



## ***Outstanding Adult***

### **Tabitha Arrowood**

**Morganton, NC**

**Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board**

Tabitha Arrowood graduated with honors from Western Piedmont Community College in 2021 and became the first college graduate in her family. She continues to be the definitive example of maintaining a positive attitude, being goal oriented, and staying highly focused on her educational goals.

Tabitha was a single mother of two young children when she enrolled in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) program. She was receiving Supplemental Nutrition Program Assistance (SNAP) and working two jobs to make ends meet.

A unique aspect of her life is that Tabitha grew up in a household where all other family members were deaf. As the only hearing person in her family, American Sign Language (ASL) was her primary language with verbal English being her second language, so Interpreter Education is a natural fit for her. Her special circumstances and well-developed skills are true assets in her chosen profession.

Tabitha took and passed the NC Transliterators License on July 16, 2021. Next in line for testing was the highly anticipated and intense Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA). She passed with flying colors!

Tabitha is employed with Western Piedmont Community College in Disability Services and assists the deaf and hard of hearing students, both independently and in team settings. She attends classes with them, interpreting and explaining the lectures and course content, as well as assists with school orientations, graduations, and meetings with instructors, counselors and financial aid representatives.

In January 2022, she also added a temporary position with NC School for the Deaf in Morganton as a Staff Interpreter for deaf students and staff. She assists in a variety of situations such as educational, medical, employment and staff development training, both on and off campus. She is also responsible for interpreting leadership meetings, human resources related issues, student health issues, driver's education, therapeutic support meetings, new hire interviews, emergencies, and any other needs required by students and staff.

With all this, she still finds time for volunteering in her community and assisting her family. Tabitha's personal statement gives us insight to her outlook for the future. She states, "I have accomplished much, but there is always more to do!"



## ***Outstanding Young Adult***

### **Joshua Swindells**

**Mocksville, NC**

**Piedmont Triad Regional Workforce Development Board**

Joshua Swindells is exemplary in every way. He has overcome many obstacles to get where he is today, and his future is promising.

Joshua, the youngest of 6 siblings, was born with a condition that rendered him legally blind. His childhood was spent in extreme poverty and instability, moving often and with insecurity. Josh knew he wanted better for his family and began working when he was old enough to help out.

In the fall of 2020, Josh saw information about earning a high school credential and immediately enrolled in Davidson-Davie Community College (DDCC) and the Piedmont Triad Regional NextGen youth program. Through NextGen he was able to get a better job at Food Lion and he quickly made manager. In February of 2021, he earned his high school credential.

Next Josh enrolled as a full-time student at DDCC. He stopped by the NextGen office after his first day of college and was literally beaming! He loved the college experience, his instructors, and was so proud of where he was at that moment. A year prior, he had an eighth-grade education and now he has a high school credential and is the first person in his family to attend college!

During his first semester, he became a Global Scholar, with a 4.0 GPA and on the Dean's List. In the spring, he was inducted into the National Society of Leadership and Success Association and has been invited to serve on the Board of the Student Government Association. He was awarded the Gilman Scholarship which will allow him to study in France the summer of 2022. His plan is to earn an Associate in Science in Information Technology and transfer to the University of North Carolina at Charlotte to study Computer Science and Criminal Justice, with a career goal of working for the Central Intelligence Agency in the field of cyber security.

Josh has a positive attitude and is a pleasure to be around. In a recent conversation with his advisor, he talked about meeting someone when he was younger that he thought was just THE most awesome person. She asked Josh if he realized that HE is now THAT person – and he really is!



### ***Outstanding Teen***

## **Levi Blanchard**

**Kings Mountain, NC**

**Foothills Workforce Development Board**

Levi Blanchard has completed his high school diploma, is successfully participating in post-secondary schooling, and has obtained employment since enrolling in the NextGen Youth Program of the Foothills Workforce Development Board in the fall of 2021.

The COVID pandemic disrupted the traditional in-person teaching at Levi's high school and he was unable to adjust to web-based learning, so he chose to attend the Adult High School Program at Cleveland Community College. His diligence toward the academics, paired with dropout prevention strategies, tutoring, study skill strategies, incentives, and monthly comprehensive guidance and counseling from his case manager, resulted in attainment of his high school diploma in November 2021. He came to NextGen seeking services to support his education and has participated in leadership development, financial literacy, and begun his post-secondary education.

Levi has also learned and developed several soft skills during his time in NextGen, including communication, time-management, problem-solving, teamwork, work ethic, and attention to detail. He is also learning about financial literacy and how to become financially independent now that he is making his own money. Levi is currently attending Cleveland Community College in Business Administration and wants to start his own business one day.

Levi was concerned that a college education would result in insurmountable debt and was hesitant to apply for student loans. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) program has alleviated that concern and given him the opportunity to pursue his degree. He has stated that his case manager is amazing and has provided incredible support to him as he follows his dream.



***Outstanding Employer***  
**STI – Kings Plush, Inc.**

**Kings Mountain, NC**  
**Foothills Workforce Development Board**

STI – Kings Plush, Inc. (STI) is family-owned business in Kings Mountain that manufactures and distributes Revolution Performance Fabrics, one of the most in-demand fabrics in the home furnishings industry. They believe in honesty, integrity, treating employees with respect, and always remembering that they work for their customers to supply the very best in quality and value.

Since 2019, STI has been working with Gaston Correctional Center's work release program to provide job opportunities to inmates. Forty inmates have come to work at the plant, weaving and warping yarn, cleaning facilities, preparing fabric, and performing other duties needed by the business. Of the 18 who have been released, ten have joined STI as full-time employees.

One tangible example of their commitment to this population is STI's sponsorship in March 2022 of an event presented by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety (NCDPS). "In Their Shoes: A Prison-to-Community Simulation" included participants from community colleges, resource agencies, local industries, judicial districts, community corrections, and chambers of commerce. The simulation is designed to show the public exactly how difficult it is to navigate society upon release from jail or prison. It also highlights the necessary resources offenders need after being released and provides an opportunity for participants to network and share their resources. This event has garnered the attention of many high-ranking state officials including Governor Roy Cooper, House Speaker Tim Moore, and local community leaders.

In the past year, STI has also opened up opportunities for high school students to work part-time. This allows them to become knowledgeable about manufacturing and could lead to full-time positions in the future. STI also offers apprenticeship and on-the-job training.

From their hiring events to their work release programs, STI is always looking for ways to give back to their community. One positive impact is the large percentage of work release participants who are gainfully employed at STI upon release. Another is the training opportunities for the youngest members of the community to prepare to earn a living wage. They are the role model for others as they prove that a business with vision can be community-minded and remain profitable.



***Innovative Partnership***  
**SHYAS Community Assistance  
Program**  
**Salisbury, NC**  
**Centralina Workforce Development Board**

S&H Youth and Adult Services, Inc. (S&H) is an outpatient mental health and substance use treatment facility specializing in addiction and trauma. Their mission is to help improve the lives of these underserved citizens in the community through coaching, counseling, and consulting. They have partnered with the NCWorks Career Center-Rowan County to offer an innovative partnership known as the SHYAS Community Assistance Program (CAP) that includes developing a full-cycle workforce Reemployment Plan-of-Action for participants.

This unique and exceptional community partnership offers participants improved sustainability, reduces the recidivism rates for those who are offenders, and proposes an overall better way of life through reemployment opportunities. Together, the partners present a committed effort in executing community strength by helping those in need.

The partnership plays an integral role in the community by offering both affected citizens and employers in need of staff the opportunity for workforce relationships through reemployment opportunities. It also assists with the economic improvement of Rowan County by creating job opportunities for the economically impoverished.

In addition to the continuous reemployment efforts made to the citizens that S&H serves, they have partnered to help raise awareness of local employers on how those they may discount can be valued workers when given the chance. One event was the Rowan County Second Chance Job Fair that took place on July 23, 2021. Twelve individuals who received CAP services were matched with successful employment through this event.

The results of the CAP can be measured both tangibly and intangibly. Tangible efforts can be seen in the growing workforce pipeline for local business, and the ability of the newly hired to financially support themselves and their families. The intangible measure is the sense of personal fulfillment on the part of those that are newly employed. This unorthodox approach to reemployment for an underserved, overlooked, and suffering community is the secret weapon of the SHYAS Community Assistance Program, shared by S&H and NCWorks - Rowan.



## ***Bill Ragland Private Sector Award***

### **Al Searles**

**Smithfield Hog Production**

**Warsaw, NC**

**Eastern Carolina Workforce Development Board**

Al Searles joined the Eastern Carolina Workforce Development Board in 2011 and has consistently served in various leadership capacities, championing workforce development causes to build a workforce pipeline that results in upward mobility for the individual and business. He has served as Secretary/Treasurer, Vice-Chair and is currently serving his second term as Chair of the board and the Executive Committee. Al was also the Chair for the Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics career pathways efforts, and in this role, he brought industry leaders together to address solutions for workforce challenges.

As a result of Al's local leadership on the board and within his community, Al was nominated to represent North Carolina on the National Association of Workforce Development Boards. Within his first year of service on NAWB, Al was asked to serve on the NAWB finance committee and executive committee. Al continues to tackle North Carolina workforce issues while having the opportunity to address national workforce issues and bring back solutions.

Al spends an average of 10-15 hours a week in his volunteer leadership roles, where he has spent countless hours attending board and committee meetings to align members and staff with the vision of the board. His decades of workforce experience in the private sector brings an invaluable perspective to the board. His leadership, commitment, and dedication to the community make him an exemplary model. He brings energy and light to the needs of those around him, creating hope, building excitement, and fulfilling real needs of the community.

"Serving as Chairman for the Eastern Carolina Workforce Development Board, I have an appreciation for the tremendous effort and coordination it takes to bring leveraged resources and workforce services together so that our local businesses and individuals can benefit from them in connecting talent to jobs." - *Al Searles*

This is a message that Al often communicates when meeting with other business leaders, workforce and economic development stakeholders. Al believes in the value of education and often uses his own pathway journey to communicate the importance of creating career pathways opportunities for others.

"I have a passion for working in collaboration with Economic Development, Chambers of Commerce, our education system, and workforce partners to ensure we work together to leverage the talent, both developed and undeveloped, in our communities to fill the needed workforce pipeline."

- *Al Searles*



## ***Wayne Daves Customer Service Award***

### **Jalie Phifer**

**Talent Development Program Assistant**

**NCWorks – Raleigh**

**Capital Area Workforce Development Board**

Jalie is part of an elite team that provides 100% virtual employment services to customers through the Access NCWorks Contact Center. Her primary responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following: providing referrals and guidance to customers, assisting customers with navigating NCWorks Online, creating profiles, registering job seekers in NCWorks, providing overviews of NCWorks programs and services, completing initial assessments and enrollments, providing job search assistance activities including developing resumes, providing labor market information, assisting with scholarship and training information for in-demand jobs.

Jalie also assists with follow-up calls for RESEA and EAI customers to ensure they are receiving job leads and job referrals from the Career Center and she assists customers with setting up and using the virtual recruiter feature. Her role doesn't stop there! She also serves as the Limited English Proficiency staff person and fulfills those duties and obligations. She ensures customers have the accommodations and access to the information they need.

In addition to all those responsibilities she fulfills the role of an administrative assistant for the Talent Development Department, as her keen eye for detail is a valued asset for the team. She identifies and corrects errors that could be quite time consuming for her teammates. Her thoughtful and positive demeanor are a true asset to the organization. Even in times of personal struggle, Jalie never fails to bring a smile to work each day. Jalie prides herself on providing high quality and superior customer service to customers and sets the bar high for her colleagues. Her personality is infectious, and she offers a glimmer of hope to all customers who meet her.

As most services continue to be virtual at this time, Jalie has continued to rise above the call of duty to assist customers online while providing the same exceptional customer service they would receive in person. Jalie's outstanding service to customers is evidenced in the continuous positive feedback received from customer surveys. During this past year with the pandemic, Jalie didn't miss a beat – just one of the many reasons she is so deserving of this award.