Cody Zeller-Townson starred as a green snake. Cody has participated in a number of productions over the years. The show proved to be a gorgeous production that showcased a forest bursting with life when a conflict leads to a full-blown hullabaloo!



GHA Residents Shine at Spring Games

Special Olympics Stanly County hosted their annual Spring Games on April 3rd at South Stanly High School. The Opening Ceremony began at 10 a.m. with athletes from across the County including a large group from GHA Autism Supports who performed extremely well in various athletics events!





CEO MESSAGE

From the Desk of Dawn Allen

“

As we continue our journey together in service to individuals with autism, I want to take a moment to recognize and appreciate the commitment, compassion, and creativity each of you brings to our mission every day. Your work makes a lasting difference in the lives of those we support, and I am continually inspired by your dedication.

At GHA Autism Supports, our strength lies in our people—staff, families, and the individuals we serve. Whether you are providing direct support, working behind the scenes in administration, or leading innovative programs, each role is essential to our success and to the well-being of our community.

We are also looking ahead to new opportunities for growth and improvement. From expanding services to enhancing staff development, we remain focused on creating an environment where everyone can thrive. I encourage you to stay engaged, share your ideas, and continue supporting one another as we pursue excellence in all we do!



”

GHA Represented at Transition Fair

Stanly County Schools and Stanly Community College hosted a Transition Fair on April 29th at the Webb Student Center at Stanly Community College's Albemarle campus located at 141 College Drive. This event was designed to connect individuals with disabilities, including those who identify as having intellectual and developmental disabilities, and their families

with essential resources and support for every stage of life. Attendees had the opportunity to meet local resource providers, including staff from GHA Autism Supports, explore transition and support services, and connect with organizations dedicated to empowering individuals. We were excited to be a part of this first-time event!



GHA Autism Supports Director of Social Work Araceli Mondragon was on hand at the recent Transition Fair taking a moment to chat with participant Adam.

A Little Horticultural THERAPY



Spring has sprung, and many of the individuals that GHA serves have been busy in the dirt planting lots of flowers and vegetables! Nature can be a powerful grounding force, and horticultural therapy allows our individuals to connect with the natural world, which can be both healing and inspiring!



CAPTURING SOME FUN!



FUN!



FUN!

