



universal possibilities™

Quarterly Newsletter - July 2025

Welcome to the first edition of the Universal Possibilities newsletter!

Welcome to our very first newsletter! Since our founding in April 2022, Universal Possibilities has grown from a shared dream to a vibrant nonprofit movement powered by love, vision, and community. Every step we take brings us closer to creating an inclusive housing option for independent adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Thank you for being on this journey with us.

Lifting people up

Creating joyful living environments where individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities can enjoy fun, fulfilling, and enriching experiences every day.

Empowering people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to live independently through forward-thinking housing solutions tailored to their individual needs

Fostering vibrant communities where individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities can thrive socially through innovative housing opportunities.

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From the Founders' Corner

Universal Possibilities, Inc., or UP, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit whose goal is to establish an innovative apartment community for independent individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) in the East Aurora area.

Currently there exists a shortage of housing options for folks with I/DD who can live independently with little support. Our organization will build a community in East Aurora, NY that will have approximately 8 to 10 apartments. Our UpLift Wellness Program will place a strong emphasis on socialization, health, and wellness as this social component is a valuable asset in creating an improved quality of life for our residents.

Our wellness program sets us apart from other housing options in that it will create spaces where residents can socialize, learn, engage in physical activity and enhance their well-being while reducing isolation. Residents will learn skills needed for self-direction and will have the ability to advocate for help with their needs. Residents will live, learn, and thrive!

We are strongly committed to achieving our goal and are confident in our future success due to the passionate dedication and talents of our Board, Supporters and Volunteers, which include teachers, administrators, business leaders, health professionals and hardworking individuals from many fields.

Please join us on our journey to creating independent living!

Project Spotlight: Housing That Uplifts

We're working hard to bring our vision of eight to ten thoughtfully designed one-bedroom apartments to life. Each unit will be part of a community-first model, with shared wellness, fitness, and social spaces designed to promote connection, independence, and dignity.

Several pieces of land and existing buildings have been reviewed, and some have been negotiated over the past year. There are some promising developments in the works, but we have not finalized any locations just yet. We are working hard to have a positive update on this topic in the next newsletter. Until that time, please feel free to contact us with any potential locations for Universal Possibilities. We are looking for either land with 1+ acres available and zoned for multiple parties or an existing structure which can be transformed. The ideal location is walkable to grocery stores and other necessary facilities for everyday life.

Volunteer Shout-Out

On behalf of everyone at UP, we want to extend our deepest gratitude to our volunteers. Their dedication, hard work, and generosity of spirit are inspiring!

We are a 100% volunteer organization. The time, energy, and enthusiasm that our volunteers bring makes an incredible difference. Whether lending a hand at events, offering expertise, or simply showing up with a smile and a willingness to help, they are the heart of our mission. The impact they have made on the lives we serve cannot be overstated.

If you would like to join our volunteers in being an essential part of our work, please visit our website and select "About" and "Get Involved". We would love to have you join us.

Upcoming Events

Fall Event

 Wednesday, October 22, 2025

Our fall event will be a Bills themed party at the East Aurora Country Club. Join us to show your support of our cause and to participate in exciting raffles and auctions including Bills collectibles and unique bottles of alcohol. More info is coming soon!

4th Annual Meat Raffle

 Saturday, April 18, 2026

Our biggest event of the year will be back in 2026! Food, fun, prizes – and all proceeds go directly toward our housing initiative. Invite friends, bring your lucky numbers, and support a life-changing cause.

If you have any ideas for future events, please reach out to us at info@universal-possibilities.org

Past Events

3rd Annual Meat Raffle

The 3rd annual Meat Raffle was held in April 2025; once again, the event was a huge success. In addition to having a wonderful night with our enthusiastic supporters, we exceeded our goal by raising \$2,000 more than we did in 2024. Thank you so very much to everyone who participated, we could not have made the event a success without you.



Heart of Music festival

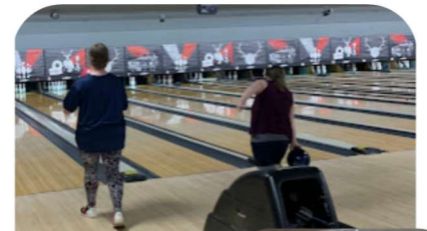
The Heart of Music festival occurred in East Aurora on June 7th, 2025. This event was created to “Produce a community music event to benefit local non-profit organizations focusing on our community youth and music; promote a vibrant village full of live music; and provide an outlet for local musicians to share their talents and keep live music alive!”. This wonderful and fun event has donated almost \$1 Million dollars to the local communities. We are extremely honored to share that Universal Possibilities was a beneficiary of the Heart of Music festival this year!




Bowling



Potential future residents took part in a social bowling event on July 13, 2025. This was our first sponsored social event, and it was a great success. Several potential residents and their families joined us for a fun filled afternoon of bowling, socializing, and smiles. Thank you so much to all who joined us, we look forward to more events.



Give 716

 Tuesday, July 15, 2025 @ 7:16 pm - Wednesday, July 16, 2025 @ 11:59 pm

Universal Possibilities participated in Give 716 again this year. With your help, we raised over \$6,000, exceeding our goal of \$4,000! We also had a record number of donors and donations (44 donations). Due to your generosity and the sponsors of Give 716, we also received several donation matches, one grant, and obtained some excellent incentives as did many of our donors. Overall, Give 716 raised over \$1.4 million dollars and benefited 576 charities in Western New York, all within 1 day.

Board Members

For our inaugural newsletter we felt it appropriate to share information about our board members. Our members bring a wide array of backgrounds and knowledge in order to assist with the various needs to make the UP vision a reality.

Board of Directors



Ruth Kartalis, President

Ruth has extensive experience in both education and technology. At Nike she was a key developer and the project leader for RepNet, a Sales Force Management system that was one of the first of its kind. In education, she held several positions including teacher, High School House Principal, Assistant Director of Special Education and Assistant Director of Technology. Ruth received a BS degree from the University at Albany, majoring in Mathematics and Computer Science. She also has two Master's Degrees in Education and Leadership from Canisius College and St. Bonaventure University. Ruth and her husband Nick live in East Aurora and have two daughters, Krista and Kathryn, and one son, Michael. Michael's diagnosis is Pervasive Developmental Delay and he is on the Autism Spectrum. Mike hopes to someday live in his own apartment among his peers.



Deborah Flynn, Vice President

Deborah is currently the Director of Gourmet Specialty at The Cookware Company. Deborah was a founding director of Home of My Own of WNY and was its President until September, 2022. She helped bring Lose the Training Wheels to WNY, now known as I can Shine Bike riding camp, helping hundreds of local kids with I/DD learn to ride a two wheel bike. She was actively involved and was Board President for Bornhava, an early childhood center for children with developmental disabilities. Deb has worked in the Housewares Industry for over 25 years. She has an MA in Interpersonal and Public Communication from Bowling Green State University. Deb and her husband Mike live in East Aurora, NY, and have two daughters, Courtney and Kaleigh. Kaleigh has Down Syndrome and fuels the passion for this project.



Nicholas Kartalis, Treasurer

Nick has extensive experience in business and education. He was a Senior Vice President of the Nike Corporation, President of the Danskin brand and Vice President of Dick's Sporting Goods along with other corporate management positions. Nick also spearheaded two major corporate acquisitions in both the wholesale and retail trades. Nick is a graduate of Springfield College and is a permanently certified Health and Physical Education teacher. While in the Master's program for Guidance and Personnel Services at the University of Albany, Nick worked as a graduate assistant initiating the football program there.

Independent Living

The advisory board partnered with the UP founders to develop a set of skills necessary for all future residents. This list can be found here: <https://universal-possibilities.org/skills/>. This is just one of many initiatives in which the advisory board is involved. If you are interested in joining our advisory board, please contact us for more information.

Advisory Board

Michael Flynn

Mike was born and raised in Amherst, NY and counts his experience at Canisius High School and Massachusetts Maritime Academy in shaping his trajectory in life. He spent most of his career running the tugboats on Lake Erie working for Great Lakes Towing Company. Now retired, he has a home improvement business that keeps him busy when he is not working on home projects of his own.

Mike and his wife Deb have raised their two daughters Kaleigh and Courtney in East Aurora, New York. Kaleigh is the oldest sibling and was born with Down Syndrome. Never deterred by what challenges her disability might create, he has always held that if the bar gets pushed, she will rise to the occasion. Both Mike and Deb have continued to look for opportunities with education, activities, work and life skill building to help create an independent and fulfilling life for Kaleigh.

As Kaleigh is now 27 years old, finding appropriate housing for her in a safe, inclusive and independent setting is a priority. Universal Possibilities has the vision, mission and values that fit Kaleigh's needs so being a part of this organization is a perfect fit with other likeminded parents

Krisan Hahn

Krisan is retired and lives in Marilla with her husband Chuck. She is a mom and grandma who enjoys teaching aerobic dance classes and playing pickleball.

Krisan is a former employee of Clarence High School. She was president of the PTO and SEPTSA (Special Education Parent, Teacher, Student

Association) board member. A highlight of her time there was planning and organizing a huge prom held in downtown Buffalo for students with disabilities. Along with peer helpers, parents and teachers, the prom was an incredible event enjoyed by so many who may not have had a prom experience.

Krisan's pride and joy is her youngest daughter, Jennifer. Jen was born with a developmental disability. Jen's love of life and self-determination pushes Krisan to be her lifelong advocate. Some of Jen's personal goals include working, being physically active, maintaining friendships, being part of a community and choosing where and how to live. Krisan is excited about being a member of the Advisory Board for Universal Possibilities and helping all of the participants reach their goals.

Krista Martinez Murphy

Krista (Kartalis) Martinez-Murphy is a dedicated healthcare professional with over 23 years as a Registered Nurse. In her current role as a Health Care Surveyor 3 with the New York State Department of Health, she leads teams in evaluating healthcare facilities to ensure they meet rigorous standards of safety, quality, and regulatory compliance. Throughout her career, Krista has combined clinical expertise with a deep commitment to compassionate care, public health, and patient advocacy.

Her passion for supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities is inspired by her brother, who is on the autism spectrum. He continues to motivate her work and strong commitment to advocating for creating environments where individuals with disabilities have the same rights as everyone else. Krista lives in East Aurora, New York, with her husband, Chris,

and her daughter, Zoe. Zoe is part of the Unified Club at her school that fosters social inclusion, promotes understanding, and helps to break down barriers between students with and without disabilities. Together, they are all actively involved in volunteering their time to support the mission and goals of Universal Possibilities.

Kathryn (Kartalis) Peters

Kathryn (Kartalis) Peters serves as the Vice President of the Clinical Trials Office at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center, where she leads a team committed to advancing cancer research and delivering innovative therapies through clinical trials. She brings a strong technical and strategic background to her role, holding a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science and Mathematics and a Master of Science in Computer Science and Cyber Security. Her expertise supports the integration of data, technology, and operations to drive high-impact research and improve patient care.

Her advocacy work is deeply personal—her brother, who has autism, is her lifelong inspiration and the reason she is passionate about creating opportunities for individuals of all abilities. She lives in Elma, New York, with her husband, Jeremy Peters, and twin daughters, Mikayla and Nicole. Together, they are all actively involved in volunteering their time to support this important initiative for current and future generations.

Christine Rushok

Christine joins the Advisory Board with a unique interest...her very own daughter, Genevieve.

“Honestly, right after the first conversation I had when I learned about Universal Possibilities’ mission, I knew I was all in. Universal Possibilities...What a powerful and positive way to plan for the future of all of our community’s young adults with I/DD.”

Christine has a BA in Legal Studies from the University at Buffalo. This has consistently assisted her in navigating the ways of Special Education law as a strong advocate throughout Genna’s educational career. Christine continues to advocate for Genna and her peers as young adults with I/DD (Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities) in the workplace and within our community.

Christine is a proud Mom of two daughters, Lauren and Genevieve (Genna) and lives in the village of East Aurora. The three of them are always looking for a way to give back and make a difference. Christine and Genevieve proudly volunteer weekly at Hearts for the Homeless in our own Buffalo Riverside community in their commercial kitchen. They understand that preparing nightly warm meals for our community’s food deprived is not only God sent but heart felt. Lauren is a federal advocate for policies benefiting infants and toddlers, including those with disabilities.

Thank you for supporting our mission at Universal Possibilities. Christine, Lauren, and especially Genna believe it to be so important that all our young adults live and love as they wish—safely, respectfully and most importantly, independently.

Get Involved

- Volunteer your time or skills
- Donate at <https://universal-possibilities.org/donate>
- Share our mission on social media

Stay Connected

- ✉ Email: info@universal-possibilities.org
- 🌐 Website: <https://universal-possibilities.org>