

Charlie Durkin



Charlie Durkin's personality simply fills a room when he enters. As he shares his life story with a winning smile, the energy of his resolute determination to move forward becomes clearly evident. His LinkedIn summary statement begins with, *Dedicated, determined and passionate college student who excels at efficiency and multi-tasking ... Extremely accomplished academically and pursuing a career in medicine in addition to a passion for social justice and activism work.* These lines perfectly capture Charlie's character and current life mission.

"Growing up I always wanted to work with animals and loved being around them, but was never around cows and their personalities," said Charlie as he explained his journey to UNH. As part of his immersion into veterinary school preparation, Charlie started working at the UNH Fairchild Dairy Teaching and Research Center for two years, caring for the 80-cow dairy herd and doing public education programs. As a junior he was accepted to the renowned Cooperative Real Education in Agricultural Management (CREAM), an experiential learning opportunity for animal science, pre-vet, and dairy management students. As these immersion experiences were supplemented by a part-time job at a veterinary clinic in Newfields, NH, Charlie was paving a clear road to veterinary school. However, other experiences and involvements were creating questions about his vision as a veterinarian.

Cue up Safe Zones in Charlie's path. UNH Safe Zones is an educational outreach program focused on reducing and preventing harassment, discrimination, and violence based on sexual orientation, romantic orientation, and gender identity or expression. Charlie became a volunteer facilitator for Safe Zones at the end of his first UNH year and eventually one of two Student Coordinators. One of his central roles is delivering presentations for classes and groups on a regular basis. Charlie shares that, "My Safe Zones supervisor, Lu Ferrell, has been a huge influence on me. In high school I couldn't speak in front of a group at all and got super nervous every time. Now, I run into students nearly every week who share the impact of my presentation, or tell me that they had the courage to come out to their parents after hearing my personal story."

A pivotal moment occurred on Charlie's journey during final exam week in his sophomore year. "I was super stressed out at one moment, preparing for finals, and had a million thoughts racing through my head. I identified as a woman at that time, but then this huge question about my identity seemed to come out of nowhere. I had been asking myself 'what does it mean to be a woman?' I was always able to muster up some answer, or push it out of my mind fast enough not to realize that I didn't have one. In that moment, I just didn't have the energy to lie to myself for another second and realized I had absolutely no idea what it meant to be a woman. I also had no clue what it meant to be a man. All I knew was what it meant to just be a person." At the time, that person went by a different name, different pronouns, and couldn't fathom the extent of the journey on which they had just begun to embark.

Over the course of the next 18 months and many transformations, both physical and emotional, Charlie has come closer to feeling more comfortable with himself than ever before. He evolved into the Charlie he never knew he could be and is now embracing the transgender identity with all his heart. He added, "I have to give huge credit to my Dad through all of my identity questions and life changes. He has always been so supportive of me and cares so much about my well-being."

Charlie works closely with Sean McGhee, the Director of the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA) since Safe Zones is an integral part of its services and outreach in promoting intersectional social justice work. He asserts that, "Sean is my idol, he has so much knowledge and calls me a mover and a shaker who is doing legacy work that will last well beyond my time at UNH." Sean's nomination cites Charlie as "... an incredible community activist and advocate not only for fellow students, but for our UNH community as a whole. Although Charlie has a disarming charm and smile, he has exuded his drive, determination, power, knowledge and passion for social justice in the beat of a heart, and has stood in the breach."

The social justice fire in Charlie's heart nudged his career direction away from veterinary medicine as he admits that, "I love animals, but I love people way more. As soon as I started doing social justice work I completely realized that I can't be without this" and he progressively added deep involvement in groups moving LGBTQ issues forward ... Trans UNH, The Alliance, and the UNH President's Commission on the Status of LGBTQ People. His current vision is attending medical school with an eventual focus on endocrinology and the hope of working with the transgender and gender non-conforming community members who are seeking hormones as part of their transition.

There is no better way to finish a profile capturing the full spirit and character of Charlie Ali Durkin than to reference the final sentence of that LinkedIn summary, 'Natural born leader who won't hesitate to take control when necessary and who knows exactly what it means to work as part of a team.'