

Karen Barrett

Campaign “Shazam” Award Recipient

Rehabilitation Services Professor at the University of Maine at Farmington

“Honestly...” says Karen “it’s almost embarrassing! I just feel that this is part of my job and that everyone should be giving back time and care to their community.” Karen Barret, a Rehabilitation Services professor at the University of Maine at Farmington, is being honored by the United Way of the Tri-Valley Area with the *Shazam* Award. The *Shazam* Award recognizes those who are known to be standout cheerleaders for United Way in their workplace and daily lives.

Karen has worked hard this year to increase workplace campaign participation at UMF. She has also offered her services to facilitate a grant writing workshop for students and the public in order to increase the capacity of organizations. “I grew up in a church community that was closely aligned to the mission United Way promotes,” says Karen. “This United Way I find works hard to give back to our rural community more than others that I’ve witnessed; and I believe this is due to most of us in Western Maine having humble roots.”

As a Rehabilitation Services major, Karen is someone I know very well. She taught my very first REH class which was Introduction to Disabilities, and I recall it was her passion and enthusiasm for human services that persuaded me to stay in the program. She is a warrior for patient advocacy, statistics, and human rights; which helps to ignite interest in the field for not only myself but for most of my peers. Every class I’ve taken with Karen, I’ve looked forward to attending each day. She is always careful not to allow any boring classes to be taught, no matter the circumstance. “Many people don’t know that I’m actually an introvert,” says Karen. I wouldn’t have guessed, as she had always been considered a witty, passionate jokester in the classroom through my eyes.

“I think it’s important to note that the United Way involves themselves *with* the people that are affected and need assistance,” says Karen, “they aren’t coming down from on high to bestow gifts because they find these people to be so pitiful. We all live in this community; we don’t want kids going hungry, we don’t want people going without heat and water. We’re all in this together.” Throughout my four years at UMF, I have witnessed Karen be the driving force behind efforts to change the public’s perception towards each other. Seeing her name on the list to be honored as a superhero was no surprise to me, as she proves every day to be a hero in the lives of hundreds of students throughout her years at UMF. Without having taken Karen’s class my freshman year, I may not have found my passion or stayed at the university, and I know this is true for many of my peers.

United Way of the Tri-Valley Area is proud to honor those like Karen Barrett, for not only her dedication to rural Maine, but to every life that crosses her path. Her leadership and insight have helped to shape the minds of students to be more compassionate and understanding; and providing them countless opportunities to progress academically and personally. She has helped to produce the bright minds of Maine that go on to find themselves in various human services positions that are so valuable and needed in this state. Karen’s positivity and compassion ripples outward; everyone including myself are so grateful to have had the opportunity to be taught by such an amazing individual.