

SPRING 2025



UPHOLDING
MENTAL HEALTH



A NOTE FROM OUR CEO

As I write this column for our Spring newsletter, we are already in the month of May. The significance of this month is quite varied. Mirci has now been in its new location at 2750 Laurel Street for a full year, and it has been a year of growth and maturing for the agency.

This is the first time since 2005 all administrative, behavioral healthcare, and supportive housing staff have been in the same location. We didn't realize just how much all being together would improve our continuity of care, and now that we've been here a year, we can't imagine how we managed across four locations in the past.

Having our outreach team and benefits specialists down the hall from the supportive housing staff makes the move from unhoused to accessing mainstream benefits and entering housing seamless. Then a little further down the hall you can find our nurses at their new nurses' station which is right across the hall from our physicians. Patients can have their vitals checked, pick up medications, and see their psychiatric provider all in one stop. On the same hallway, our clinical team has individual and group therapy rooms, as well as meditation rooms. Perhaps the most infamous space along this hallway is the aquarium housing Mirci's therapy turtle, *Raphael*!

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Of course, along another hallway - but on the same floor - we have our management team and administrative offices. In addition to the ease with which our clients are now able to access housing, benefits, and behavioral healthcare services, our staff are more connected and more efficient.

May is also significant as national *Mental Health Awareness Month* AND *Affordable Housing Month*. And the significance of these two recognitions in the same month is not lost on me. How appropriate that Mirci is upholding mental health and providing affordable housing options all in the same space.

So during the month of May, we thank all our friends and supporters that make it possible for Mirci to help vulnerable people build healthy, independent lives every single day.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julie Ann Avin".

Julie Ann Avin
President & CEO

INTRODUCING OUR NEW COO!

Mirci is delighted to welcome Shawn Caraballo to the team as our new Chief Operating Officer!

Caraballo is an accomplished nonprofit executive with 16 years of dedicated service in the social sector. Throughout her career, she has demonstrated exceptional leadership in organizational development, community engagement, and creating sustainable solutions for vulnerable populations, shown through successfully leading organizations through periods of growth and transformation.

Caraballo is a Certified Development Executive (CDE) and Certified Nonprofit Executive (CNE), and holds a master's degree in education administration from Columbia College. She currently serves as Vice President of the Midlands Area Consortium for the Homeless (MACH) and as a member of the South Carolina Interagency Council on Homelessness (SCICH), actively contributing to policy development and coordinated service delivery across the state. In her new role, Caraballo looks forward to continuing the advancement of initiatives that create pathways to stability and hope for individuals and families throughout South Carolina.



"I am incredibly honored to join Mirci as Chief Operating Officer and contribute to an organization that has been pioneering mental wellness support in Columbia for over 60 years! Having spent my career working with individuals facing housing instability and mental health challenges, I'm energized by Mirci's comprehensive approach to breaking the cycles that keep people at an impasse. Together, we'll continue building pathways to stability, hope, and lasting recovery for every person we serve!"

MIRCI IN THE COMMUNITY



Staff and clients at NAMI Walks Mid-Carolina



Mirci recognized by Richland County Council in May for 60 years of service



ACT Team members at a best practices conference at UNC-Chapel Hill



Sharing the Mirci impact with UUC for their "Share the Plate" program

CLIENT CORNER

Lisa's Story

“Until one has loved an animal, a part of one’s soul remains unawakened.” - Anatole France

Lisa shares her experience, one of things remembered and better forgotten. She experienced a multitude of trauma in her youth in New York, and her first psychiatric hospitalization occurred at age 13, when “the judge said [I] was a danger to society.” Lisa reported she felt paranoid: “I thought people were laughing at me, talking stuff about me, out to get to me.”

Lisa relocated to the Columbia area in the 90s, and since that time endured at least eight inpatient hospitalizations and numerous legal issues resulting from traumatic experiences owed to her mental health diagnosis. Over the years, Lisa worked various jobs, finally ending up riding along with a friend who was an over-the-road truck driver. She enjoyed the travel and solitude: “I got to see a lot of things, but not have to be with a lot of people.”

In January 2019, Lisa moved into Mirci’s permanent supportive housing. Mirci’s benefits team then worked with her to ensure her disability benefits were stable, and helped her enroll in SNAP. The clinical team began visiting with Lisa, and accompanied her on two grocery runs and a few community activities led by the after hours team.

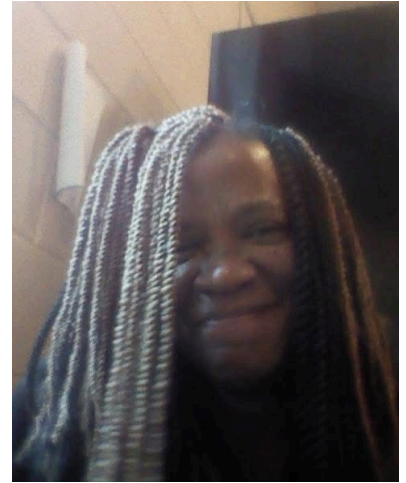
Having her own apartment again allowed Lisa to settle down and create her space the way she enjoyed it. Lisa collected a variety of thrifted and gifted items and set to decorating her home. Despite enjoying her own space, Lisa still faced one of the biggest challenges facing many in similar situations - connecting with others and making friends.

Lisa’s natural instinct to nurture called on her to provide care, but her mental health diagnosis made connecting difficult. While she endorses not feeling very comfortable around people, Lisa is a true animal lover, and has since adopted two cats, Cotton and Midnight. She relies on her furry friends for comfort, especially in her recent recovery from a stroke and several subsequent medical procedures. Lisa calls her cats “her babies”, and doesn’t like being away from them.

Today, Lisa reports satisfaction in her life, and peace in her apartment. She greatly enjoys her “cat family” and appreciates a fairly relaxed daily routine.

She ends her story with a powerful mantra:

“I tell people I’m a solider because of all I’ve been through, and now I’m walking without a cane.”



Lisa, Mirci Client



Lisa's cat "Midnight"



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