

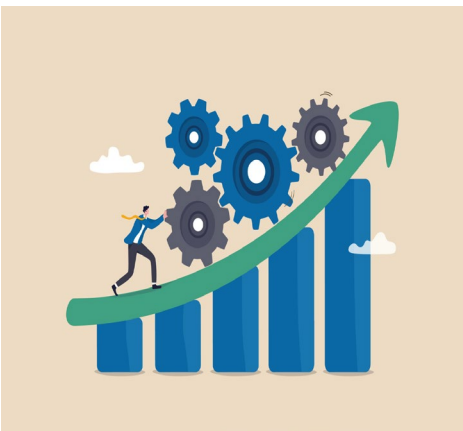


# NOT JUST 'ANOTHER' COG

MID-CAROLINA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENT  
NOVEMBER 2024 NEWSLETTER

## MID-CAROLINA'S MISSION

Our mission is to provide creative regional solutions to relevant and emerging issues in Cumberland, Harnett, and Sampson Counties, North Carolina while providing a standard of excellence in delivering federal, state, and regional services for our communities. We are a voluntary coalition of local governments. Our council functions as a multi-county, planning, development, and human services organization.



***Together, we can!***

White, symbolized the light, love, and resilience that caregivers bring to those in need. Dee's Catering provided a delightful meal, and the afternoon was filled with moments of connection and reflection, offering caregivers a chance to feel valued and appreciated for the vital work they do every day.

The event served as a beautiful reminder of the profound impact caregivers have on the lives of their loved ones and the community.

## MCRC Agency on Aging Hosts Family Caregiver Appreciation Banquet

On Friday, November 8, 2024, the Mid-Carolina Agency on Aging hosted the annual Family Caregiver Appreciation Banquet at the Bill Crisp Senior Center, recognizing the dedication and compassion of family caregivers. The event, organized by Carla Smith, Aging Program Specialist, and Barbara White, Family Caregiver Specialist from the Mid-Carolina Regional Council (MCRC), was a heartfelt celebration filled with gratitude and reflection.



This year, 25 caregivers were honored for their selfless contributions, many of whom care for loved ones at home without formal support or compensation. The Family Caregiver Support Program, established in 2000, has been a vital resource for caregivers, addressing the emotional, physical, social, and financial challenges they face. The program, funded by the Older Americans Act, Title III-E, works to expand services and resources that ease caregiver burdens and allow them to continue providing care for their loved ones at home.

Special guests Senator Val Applewhite and MCRC Executive Director Justin Hembree also joined the celebration to honor the caregivers. Senator Applewhite commended the caregivers for their strength and compassion, while Mr. Hembree expressed sincere appreciation for their unwavering commitment to their families and communities. Their words highlighted the essential role caregivers play in enriching the lives of those they serve.

The banquet room at the Bill Crisp Senior Center was beautifully decorated in Tiffany blue and white, creating a welcoming and elegant atmosphere. A candle tribute, led by new MCRC member, Lisa DeCandia, and Ms.



### **North Carolina Celebrated “Employ A Veteran Week” Nov. 11-15**

North Carolina honored its veterans during “Employ A Veteran Week” from November 11-15, featuring a range of events designed to connect veterans with job opportunities and essential services, as announced by Governor Roy Cooper.

“Veterans strengthen our communities and enrich our businesses as citizens, skilled workers, and leaders,” said Governor Cooper during the announcement. “We owe veterans and their families a deep debt of gratitude for their service. As America’s most military- and veteran-friendly state, North Carolina is committed to helping them secure good jobs in growing industries.”

N.C. Commerce Secretary Machel Baker Sanders remarked, “It was our privilege to serve our veterans, the more than 20,000 military service members transitioning from active duty in North Carolina each year, and their families through our NCWorks Career Centers and other state programs. The talent within our military community brings a strong work ethic, leadership experience, adaptability, integrity, and specialized training to our workforce—qualities every business needs to thrive.”

Grier Martin, Secretary of the N.C. Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (NC DMVA), emphasized the importance of supporting veterans: “They bring invaluable skills and experiences to our communities, demonstrating resilience, leadership, and dedication during their service. A successful transition to civilian life is essential for veterans and beneficial for our economy.”

Local events in the MCRC region focused on assisting veterans included:

- **Wednesday, Nov. 6 (10 a.m. – 2 p.m.):** Veterans Hiring Event at NCWorks Career Center – Cumberland County, 490 N. McPherson Church Road, Fayetteville, NC.
- **Thursday, Nov. 7 (10 a.m. – 2 p.m.):** Veterans Job Fair at NCWorks Career Center – Hoke County, 304 Birch Street, Raeford, NC, featuring at least four employers and Dress for Success. The general public was also welcome.
- **Thursday, Nov. 7 (10 a.m. – 2 p.m.):** Veterans Hiring Event at NCWorks Career Center – Cumberland County, 490 N. McPherson Church Road, Fayetteville, NC.
- **Wednesday, Nov. 13 (10 a.m. - 3 p.m.):** Women Veterans Career & Resource Fair at Soldier Support Building, 2843 Normandy Drive, Fort Liberty, NC, hosted by NCWorks Career Center – Cumberland and other partners.

The Department of Commerce, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor, employs 50 NCWorks Veterans Services professionals—veterans themselves—whose mission is to help fellow veterans find quality jobs and training opportunities. Located at local NCWorks Career Centers, they serve veterans and job seekers alike while assisting employers in meeting their talent needs. Many professionals also engaged as partners in Veterans Treatment Courts and collaborated with North Carolina For Military Employment (NC4ME) on special hiring events.



For more information on local career centers, individuals were encouraged to visit [www.NCWorks.gov](http://www.NCWorks.gov). Veterans and employers also accessed services through the NCWorks Veterans Portal at [veterans.ncworks.gov](http://veterans.ncworks.gov). The community came together to celebrate and support veterans during this special week!

## Honoring Our MCRC Veterans



**Justin Hembree**  
US Army



**Barbara White**  
US Army



**Doug Muessle**  
US Army



**Melissa Simmons**  
USAF



## Thanksgiving Getaway Enjoying a Long Weekend of Festivities!

As the leaves turn golden and the air turns crisp, Thanksgiving is just around the corner, and this year, many of us are lucky enough to have Thursday and Friday off to celebrate the holiday! Whether you're a seasoned holiday veteran or a Thanksgiving novice, this long weekend is the perfect opportunity to indulge in all the things that make this season so special.



### A Feast for All

Thanksgiving is synonymous with feasting, and a long weekend means you can enjoy a relaxed celebration without the stress of rushing back to work! Start your day with a delicious breakfast of pumpkin pancakes or a savory breakfast casserole. Then, as the smell of turkey roasting fills the air, gather with family and friends to prepare your favorite holiday dishes.



Don't forget the sides! From creamy mashed potatoes to tangy cranberry sauce, there's no better time to try that new recipe you've been eyeing. And, of course, dessert is a must! Whether you prefer classic pumpkin pie, rich pecan pie, or an adventurous cranberry tart, there's room for all kinds of sweet treats on your table.

### The Perfect Time for Relaxation

With Thursday and Friday off, you have the perfect excuse to relax and recharge. After your Thanksgiving feast, why not cozy up on the couch with a good book or binge-watch that series you've been meaning to catch up on? You could even host a movie marathon featuring all the holiday classics, like *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* or *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*.

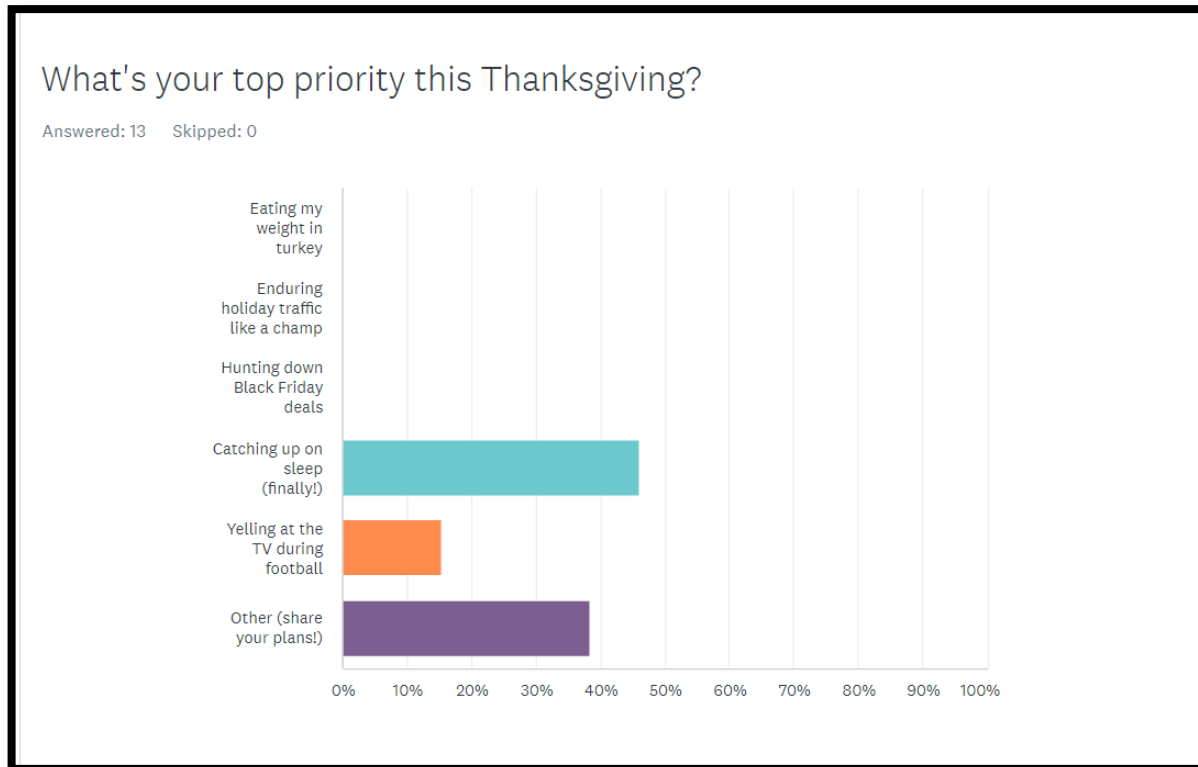
And let's not forget about the post-dinner nap—it's practically a Thanksgiving tradition! Enjoy the blissful feeling of a full belly as you settle in for a well-deserved snooze.



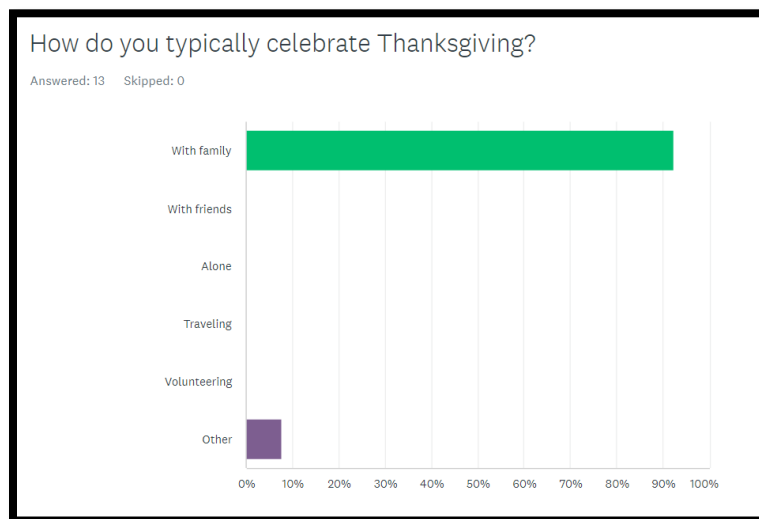


## *Thanksgiving Traditions Survey Results: How We Celebrate*

This Thanksgiving, our MCRC community shared what they're most looking forward to, and while some classic traditions held strong, there were a few surprises!



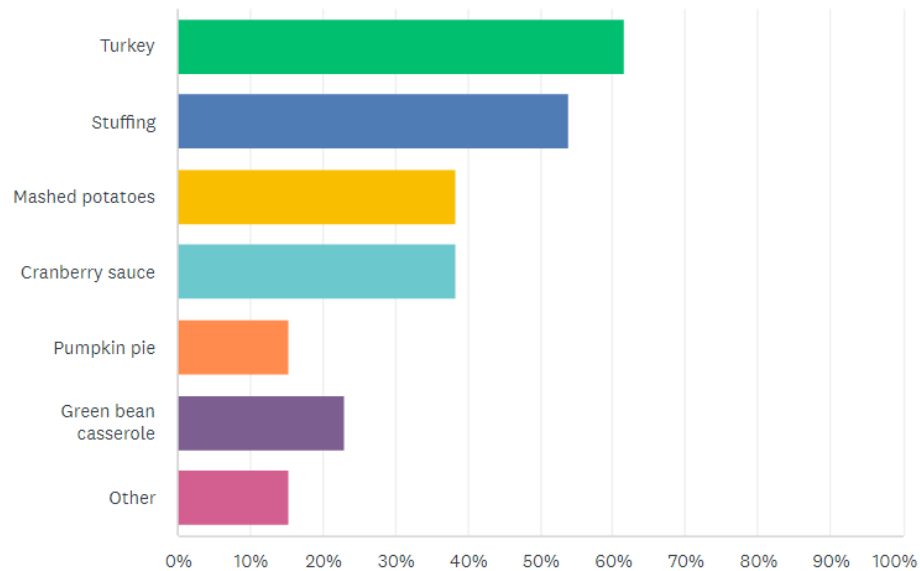
In our recent survey, 46.15% of respondents said they're most excited about catching up on sleep during the long holiday weekend—a much-needed break for many! Others plan to spend their time cheering on their favorite football teams, with 15.38% admitting to getting loud in front of the TV.



When asked about Thanksgiving Day company, 92.31% of survey participants confirmed they'll be celebrating with family, while a few have unique plans, indicating "other" ways to spend the day.

## What are your favorite Thanksgiving dishes? Select all that apply.

Answered: 13 Skipped: 0

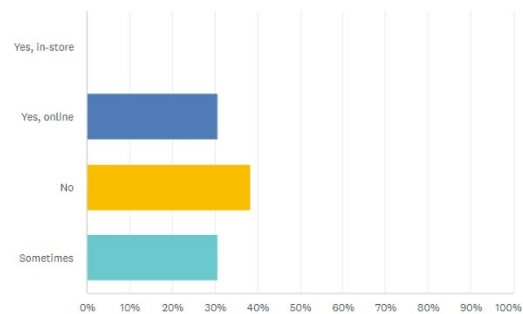


As for Thanksgiving favorites, turkey came out on top with 61.54%, followed by stuffing at 53.85% and mashed potatoes and cranberry sauce, each with a 38.46% nod. Pumpkin pie and green bean casserole were also mentioned, although in smaller numbers.

The holiday shopping scene saw mixed results: 30.77% plan to browse Black Friday deals online, but 38.46% said they'll skip the sales altogether. The remainder might check out deals here and there, suggesting a more relaxed approach to holiday shopping this year.

## Do you participate in Black Friday shopping?

Answered: 13 Skipped: 0



*Thank you to everyone who participated in our survey!*



## MCRC Area Agency on Aging Offers Successful Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Training to Aging Service Providers

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The DEI training was held on October 29 at Fayetteville Technical Community College.

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Gerald Peterson, Career Employment Consultant II with Cumberland County NCWorks Career Center, was the featured speaker. Mr. Peterson pointed out that there are now 5 generations in the workforce. Each generation comes with vary stereotypes. Understanding these cultural differences can create an environment that positively affects employee engagement, workplace decisions, interactions and business success.

Participants were asked to complete an activity based on generational stereotypes. The activity reinforced that viewpoints from the five generations do overlap. Age diverse teams encourage innovation and productivity. We all need to embrace our similarities and differences and learn from each other's experiences and innovative ideas to find solutions. The training wrapped up with a networking lunch for aging staff, providers and aging advisory council members.

***“Diversity is a mix and inclusion is making the mix work.” – Andrés Tapia***







# MERE Wall of Gratitude

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**Co Worker Appreciation Post**

A grateful heart is a happy heart.

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**Justin Hembree:** Thank you for your steady guidance and big-picture thinking. Your leadership keeps us on track and motivates us to keep improving and moving forward together. Your support and clear vision make a real difference in our work. Thanks for setting such a strong example for all of us.

— Anonymous

**Samantha Wullenwaber:** Your meticulous work on projects is always impressive, and your attention to detail has been invaluable to our team's success. Your clear communication and dedication to improvement set you apart.

**Glenda Dye:** Your years of service and unwavering commitment have laid a strong foundation for our team's success. Thank you for being a pillar of consistency and excellence. The depth of knowledge and experience you bring is invaluable to us all. Your insights and guidance help newer team members learn and grow, and your legacy strengthens our work.

**Tracy Honeycutt:** Your enduring dedication has not only shaped our team's achievements but also created a legacy of excellence and professionalism that will guide us for years to come. Your resilience and commitment through the highs and lows have left a lasting mark. Thank you for your loyalty, which is deeply valued and felt by all of us.

**Barbara,** Your expertise and dedication are deeply valued, and your contributions consistently strengthen our team's operations. Your positive spirit and unwavering support provide a welcoming and motivating environment for everyone around you.

**Carla,** Your quiet strength and attention to detail help keep everything on track. Your dedication is essential to the consistency and reliability of our operations. Your dependability and hard work ensure that everything runs smoothly. Thank you for always being a reliable support.

**LaShonda Gough:** Your passion and enthusiasm uplift those around you, creating a vibrant atmosphere for everyone you work with. Your energy and positivity are infectious, inspiring us all. Thank you for creating an atmosphere that encourages collaboration and enthusiasm.

**Melissa,** Thank you for your diligent work and commitment to excellence. Your efforts do not go unnoticed. Your empathy and understanding create a supportive space for everyone. Thank you for being a person others can count on.

**"Marybeth,** You're awesome! I see all the support you provide in all the different departments in my short time at Mid-Carolina. You are absolutely irreplaceable, and it is inspiring to see how much your support makes a difference in all departments."

**Vincent Herrera**

**Ifetayo Farrakhan:** Your kindness and willingness to help others have a positive ripple effect, creating a welcoming environment for the entire team.







**Doug Muessle:** Your dedication and high standards set a remarkable example for us all, and your work is greatly appreciated.

**Veronica,** Your warmth and ability to connect with others enrich our workplace and strengthen our team bonds. Thank you for your resourcefulness and initiative; your ability to find solutions helps us all move forward more effectively. You have an incredible ability to see strengths in others and help them build on those qualities. Thank you for being a source of encouragement and inspiration.

**Tamara,** Thank you for your professionalism, which has greatly contributed to our team's progress. Thank you for your willingness to take on challenges and tackle them with determination. Your proactive approach is inspiring and keeps us moving forward.

I am grateful for the work ethic that **Tony Porter** brings to our organization. We don't get to see Tony a lot because he is in the field doing work! He provides a high level of service to our local governments and is a great representative of our team. Thank you, Tony. Anonymous

**Jennifer McArthur:** Your expertise and insight have been instrumental to our success, and your hard work is truly valued. Your creativity and proactive approach to problem-solving keep us moving forward. Your ideas bring fresh perspectives that elevate our work.

"I am grateful for the patience you have showed me, and how inviting you make me feel coming onto your team **Helen!**" **Vincent Herrera**

**Haley Hogg:** Thank you for your flexibility and adaptability, which ensure that we can meet any challenge head-on. Your flexibility and quick thinking are invaluable. You handle every situation with ease, helping us stay prepared for any challenge.

I am grateful for **Lorria Troy**. Her smile can turn bad days into good days! Thank you, Lorria! Anonymous

**Abby Manning:** Your dedication and focus on detail strengthen our team's efforts, and your contributions are sincerely appreciated. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and expertise so generously; your guidance enriches our team's skills and fosters continuous growth.

I am grateful for **Mary Beth Haire**. She takes care of details that most of us forget about! Thank you, Mary Beth! Anonymous

**Andrew White:** Thank you for your innovative ideas and fresh perspectives, which help keep our work dynamic and forward-thinking. Your calm, thoughtful approach to problem-solving helps our team navigate complex situations with clarity and confidence.

I am grateful for **Barbara White**. Barbara's true passion for her work shines through everything. Thank you, Barbara! Anonymous

"**Carl**, you are a vital part of SCSEP team, and I appreciate the care you take in keeping our databases updated." **Vincent Herrera**



**Tony Porter:** Your strong work ethic and commitment are deeply valued by everyone on the team, and your efforts make a difference. Your reliability and dedication are evident in everything you do. You are a trusted teammate whose hard work keeps us moving toward our goals.

**Orin Gill:** Your leadership and guidance are truly appreciated, and your support helps drive us toward success. Your professionalism and integrity set a positive example, ensuring that our work maintains high standards and reflects our values.

**Helen,** Your ability to collaborate and communicate effectively helps strengthen our team dynamics and fosters a sense of unity. The positivity and encouragement you bring each day create a motivating environment that makes a real difference to everyone around you.

**Vincent Herrera:** Your resourcefulness and initiative bring solutions to the table that enhance our work and help us achieve our goals more efficiently.

**Kareem Strong:** Your contributions prove that teamwork knows no boundaries. Your responsiveness and collaboration keep us connected and productive, no matter where we are. Thank you for overcoming the unique challenges of remote work and staying engaged. Your consistent dedication helps make remote teamwork seamless.

**Justin,** you man, know how to cook some BAR-B-QUE. Mic drop.

**Lanora Washington:** Even remotely, your proactive attitude and attention to detail are felt across the team. Thank you for your contributions, which help bridge the distance between us. Your resourcefulness and ability to thrive in a remote setting are invaluable. Thank you for finding ways to make remote collaboration as effective as being on-site.

**Paula Stewart:** Your enthusiasm and positive energy always shines through. Thank you for bringing your unique presence to the team, no matter where you are. Thank you for your commitment to staying connected, which helps foster a strong team culture. Your ability to engage remotely makes a real difference in our success.

Although **Vincent** is new to our SCSEP team, he is already impacting the efficiency of our office with his technological savviness. Our older job seekers respond well to his easy-going style, respectful manners, and attentiveness. I am glad to have you working on our team! **Helen Mort**

**Kimberly Mofitt:** Your guidance and support have such a meaningful impact on those you mentor. Thank you for sharing your wisdom so generously and empowering others to reach their full potential. Your contributions prove that teamwork knows no boundaries. Your responsiveness and collaboration keep us connected and productive, no matter where we are. ~ **Mary Beth**

**Melissa,** your "Good Mornings" are the best. I'm so grateful to get them every day of the week! **Mb**

**Ifie,** You're always smiling! I love that.

**Carl** has been an outstanding support to the SCSEP team. His business acumen has enhanced many reports and policies being implemented in our program. I am grateful for his insights, suggestions, and advocacy for our Job Seekers. **Helen**





## Spotlight on MCRC Care:

### Kareem R. Strong, Regional Long-Term Care Ombudsman

Kareem R. Strong, MPA, CDP, CF-L1, is making a significant impact as the Regional Long-Term Care Ombudsman for the Mid-Carolina Area Agency on Aging, which serves the counties of Cumberland, Harnett, and Sampson. With a decade of experience in this crucial role, Strong is dedicated to advocating for the rights and well-being of residents in Skilled Nursing Facilities, Adult Care Homes, and Family Care Homes.



In addition to his responsibilities with the Agency, Strong is actively involved in various organizations aimed at enhancing community support and care. He serves on the Board of Directors for Restoring Dynamic Lives Therapeutic Outpatient Therapy, holds a position on the Executive Slate for the North Carolina LTC Ombudsman Association, and is the President of Cumberland & Sampson P.E.A.C.E (Partnership for Education, Access, and Choice at End of Life).

Strong's academic credentials bolster his professional expertise. He holds a Master's Degree in Public Administration, focusing on Health Care Management, and is a Certified Dementia Practitioner. Currently, he is in the dissertation phase of his Doctorate in Education and Organizational Leadership, specializing in Health Care Administration. His commitment to learning and leadership reflects his dedication to improving long-term care services.

Beyond his professional endeavors, Strong balances his responsibilities as a primary caregiver for his parents and as a certified CrossFit Level One Trainer, embodying a holistic approach to both his personal and professional life.

The work of a Long-Term Care Ombudsman, like Strong, is vital for ensuring that residents of long-term care facilities receive the respect and quality care they deserve. Ombudsmen advocate for residents' rights, investigate complaints, educate families, and promote collaboration among care providers. Their presence enhances communication, builds trust, and fosters an environment where the voices of residents are heard.

As the Mid-Carolina Area Agency on Aging continues to champion the needs of older adults, Kareem R. Strong's leadership and advocacy efforts exemplify the agency's commitment to improving the lives of those in long-term care. His dedication to service and community makes a significant difference in the quality of care and support available to residents and their families.

# The Heartfelt Rewards of Working for Mid-Carolina Regional Council

There's a unique sense of fulfillment that comes from working for the Mid Carolina Regional Council (MCRC), something that goes beyond the tasks and responsibilities of a job. It's a feeling of knowing you're part of a team dedicated to making a real difference in the lives of others, and that each day offers an opportunity to contribute to something meaningful.

At MCRC, the work we do feels personal. There's a quiet pride that comes with knowing that the work we do impacts people's futures, enhances the quality of life in our communities, and helps build a brighter tomorrow.

It's easy to get caught up in the day-to-day, but every now and then, we're reminded of the bigger picture—the people we're serving, the lives we're touching, and the positive ripple effect we're creating in the community. That feeling of knowing we've made a difference is what makes every day at MCRC meaningful.

## *Connection and Support*

One of the most rewarding aspects of working at MCRC is the sense of connection—not just with the communities we serve, but with the colleagues we work alongside. There's a sense of camaraderie here that makes it more than just a workplace. It's a community of people who care deeply about the work they do and about each other.

This sense of connection extends beyond the professional realm. Whether it's sharing a quick conversation, offering support, or celebrating milestones together, the relationships we build here make the work feel even more rewarding. It's not just about doing a job; it's about being part of something bigger, where everyone's efforts matter and everyone is valued.

## *A Place of Personal Growth*

MCRC isn't just a place to work—it's a place where we grow. The support, encouragement, and collaborative environment help us expand our own skills and understanding. Whether it's learning something new or gaining a new perspective on the work we do, MCRC is a place where personal and professional growth go hand in hand.

It's an environment where you're encouraged to learn, to ask questions, and to think differently. And as we grow, so does our ability to serve others—whether that's through providing more effective solutions, offering more empathetic support, or simply being a better colleague.

At MCRC, it's the feeling of purpose, the sense of connection, and the joy of helping others that truly makes this a special place to work. It's not just about what we do; it's about how it makes us feel to be a part of something that's bigger than ourselves, something that helps shape our communities and leaves a lasting legacy for the future.



**SPECIAL ACTIVITIES AND SURPRISES AWAIT YOU  
WE CAN'T WAIT TO CELEBRATE  
YOU'RE INVITED**

# **CAREGIVER CHRISTMAS SOCIAL**

Hosted by: Mid-Carolina Council Family Caregiver Support and  
Beauty Spot Missionary Baptist Church Women's Ministry

**DECEMBER 6TH, 2024  
11:00AM TO 2:00PM  
BILL CRISP SENIOR CENTER  
7560 RAEFORD ROAD FAYETTEVILLE NC 28304**

Enjoy an afternoon filled with holiday cheer, delicious  
treats, and wonderful company  
Connect with fellow caregivers and celebrate the  
incredible work you do.

Contact: Barbara White at [bwhite@mccog.org](mailto:bwhite@mccog.org)  
or 910-323-4191 ext. 28

We hope to see you there



## "Essential Guidelines for Safeguarding Against Cyber Threats"

Please adhere to the following guidelines to ensure we protect ourselves and the organization from potential cyber threats:

1. **Do not open attachments** from unknown or suspicious sources.
2. **Pay close attention to the sender's email address.** If you receive an email from a team member but the account appears different from the one you normally communicate with, or if the content of the email seems out of place or unclear, **do not reply** to the email.
  - o Instead, **send a separate email** to the colleague's known email address and confirm if they sent the message.
3. If you receive an email from an unfamiliar name or email address, especially one that contains attachments, an invoice, or a request for banking or payment information, **do not provide any information.**
  - o Immediately **block the email** in your Outlook and **notify Adam Stremcha** [astremcha@lafayette-biz.com](mailto:astremcha@lafayette-biz.com) with our IT company for further investigation.

**We are all responsible for staying vigilant and aware of which emails we open and respond to. If you have any questions or encounter any suspicious emails, do not hesitate to reach out for guidance. When in doubt, ask!**

To block an email in Outlook, follow these steps:

### For Outlook Desktop (Windows/Mac):

1. **Open Outlook** and go to your Inbox.
2. **Select the email** you want to block by clicking on it once.
3. In the top menu, click on the **"Junk"** button in the ribbon (it may say "Junk" or "Block" depending on your version).
4. Select **"Block Sender"** from the dropdown menu.
5. The sender will be blocked, and future emails from this address will be directed to your Junk Email folder.

### For Outlook Web (Outlook.com):

1. **Log into your Outlook account** at [Outlook.com](https://outlook.com).
2. **Select the email** you want to block by checking the box next to it.
3. At the top of the page, click on the **three dots** ("More actions") next to the delete button.
4. From the dropdown menu, select **"Block"** and confirm by clicking **"Block"** again.
5. The sender will be blocked, and future messages will be sent to the Junk Email folder.

### For Outlook Mobile (iOS/Android):

1. **Open the Outlook app** on your mobile device.
2. **Select the email** you want to block.
3. Tap the **three dots** (More options) at the top right corner.
4. Tap **"Block"** and confirm your action.

By following these steps, you can block unwanted emails and keep your inbox safe from suspicious senders. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and let's work together to keep our email systems secure.