

# THE OVERVIEW

*Mandi's Story*

*7 Brew & HCO: Brewing a Difference*

*Seeing Our True Colors*

*Intern Spotlight: Erica Johnson*

*Upcoming Events: PEZ on the River & Tidal Wave Charity Day*

*Healthy Lifestyles*

*Dreams Come True*

*Living with Purpose*

*Everyday Moments*

*Monthly Quote*

*Mission, Vision, Core Values*

# NEWS & HIGHLIGHTS

## MANDI'S STORY GROWING THROUGH EVERY CHALLENGE

When Mandi moved into her HCO home in 2000, she wasn't quite sure what to expect. Fresh out of school, she had only lived at another HCO home for a few months before settling into the house she still proudly calls home today. More than 25 years later, she is the longest-tenured resident in her program, and over the years, that house has become much more than a place to live. It has become a place where she has built confidence, independence, and a life she is proud of.

Growing up in Rollingstone with her parents and sister, Mandi attended school there before moving on to Winona Middle School and High School. As a child, she worked with a speech therapist because speaking clearly was often a challenge. By the time she graduated, those struggles had become much less noticeable, and life moved forward.

Then, years later, something changed.

Staff began noticing that Mandi was becoming more difficult to understand. For her, it was frustrating. She remembers how discouraging it felt when people would frequently ask, "What did you say?" Having to repeat herself over and over made everyday conversations harder than they should have been.



Rather than letting the challenge grow, Mandi and her support team took action. She began attending speech therapy, where she learned new techniques and exercises to strengthen her communication. What started with reading sentences aloud has grown into practicing real conversations. Just as importantly, the work doesn't stop when therapy ends. Staff continue practicing the exercises with her at home, encouraging her every step of the way and celebrating the progress she's made.

Today, the difference is remarkable. Her speech has improved tremendously, and one of the things she is most proud of is how far she has come. Her determination, paired with consistent support, has helped her find confidence in using her voice again.

That determination shows up in many parts of her life.

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## 7 BREW & HCO: *Brewing a Difference*

### Caffeine for a Cause

HCO was honored to be selected by 7 Brew Coffee as the beneficiary of their Caffeine for a Cause fundraiser, held Friday, August 7 through Sunday, August 9. Throughout the weekend, donations made through the fundraiser benefited HCO, providing a wonderful opportunity to raise awareness and support for the individuals we serve.

A small group from HCO joined in on the fun throughout the weekend, holding signs, handing out a few goodies, and enjoying the excitement at 7 Brew. We received plenty of honks and waves from people driving by, making it such a fun and

memorable experience! It was especially incredible to see the generosity of the Winona community throughout the weekend. So many people chose to give, and we are incredibly grateful for everyone who stopped by and donated to support HCO. The 7 Brew staff was absolutely amazing and so great to work with throughout the entire event. We are so thankful to 7 Brew for choosing HCO and to the Winona community for making the fundraiser such a success!



## 7 Brew Ribbon Cutting

As part of the Caffeine for a Cause fundraiser, HCO was invited to attend 7 Brew's Ribbon Cutting on August 18th. Directors Cindi Wiczek and Andy Schneider attended on behalf of HCO and accepted a generous donation of \$8,165.28 from 7 Brew. We are incredibly grateful for 7 Brew's generosity and for choosing HCO as the beneficiary of this special fundraiser.



# SEEING OUR TRUE COLORS

What color are you? It might sound like a simple question, but during HCO's recent Summer Leadership Training, it sparked meaningful conversations, plenty of laughter, and a new way of understanding one another.

This July, HCO's full-time staff and members of our Board of Directors gathered for an interactive morning focused on communication, teamwork, and leadership. Jennifer May from Star Services led the training, guiding staff through activities that encouraged conversation, reflection, and a fresh perspective on working together. From thought-provoking discussions with coworkers to lessons on how our actions can positively influence a team, the morning challenged everyone to think differently about the relationships that make HCO successful.



The highlight of the training was discovering our True Colors.

Using the True Colors personality assessment, everyone completed a short quiz to identify the personality style that best described them. Participants were then divided into four color groups, each representing a unique way of thinking, communicating, and approaching challenges.

- Orange personalities value freedom, action, and adaptability.
- Gold personalities thrive on organization, responsibility, and structure.
- Blue personalities are driven by relationships, empathy, and connection.
- Green personalities enjoy problem-solving, innovation, and strategic thinking.

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# *Intern Spotlight:* ERICA JOHNSON

This summer I began a new chapter at Home and Community Options by stepping into a communications internship. While HCO was already a familiar place to me because of my work as a Direct Support Professional, my internship has allowed me to experience the organization from a whole new perspective.

As a marketing student at Winona State University, I was looking for an internship that would provide real-world experience while allowing me to continue working for an organization whose mission aligned with my values. Having already experienced HCO firsthand as a DSP, I knew the people, programs, and mission of the organization. My communications internship gave me the opportunity to take that familiarity and look at HCO through a different lens, using my creativity and marketing skills to help tell the stories of the people who make HCO special.



Throughout my internship, I have had the opportunity to work on a wide variety of marketing and communications projects. I have written newsletter stories featuring individuals and staff, designed flyers and promotional materials, created social media content, and helped share HCO's mission through storytelling. Each project has strengthened my marketing and communication skills while allowing me to highlight the incredible people who make HCO such a special place.

One of the most rewarding parts of my internship has been the opportunity to visit many of HCO's homes and programs while interviewing individuals and staff for newsletter stories. Although I was already familiar with HCO through my work as a DSP, these experiences have allowed me to see the agency in a new way. Every visit has given me the chance to meet new people, hear their unique experiences, and learn more about the many ways HCO supports individuals throughout the community. These conversations have shown me firsthand the meaningful relationships, personal growth, and everyday successes that happen across the organization.

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# UPCOMING EVENTS

## *save the dates*

# PEZ ON THE RIVER

## TOY SHOW & SALE

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2026**  
**8:30AM-1:00PM**

**AT THE RIVERPORT INN & SUITES**  
900 BRUSKI DRIVE, WINONA, MN 55987

Pez on the River helps support Home & Community Options' Sensory Library and Advocacy Events. Join us for lots of fun and even take home a free gift. No entrance fee required!

*Freewill donations will be given to HCO.*



**FRIDAY SEPT. 18**

**100% OF PROCEEDS**  
BENEFIT CHARITIES

**HOME & COMMUNITY**  
**OPTIONS**



**Annandale**  
VILLAGE



**The Joseph Sams School**  
*Serving Children With Special Needs*

## TIDAL WAVE CHARITY DAY

We're pleased to partner with Tidal Wave Auto Spa again this year for their annual Charity Day on Friday, September 18, 2026!

This special one-day event brings the community together to support local nonprofit organizations, and we're grateful to be one of the organizations benefiting from this year's event. Stop by Tidal Wave Auto Spa at 1015 Frontenac Dr. in Winona on September 18 to get a wash and support Home and Community Options!

We're thankful to Tidal Wave for continuing to partner with HCO and support our mission of empowering individuals with disabilities to live meaningful lives in their communities.

# EMPOWER YOUR MOVEMENT

## *Adaptive Exercises for Balance and Strength*

This month's Healthy Lifestyles was all about staying strong and steady! Exercise Intern, Sydney, hosted a fun and informative fall prevention class that gave everyone practical ways to help prevent falls while staying active.

Sydney kicked off the evening with an interactive version of "Simon Says," leading the group through exercises designed to improve strength, balance, and stability. Next, everyone joined in a game of fall prevention BINGO. The activity kept everyone up, engaged, and laughing while learning important tips along the way.

To wrap up the evening, the group relaxed with an art activity and a delicious fruit and yogurt parfait. Everyone who attended also received a fall prevention brochure featuring basic tips for staying strong and steady, including home exercises, safety tips, and helpful dos and don'ts. The brochure highlighted that staying active is one of the best ways to help prevent falls.

It was a great combination of learning, movement, and fun! Thank you, Sydney, for sharing your expertise and making this month's Healthy Lifestyles a memorable and valuable experience for everyone who attended.



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# DREAMS COME TRUE: HCO'S SUMMER WITH WWE

From meeting WWE Superstars at an HCO program to visiting the Minnesota Vikings' training facility, this summer has been one that many of the individuals we support will never forget.

When WWE announced that SummerSlam was coming to Minnesota, Home and Community Options (HCO) was honored to be selected as a WWE SummerSlam Community Champion. Through this partnership, HCO and the individuals we support had the opportunity to take part in several special events leading up to the big weekend in Minneapolis.

One of the first experiences came in the spring, when WWE Superstars visited an HCO program. Individuals had the chance to spend time with wrestlers they had watched for years, play yard games, share a meal, and take pictures with their favorite Superstars. For many, getting to meet the people they had watched on television for so long was a dream come true.

The WWE experience continued into the summer, eventually leading to an invitation to visit the Minnesota Vikings' training facility ahead of SummerSlam. Upon arriving at the facility, the group had the opportunity to walk through the Vikings Museum, where they were greeted by WWE Superstars Otis and El Grande Americano. The wrestlers spent time chatting with the group and taking pictures before everyone received a Minnesota Vikings backpack and football.



The group then headed out to the practice field, where they watched the Vikings practice. Many were in awe as they watched the players in action, while conversations throughout the visit centered around favorite football players, teams, and memories of watching both football and wrestling.

The biggest surprise came when the group learned they would have the opportunity to have their footballs signed by Vikings players. At first, they weren't sure who would be able to stop by after practice. The guide explained that it would be up to the players once they finished.

It didn't take long to find out.

The entire Vikings offensive line came over to meet the group and sign their footballs. Each player took the time to introduce themselves, ask individuals their names, and thank them for coming. What could have been a quick autograph turned into meaningful interactions that made the experience even more special.

One particularly sweet moment happened when a player asked Eric his name. When Eric shared his name, the player responded, "No way! I'm Eric, too!" The two celebrated their shared name, creating a simple but memorable connection.

For Nick, the entire day felt almost too good to be true.

"This day doesn't feel real. Am I dreaming?!" he exclaimed. At one point, he even asked, "Can you pinch me?" Later, he summed up the experience perfectly: "This is my dream come true!"

Nick wasn't the only one feeling that way. Throughout the day, many individuals described the experience as "the best day ever."

We can't thank WWE enough for including HCO in this incredible experience and creating so many unforgettable moments for the individuals we support. From meeting their wrestling heroes to getting an up-close look at the Vikings, this truly was a dream come true for many, and a summer they will remember for years to come.

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## **LIVING WITH PURPOSE:**

*Recognizing Servant Leadership at HCO*

Over the past several years, a group of HCO staff members has the opportunity to attend the Servant Leadership Conference at Viterbo University. This year, five HCO staff members attended: Darin Olson, Kathy Hager, Kathy Henson-Schroeder, Clara Haugo, and Celina Quinn. All five described the conference as a meaningful and powerful experience, sharing that they gained valuable tools and ideas to bring back to their teams. The conference provided an opportunity to learn, reflect, and discover new ways to put servant leadership into practice at HCO.



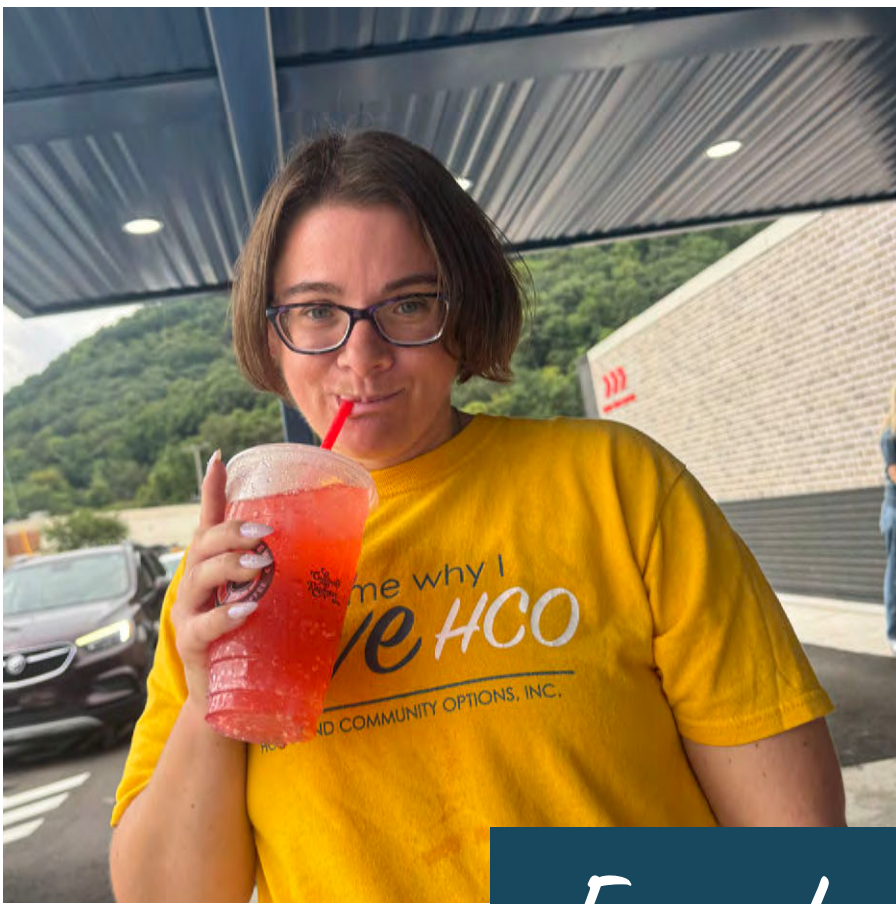
For Kathy Henson-Schroeder, one of the most powerful takeaways from this year's conference was the reminder that, "Mindset is the foundation; resilience is the result!" Darin Olson also shared a quote that resonated with him: "Servant leadership is a humble form of influence, where the servant leader is focused on motivating and developing followers with the end goal of benefiting all of an organization's stakeholders." Together, these reflections capture the heart of servant leadership and the importance of growing together, leading with purpose, and creating a positive impact for everyone we serve.



Following the conference, HCO brought together staff who have attended the Servant Leadership Conference in the past, along with this year's participants, for HCO's Living with Purpose Recognition. The afternoon was an opportunity to reflect, connect, and hear stories that demonstrate what serving others looks like every day at HCO.

The afternoon began with a light lunch and meaningful conversation around the tables. Guided questions encouraged everyone to pause, reflect, and enjoy time connecting with the people around them. Attendees then heard three inspiring stories, each connected to one of the Seven Pillars of Servant Leadership.

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## Everyday Moments



## MONTHLY *quote*

A skilled communicator listens deeply, seeks to understand, and speaks with clarity and purpose.

Are you Living with Purpose?

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# HCO

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## HOME & COMMUNITY OPTIONS

## Mission

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To empower and support people with developmental disabilities

## Vision

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For everyone to thrive and be valued members in their community

## Core Values

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- Respect for all people and their differences
- Quality services that balance independence with safety and security
- Opportunities for all individuals to learn, build meaningful relationships, and enjoy life