



Healthbeat



HEALTH DISPARITIES PERSIST, BUT SOLUTIONS EXIST



Christopher Lloyd
Vice President of Marketing & Communications

Cheryl Berry
Marketing Multimedia Artist

Ben Rose
Multimedia Content Producer

Brandi Caplinger
Digital Marketing Coordinator

Jaclyn Saunders
Marketing Associate

Tiffany Whisner
Marketing Content Manager

CéAira Waymon
Marketing Creative Associate

Aspire Indiana Health Magazine
June 2024, Issue 158
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Ben Rose, Multimedia Content Producer
Cheryl Berry, Marketing Multimedia Artist

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Ce'Aira Waymon, Marketing Creative Associate

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Health Disparities Persist, But Solutions Exist

by Tiffany Whisner, photo below by Adobe Firefly, video by Ben Rose



Juneteenth, officially Juneteenth National Independence Day, is celebrated annually to commemorate the ending of slavery on June 19, 1865, when Major General Gordon Granger ordered the final enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation in Texas at the end of the American Civil War.

Some may wonder — “Wasn’t the Emancipation Proclamation issued in 1863? Weren’t all slaves freed in the U.S. then?” Actually, that’s a common misconception.

During the Civil War, emancipation came at different times in different parts of the country — enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation relied heavily on the advance of the Union troops. And Texas, as the most remote state in the Confederacy at the time, had actually seen the expansion of slavery since the Union presence there was low. The enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation was slow and inconsistent, and it was two years later before the end of slavery finally came in Texas.

“You would have thought when President Lincoln issued the final Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 that slavery — and inequity between the haves and have nots — would have been over. But it actually caused more of a divide,” says Aspire Culture Officer Dr. Gina Forrest. “Unfortunately, the structural and institutional racism caused by slavery is still embedded in our country. Just because we said ‘no more slavery’ didn’t necessarily change the thoughts and feelings toward formerly enslaved people. Their health, where they worked and where they played still did not matter.”



CELEBRATE JUNETEENTH! Click to watch!

HEALTH DISPARITIES SEPARATE AND DIVIDE

According to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), health equity is the state in which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health. Achieving this requires focused and ongoing societal efforts

to address historical and contemporary injustices; overcome economic, social and other obstacles to health and healthcare; and eliminate preventable health disparities.

“When I think of health equity, I think of everyone being able to reach their highest status of health and well-being,” Dr. Gina says. “Health equity is at the core of our mission at Aspire, serving underserved communities with compassion. By prioritizing health equity, we acknowledge and actively work to mitigate disparities in healthcare access and outcomes. It’s our ethical duty to advocate for and facilitate equitable healthcare practices.”

Health disparities are those unavoidable — yet preventable — differences that affect an individual’s ability to achieve optimal health experienced by various populations disadvantaged by their race, gender, social or economic status, geographic location and environment.

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[The 2024 State Health Disparities Report](#), released by The Commonwealth Fund, states, “Profound racial and ethnic disparities in health, well-being and life expectancy have long been the norm in the United States. These disparities are especially stark for Black and American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) people, who live fewer years, on average, than white and Hispanic people and are more likely to die from treatable conditions, more likely to die during or after pregnancy and suffer serious pregnancy-related complications, more likely to lose children in infancy, and are at higher risk for many chronic health conditions, from diabetes to hypertension.”



Racial and ethnic disparities are pervasive across all states, including Indiana. As reflected in [the Report's](#) “Health system performance scores, by state and race/ethnicity,” states received overall health system scores for each group representing aggregate performance across three domains: health outcomes; healthcare access; and quality and use of healthcare services. In Indiana, the race/ethnicity groups scored as follows: White - 64; Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) - 61; Hispanic - 25; and Black - 14.

Illuminating the clear and deep disparities in health and healthcare leads to the question: Why do these

disparities exist and persist? Unfortunately, says Dr. Gina, our society has created — and allowed — [health inequities](#), when health outcomes differ across groups due to systemic, avoidable and unjust social and economic policies and practices that create barriers to opportunity.

ELIMINATING THE OBSTACLES TO POSITIVE OUTCOMES



People’s living conditions are often made worse by discrimination, stereotyping and prejudice based on sex, gender, age, race, ethnicity or disability, according to [the World Health Organization](#). Discriminatory practices are often already embedded in our institutional and systems processes.

“Through the policies and procedures we create, society has put in these roadblocks so people can’t reach their full potential,” Dr. Gina says.

Credit scores to get a mortgage; credit scores to buy a car; redlining in neighborhoods; test scores to get into college; college degrees to get a job; dress codes in the workplace — we see societal roadblocks everywhere. And they are all challenges we face toward achieving health equity.

“It’s all those social drivers of health — from employment and housing to legal issues, trauma, racism and violence,” Dr. Gina says. “If we work to eliminate those inequities, or at least reduce them, there is the possibility to achieve a better and greater health outcome.”

The Social Drivers of Health (SDoH) are the conditions in which people live, work, grow, age

and play. These conditions influence a person’s overall health. The SDoH categories are broken down into economic stability, education, neighborhood and physical environment, community, food, and healthcare access and quality.

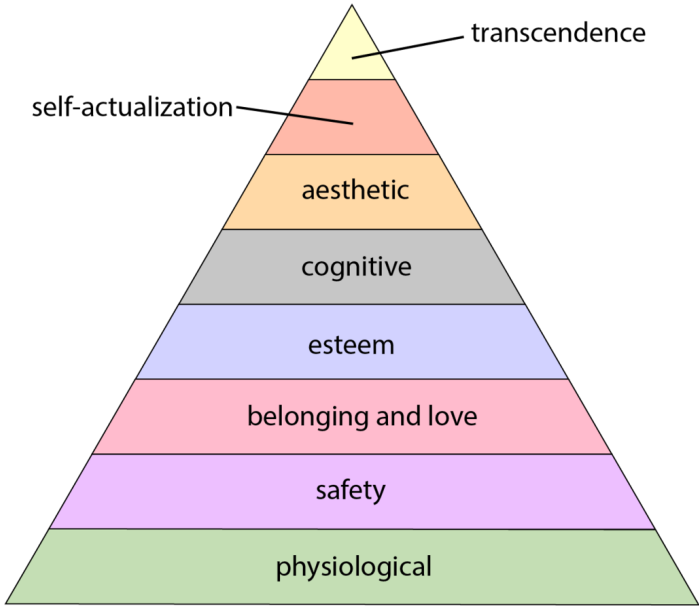
“Health disparities usually exist because people don’t have access to or there is a barrier to accessing what they need. Addressing those social drivers of health helps reduce health disparities,” says Aspire Vice President of SDoH Mike Keevin. “Think about a person who is homeless and living on the street. They may not have access to food, and living on the street is unsafe. This can cause stress and have a negative impact on their mental health.”

When individuals aren’t having their basic daily needs met, their health and well-being suffers, which creates a domino effect in the other areas of their life.

“Take a look at [Maslow’s hierarchy of needs](#). If you don’t have your physiological needs of water, food, shelter and sleep met, that’s all you’re going to think about every day,” Dr. Gina says. “You’re only thinking about today and surviving today. Those societal barriers can make it extremely difficult for individuals to move past the base level of attaining their basic needs.”

“Think about someone who may have lost their driver’s license due to a past event in their life,” Keevin says. “Accessing legal services may help them regain their license so they can travel to their job. This mobility may open up a better job that wasn’t accessible before, and this new income and mobility may help them access healthier foods. The new job also provides insurance, so they can afford going to the doctor. You can see how addressing the Social Drivers of Health can create positive momentum in a person’s life.”

That is why Aspire offers community programs like housing assistance, employment support,



rehabilitation services, crisis intervention and Deaf services to help individuals cope more effectively in their environment.

BE AN ALLY

At the global, federal and state levels, [action needs to be taken to improve health equity](#):

- by the health sector to ensure high-quality and effective services are available accessible and acceptable to everyone, everywhere when they need them
- by health and other sectors to act on the wider structural determinants of health to tackle the inequitable distribution of power and resources, and to improve daily living conditions
- and the health sector needs to take the lead in monitoring health inequities through monitoring health outcomes and health service delivery — as well as working with other sectors to monitor people’s living conditions.

There is also work we can do on an individual level.

“We need to challenge ourselves to truly be an ally to the community and specifically those most affected by health inequities and disparities,” Dr. Gina says. “When your kids are in school, are you advocating for every child or just your own? If you see something racial or homophobic or sexist, are



Social Media Hits

by Brandi Caplinger

A look back at our top social media hits in May!



Employee Spotlight: Sydney Bebar



by Jaclyn Saunders, photo/video by Ben Rose

From cheering on her alma mater, the Butler Bulldogs, to cheering on her favorite new small artist at local venues around Indy and cheering on the kids she works with daily, Sydney Bebar radiates passion.



She has an innate understanding of how important education is in these circumstances. After mere moments with Sydney, it is clear why the kids take to her so quickly and are able to open up — her welcoming presence and positive demeanor make it easy to see her as a person you can trust.

On a personal note, Sydney gushes as she talks about her cat, Oliver, a kitten found in her parents' backyard, and spending time with her friends. She loves listening to live music and can often be found spending her weekends at local clubs, such as the HI-FI in Indianapolis, listening to new bands as they dance across the stage. Sydney is full of joy and passion — and she exudes an incandescent glow that is warm and welcoming to the children she works with daily. We are thrilled to have Sydney continue her professional career with Aspire. ■

Sydney began her journey with Aspire as an intern working with kids on probation in Marion County. After graduating with her master's degree, she transitioned to working in Hamilton County as a school-based therapist. A smile beams across her face like stadium lights when she talks about her job and working with the students. "It's a big moment when you realize you've finally earned their trust," she exclaimed.

Working with children can be challenging, but the challenge seems to drive Sydney to work even harder for them. In fact, as

bright and bubbly as Sydney naturally is, her aura beams even brighter as she talks about working with children on probation.



She recently earned a certification as a Credentialed Sexually Abusive Youth Clinician (CSAY-C), and she was enthusiastic about the positive work she has been able to do with that certification.



Demetrius Dillard Receives CMHC Advocate of the Year Award from Indiana Council

by Tiffany Whisner, photos by Council attendees



(Pictured L-R: Aspire Information Officer Jim Skeel; Aspire Senior Director of Information Systems and Technology Demetrius Dillard; and Indiana Council of Community Mental Health Centers President and CEO Zoe Frantz)

When the Indiana Council of Community Mental Health Centers (CMHC) put feelers out for a person to coordinate and lead an effort for a systemwide data integration product and process, Demetrius Dillard answered the call. For his tireless advocacy efforts on behalf of CMHCs in Indiana, Aspire Indiana Health's Senior Director of Information Systems and Technology has been named their CMHC Advocate of the Year.

This prestigious honor recognizes an individual who has championed the advancement of CMHC's mission to deliver high-quality,

culturally competent, comprehensive primary care services regardless of patients' ability to pay. They have demonstrated a steadfast commitment to supporting the growth of the CMHC through education, partnership or service.

Demetrius' passion for data and technology within Aspire and CMHCs has been instrumental in leading an effort for a systemwide data integration product and process.

"Demetrius provided expertise and guidance to Zoe (Frantz, Indiana Council President and CEO), the State team and the Council team in their conceptualization and understanding of the capabilities and possibilities in this arena. In step with the Council's and State's 'build the plane while you fly it!' approach to implement this portion of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) transformation, Demetrius was a strong advocate for the involvement of all CMHCs and helped set up a framework for the collection and meaningful use of CCBHC data," says Aspire Information Officer Jim Skeel.

"He provided expertise and guidance to Zoe (Frantz, Indiana Council President and CEO), the State team and the Council team in their conceptualization and understanding of the capabilities and possibilities in this arena."

— Jim Skeel



know what he might be looking for when he needs to add to his team. Also, he is proactive in anticipating what our needs are across the organization." ■

"I appreciate how Demetrius is constantly looking at his team internally — how they can grow and keep learning," says Aspire Indiana Health Culture Officer Gina Forrest. "He keeps up with trends in the workforce from his lens, and that helps us in HR to

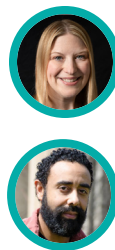
FELICIA HESTER A FINALIST FOR EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

by Tiffany Whisner, photo by Ben Rose

Congratulations to Felicia Hester, an outpatient recovery coach with Aspire, for being named a finalist for the Employee of the Year from the Indiana Council! Over the past six years, Felicia has impacted others through her deep knowledge of the judicial process and the compassion she shows for the people who pass through there. Felicia began her time with Aspire as a forensic peer specialist to support Drug Court and OWI Track participants in their recovery from substance use disorder (SUD). Currently, her time is spent supporting participants by meeting with them one on one in the community to teach, model and encourage recovery thinking and behavior.

"So many — too many — lives have been lost to the disease of addiction, including my best friend and most recently, my baby brother," Hester says. "I do this work to honor all of their lives and for the families who suffered alongside them as well as the children who don't have a say in the matter. Aspire currently has more than 15 drug court participants and/or graduates who are either already employed or looking to become employed as Peer Support Specialists. My hope is that it only continues to grow." ■





Golf and Fundraising for a Great Cause

by Tiffany Whisner, photos by Ben Rose

After several days of rain, the sunshine came out for Progress House's Golf for Recovery outing on May 16! And what a day it was supporting Progress House and all the programs and services that help make recovery and wellbeing a reality.



A record number 98 golfers came together for a fantastic day of golf at Plum Creek Golf Club in Carmel — and even in attendance was Daisy, Progress House's therapy dog. She gave the event two paws up! And for the first time ever, one golfer got a hole in one! Congratulations to Ric Blake for his hole in one on the prize hole — the prize was a week stay at a vacation lake house!

The Golf for Recovery event was established by Jim Malarney, who served two terms as president of the Progress House Board — we continue to honor the Malarney family's generous spirit through this event. Thanks to everyone who took part in and volunteered for this year's golf outing! ■



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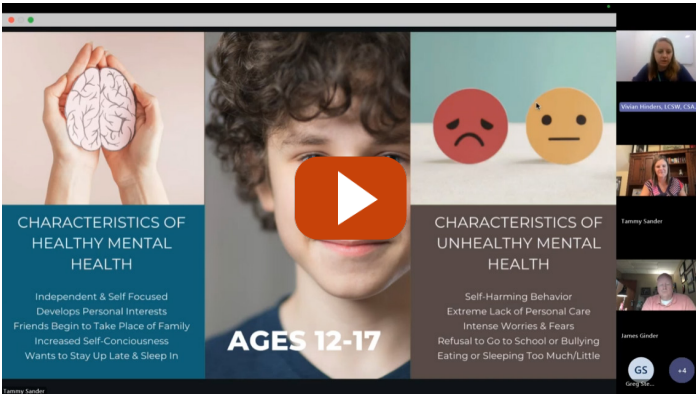
BOONE COUNTY CHAMBER IMPACT AWARD

Aspire Indiana Health received the April Impact Award in April from the Boone County Chamber “for making positive contributions to the Boone County community.” The Chamber thanked Aspire for our “unwavering dedication to our community’s health and wellbeing. Your tireless efforts and compassionate care make a world of difference to us all. We appreciate you!” In addition, as a sponsor of the Chamber’s Women in Business program series, Aspire Culture Officer Dr. Gina Forrest has presented a number of topics to the community, including inclusive language, microaggressions and ways discrimination shows up in the workplace.



INSIDE LOOK: DR. OLIVIA SMITH

Dr. Olivia Smith is one of Aspire’s primary care physicians at our Noblesville Health Center, and she has always had a love of learning and taking care of others. “That’s why I chose family medicine — because I really like that we get to care for babies, pregnant moms, people with chronic conditions, older folks and everyone in between. And I get to care for whole families which is nice because you really get to see that family dynamic.” [Learn more about Dr. Smith in this video!](#)



FOCUS ON CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH

On May 22, the Hamilton County Health Department in collaboration with Aspire Indiana Health, [hosted a webinar](#) about children’s mental health. Aspire Clinical Manager Vivian Hinders joined Hamilton County Health Department Health Education Specialist Jim Ginder to discuss topics including identifying signs of mental health struggles, supporting children’s emotional wellbeing and seeking professional help when

necessary. Participants gained valuable insights into preventive measures and strategies for promoting positive mental health outcomes for children.

“At Aspire Indiana Health, we are committed to promoting mental wellness among children and adolescents,” Hinders said. “Partnering with the Hamilton County Health Department allows us to reach a wider audience and provide comprehensive support for children’s mental health.”



INDIANA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF PTCO DAY

The 72nd Annual PTCO took place May 5 at the Indiana School for the Deaf! This annual event held by the Deaf school reunites the community to take part in beloved traditions, full of fun, laughter and community spirit. Aspire’s Deaf Services Team had a booth at the event, and those present included Program Manager Silvia Lopez; Deaf Services Therapist Leesa McClelland; ASL Interpreter Malena Dell; ASL Interpreter Haylie Will; ASL Interpreter Christy Talbot and Deaf Services Christy Talbot and Deaf Services Community Health Worker Maj Bippus. Nurse Practitioner Adam Ison also attended to provide blood pressure screenings to interested participants. All proceeds from this event go to the Indiana Deaf Children’s Foundation.



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COMMUNITY DAY WITH EASTERSEALS CROSSROADS

In partnership with the Community Alliance of the Far Eastside (CAFE), Easterseals Crossroads hosted its third annual Community Day, a free event for community residents of all ages to come together for family-friendly activities, information sessions, crafts, book giveaways, food and more. Aspire Indiana Health was one of the many local organizations with a booth at the event, sharing more about our resources and services for those in need. ■



you doing or saying something about it? Can you post something on social media and bring light to a situation that is happening? Can you engage others in a cause?"

"One person can change a lot," she continues. "You can encourage conversations with others and make a difference in the public attitude. It only takes one person to make a difference." ■

Welcome New Employees!

- Eunice Adetoro**
NP Preceptee
Indianapolis
- Olamide Awoola**
Care Coordinator/Live Skills instructor Y&F HCBS
Indianapolis
- Deborah Brown**
Patient Access Specialist
DeHaven
- Alie Dillon**
Assessment Technician
Lebanon
- Leslie Grubb**
Patient Access Specialist
Noblesville
- Miesha Holsinger**
Medication Technician
Mockingbird Hill
- Oluwakemi Ishola**
NP Preceptee
Indianapolis
- Siaka Keita**
Care Coordinator/Life Skills Instructor- Home & Community Based
Chase
- Angela Lamey**
Residential Recovery Coach
Mockingbird Hill
- Jetona Lancaster**
Infectious Disease Prevention Case Manager
Lafayette
- Nancy Lynch**
License Eligible Therapist - Assessment
Indianapolis

- James Merrill Jr**
Food Service Worker
Progress House
- Chelsea Olson**
Community Engagement Coordinator
Indianapolis
- Katherine Osborne**
Crisis Response Technician
Carmel
- Lindsay Romwalter**
Crisis Response Provider
- Marzell Stennis**
Food Service Worker
Progress House
- Jennifer Suttles**
Patient Access Specialist
Noblesville
- Jhordan Tate**
Crisis Response Technician
Carmel
- Takelieah Townsel**
Certified Medical Assistant
Noblesville
- David Vest**
Recovery Coach
DeHaven
- Ce'Aira Waymon**
Marketing Creative Associate
Administration
- Nichelle Whitaker**
Residential Coach
Hartung



Recognition

by Jaclyn Saunders



We're proud of the people who work for Aspire. That's why we'd like to take a moment to give recognition to them for their achievements — both inside and outside the work they do with us serving Hoosiers.



Katie Cutrell, Multi-Site Clinical Manager, is exactly what you hope for in a supervisor. She greets us all with encouragement, validation and support. She is a fantastic advocate for us and our clients. We love her!



Lesley Chodkowski, Multi-Site Clinical Manager - Comprehensive Outpatient Services, is always so helpful when you have a question or if someone needs resources. She always has a positive and upbeat attitude. Lesley is such a blessing to have in our office!



Cullen Shade, Patient Access Specialist - Deaf Services, has been doing an excellent job as a Patient Access Specialist. He is always available to assist clients when needed. Cullen is also great with maintaining communication and keeps the team in the loop with what is happening.



Victoria Sanders, Certified Medical Assistant, has been instrumental in meeting the medical needs of Progress House residents. She is getting the clinic organized since we are currently seeing patients on MACY. Thank you, Victoria, for your hard work and the care you show our patients!



Melina Griffin, Care Coordinator/Life Skills Instructor, is proficient in ensuring clients are taken care of in her absence. Her plan was very well thought out, and instructions were clear. I could tell she put a lot of time into preparing this while still maintaining metric requirements. It was refreshing to receive such a well-thought-out plan for a staff absence.



Leora McAlister, Patient Access Specialist, is an asset to our team, and the patients love her! This girl brings so much positivity and fun to our office.



Alex Beck, Director of Quality, served his

country as a medic in the United States Army, and he continued to serve as an officer with the Indiana Department of Corrections before becoming a safety professional in the private sector. Alex still continues to serve his community by coaching little league baseball while serving the Aspire community as Director of Quality after previously holding the role of safety coordinator.



Zach Rogers, Residential Recovery Associate III, is a Certified Community Health worker in addition to being a Residential Recovery Associate III at Progress House. He is inspiring to work with, and I enjoy coming to work with him daily and watching him help residents here at Progress House find their way.



Brandi Caplinger, Digital Marketing Coordinator, recently celebrated her one-year anniversary as the Digital Marketing Coordinator, and has brought a level of initiative and professionalism to the role that

has resulted in unprecedented levels of engagement on social media and other digital platforms. Thanks for all you do!



Jake O'Hair, Team Lead - Residential Recovery Associate, is an inspiration. He is helpful, punctual, and he does so much for Progress House. He shows strong leadership and stability when it comes to assisting colleagues in the workforce. He assists the residents in every way he can as well. He absolutely deserves recognition for his hard work and dedication to Aspire and Progress House.



Drew Hendricks, Treatment Facility Operations Manager, is always willing to jump in and help where help is needed. He is able to provide fair and consistent direction for staff and residents at Mockingbird Hill, and we are so lucky to have him!



Katie Dalton, Addiction Treatment Program Director, is always available to her team whenever they need her. She always advocates in the best interest of the staff and residents and makes sure people feel heard in their concerns and successes. She's an amazing leader, and we are lucky to have her.



Catherine Ippolito, Care Coordinator/ Life Skills Instructor Recovery Residences, has been assisting residents with discharge

planning for their next steps in recovery. She has helped a lot of residents get set up with aftercare treatment to ensure their continued success. She is willing to learn and take on new challenges to help our residents' futures, and we appreciate her so much!



Shasta Doty, Certified Medical Assistant, recently completed her schooling and exam for her Registered Medical Assistant credential. She has a great attitude every single day. On Thursdays, she rooms two providers and does an amazing job.



Victoria Sanders, Team Lead Medical Assistant, has stepped up at Progress House to assist our doctors and has done immense service for our residents.



Jessica Burkett, Patient Access Specialist, is dedicated to her patients and works tremendously hard. She is an asset at the Noblesville Health Clinic.



Emily Johnston, Internship Placement Specialist, has successfully completed her first year managing the Behavioral Health Academy (BHA) internship program, partnering with Community Health Network. Emily has been dedicated to the growth and development of students and has gone above and beyond to ensure each had

a positive learning experience through this program. Her role in this program helped to improve workflows, and her organizational capacity helped track and manage all items effectively. Well done, Emily!



Monisha French, Certified Medical Assistant, is enthusiastic and very positive with her goal to be a great support for her provider. She is making a great difference in the Indianapolis Health Clinic.



Kaylei Neal, Jessica Burkett, Desiree Rayford, Takelieah Townsel, Latisha Lampkin and Cindy Jeske, Certified Medical Assistants, have built a stellar medical assisting team together. They complement each other very well and work hand-in-hand to make sure the patients of Noblesville are receiving the best care possible. Along with their providers, Noblesville is building a remarkable healthcare team. Great job, ladies!



Niya Henderson, Talent Sourcing Specialist, has helped Aspire facilitate several very successful hiring events. We appreciate her consistency, work ethic and reliability!

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Jeff Donohoe, Care Coordinator/Life Skills Instructor, has assisted

a client who has been served by our team for many years. He was able to get her to agree to go to inpatient substance abuse treatment and has a plan for her upon her release from the program. He has worked tirelessly to get this accomplished!



Michael Burke, Community Health Worker, is an amazing

person and the greatest fit for MACY. Mike is an all-around great person with the heart for our homeless outreach.



Michael Olan, Pre-Doctoral Intern, has continuously gone

above and beyond to assist his fellow colleagues and his clients. He takes the time to intently listen and provides a safe, comforting environment for all. He is a wonderful clinician!



Courtney Tanner and **Brad Uebinger**, Youth and Family Home



Based Therapist and Licensed Clinical Therapist - FQHC,

have taken on the adolescent substance use group and are doing a great job. They are co-facilitating and sharing responsibilities well. They have goals to grow this group and serve an underserved population.



Amanda Williams, Care Coordinator Life Skills Instructor, is

dedicated to her clients. It is amazing. She is a great team player and cares about the well-being of our clients. We are lucky to have her on the ACT team!



Amber Gordon, Manager of Social Drivers of Health, has

completed her bachelor's degree in social work from Indiana Wesleyan University. Amber's dedication to both her job and education had her working 80-hour weeks during her internship. She had a lot of early mornings and late nights but managed to do it with a smile on her face. We are so proud of Amber!



Cathy Dell, Accounts Receivable Representative,

consistently goes above and beyond to deliver outstanding work and keep posting on schedule. Thank you for always having a positive attitude; we very much appreciate your hard work. Your consistent dedication to excellence sets a shining example for everyone on the team.

Hoak Certified Medical

Assistants are a team where everyone steps up to help one another with whatever is needed; communication is AMAZING, and it's a great work environment. I'm proud to call these ladies my coworkers and teammates! ■

Accent

on Compassion



Aspire
INDIANA HEALTH

Antony Sheehan
President & Executive Officer

Accent on Compassion

In last month's blog post by Aspire Indiana Health President and CEO Antony Sheehan, he talked about the concept of alignment, both in leadership and in life.

[Read more here!](#) ■



Brenda Blake
Bob Coykendall
Shasta Doty
Haily Griesman
Miesha Holsinger
Dallas Jackson
Rasheeda Liverman-Preston
Chantelle Orona-okuhor
Courtney Smith
Ryan Stadnik
Wendy Wills
Kayli Wildridge