



EMPOWERING
SOCIAL WORKERS!

Inspiring Action, Leading Change

Meet the Conference Presenters



National Association of Social Workers

CONNECTICUT CHAPTER



Melissa Linden, LCSW

Melissa Linden is an LCSW that has been in the field clinically since 2020. Melissa started her career as a peer mentor and has worked in hospitals, IOP, and correctional institutions. Melissa currently has her own private practice in Newington, CT where she specializes in substance use and trauma treatment. Melissa has experience with ages 10-70 and works primarily with LGBTQ+ and POC folx. Modalities include motivational interviewing, CBT, EMDR and talktherapy. Melissa is a Korean adoptee and is Jewish rom adoption. She has been Bat Mitsvaed twice, with one being in Israel. She has been to Israel twice, once with Hebrew high school and another with birthright. Melissa considers herself Jew"ish" as she is eform and follows the religion loosely



Steven L. Rubin, JD, CELA

Steven L. Rubin, JD, CELA is an attorney with Drazen Rubin Law LLC in Milford and Farmington. He is a passionate advocate for helping clients maneuver the often-rough terrain of estate, special needs, and elder law planning to safeguard one's livelihood and independence. Attorney Rubin is an advocate for Neurodiversity in the workplace and is the Immediate Past President of the Connecticut Chapter of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys.



James Maroney

James Maroney works in Business Development and Community outreach at Drazen Rubin. He is a near lifelong resident of Milford, Connecticut. He is a 1992 graduate of Jonathan Law and a 1996 graduate of Yale University, where he ran both Cross-Country and Track and was elected captain of the Track Team. He founded First Choice College, an educational consulting and test preparation firm, in 1999, and helped guide the firm for over 20 years. In addition, he has served on the Milford Board of Education, as a State Representative for the 119th district and he currently serves as the State Senator for the 14th district. He is a past co-chair of the Aging Committee and the Veterans Affairs Committee and currently serves as co-chair of the General Law and Regulations Review committees. He lives in Milford with his wife Jennifer Ju and their son Jay.



Sharon L. Young, Ph.D., LCSW

Dr. Young is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who has worked with adolescents and their families in residential, outpatient, and school settings. She has worked for many years with difficult to engage youth in substance abuse treatment and community settings. In practice, she developed a prevention theater program that was nationally recognized as an exemplary program by SAMHSA. She has worked as an Embedded Clinician with an infantry unit in the Connecticut National Guard and currently offers pro-bono counseling for veterans in the community. Her primary research interest is in the area of Post 9/11 veterans. She has also worked with community partners to produce research featuring best practices. She is the club advisor for the Student Veterans Organization as well as the Social Work Club.

Dr. Young joined the social work faculty at Western Connecticut State University in 2012. She holds a bachelor of science degree in human development and family relations and a master's degree in social work from the University of Connecticut. She received her doctorate in social work from the Graduate School of Social Service at Fordham University.



Alexandra Solomon, LCSW (CT), LICSW (VT)

Alex Solomon (they/she/zhe) is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with over 15 years in the field and over 10 years as a therapist. They have worked in a variety of levels of care, ranging from residential PHP to outpatient, and have extensive experience working with legally involved clients and clients struggling with substance use disorders. They are currently in solo private practice. They are an EMDR Certified therapist, and their practice focuses on complex trauma, addiction, and working with LGBTQ folks. They primarily work from a person-centered relational framework, utilizing EMDR, Ego State Therapy, Motivational Interviewing, and mindfulness interventions. Additionally, they engage in a volunteer capacity in advocacy related to increasing access for care for queer and trans people. They have traveled to Israel with Birthright, as well as to multiple Holocaust sites in Austria and Poland, including Auschwitz. They are active in their local Reform synagogue, as well as in virtual Earth-based, feminist, Renewal, and interdenominational Jewish communities.



Esther Serkin, LCSW

Esther Serkin, LCSW: Esther Serkin (she/her) is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with over 10 years in the field. She has worked in community health settings facilitating IOP'S, outpatient group therapy, and now is in private practice. Populations range from mandated care including legal and DCF, with a strong focus on trauma and varying other conditions including relationship changes, anxiety, depression, bipolar, adhd, etc. Modalities include EMDR, and integrating DBT, CBT, motivational interviewing, and strengths based therapies. She is active in her Conservative synagogue with her two children who also attend Hebrew school. Esther participated in the March of the Living which is a program that goes to Poland and witnesses the concentration and death camps. She has also lived for a year after high school in Israel, half a year in Jerusalem and half a year on Kibbutz Sa'ad.



Dr. Frederick J. Streets, DSW, LCSW

Rev. Dr. Frederick (Jerry) Streets has a distinguished career as a parish minister and faculty member in graduate theological and social work education. A pastoral counselor, licensed clinical social worker and member of the Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma, Dr. Streets has worked with the clergy, primary care and mental health professionals delivering pastoral care and clinical social work services in the United States, Bosnia, Italy, Dominica and South Africa. He is the former Chaplain of Yale University and Senior Fulbright Scholar in the Department of Practical Theology and the Department of Social Work and Criminology at the University of Pretoria in Pretoria, South Africa. He is Professor of Divinity and Social Work at Yale University Divinity School



Jillian Celentano, LMSW

Jillian is a transgender woman who began her transition in 2016 at the age of 55. She recently received her master's degree in social work at age 61. She is licensed therapist, an advocate for the trans community and has organized support groups for transgender/gender diverse children and young adults. Jillian co-authored two published transgender studies at Yale University and is a published author of her book, "Transitioning Later in Life: A Personal Guide." She works at a private practice as a therapist and educator for the transgender/gender diverse community.



Rebecca Degnan

Rebecca Degnan, LPC, is the founder and owner of Prism Counseling and Support LLC in Killingworth, a private counseling practice for the LGBTQ+ community and their loved ones. Rebecca has a Master of Science degree in counseling from CCSU. Her undergraduate degree was in music from the Hartt School of Music. Prior to starting Prism, Rebecca worked as a school counselor at the middle school level for over 6 years, and before that she taught choir for more than ten years at the middle school level. In her "free time," Rebecca is one of the founders and the President of Blue Fire Stage Company, a nonprofit theatre company in Higganum. Rebecca is the very proud mother of two kids, a 15-year-old daughter and a 17-year old son. She started Prism after her son came out as transgender and she noticed a lack of understanding and support for the LGBTQ+ community and their families in CT. She decided to do something herself to fill that void, and Prism was born. In addition to counseling, Rebecca loves to facilitate professional development workshops for schools, businesses and other organizations. She is passionate about education and helping improve communities through knowledge and support.



Jennifer Gereda, LCSW

Jennifer Gereda, MSW, LCSW, DSW candidate, received her BSW from Southern Connecticut State University and her MSW from Fordham University and anticipates receiving her DSW in May. Jennifer is heavily rooted in intensive in-home work. Her interests include Maternal Mental health and working with children, adolescents, and families. Jennifer has both administrative and clinical experience, including staff supervision. As a bilingual, multicultural therapist, Jennifer is passionate about preserving the indigenous knowledge and culture Latine immigrants bring and supporting and advocating for holistic healing practices. With her DSW, Jennifer hopes to accompany her community and contribute to the field of social work by further developing decolonizing and reindigenizing social work knowledge and skills with the self of the social worker and in practice with Latine individuals and families. She also seeks to address the continued structural violence against marginalized communities. Jennifer is interested in leading efforts to construct social work interventions, supervision and other domains to heal and bring justice to people with mixed Latine and indigenous ancestry.



Sharlene Kerelejza, LMSW

Sharlene Kerelejza, LMSW earned her BSW from University of Saint Joseph (the Saint Joseph College) in 1995 and MSW from Columbia University in 1997. Her non-profit roots lay in supporting survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence and primary violence prevention programming for 25 years, 10 of which were as the Executive Director of Meriden-Wallingford Chrysalis, Domestic Violence Services. She served as a Women's March Organizer in CT and chaired the Hartford Women's March.

Sharlene joined higher education full-time in 2017. She has been with Sacred Heart University School of Social Work as a Clinical Assistant Professor and Field Liaison since 2019, and served as an Inclusive Teaching Fellow 2021-2022. Primary areas of interest include Trauma-Informed Practice, Non-Profit Leadership and Creating Safe Spaces for the LGBTGEQIAP+ Community. She and her wife of 20 years are raising their family in Meriden, CT.



Robyn-Jay Bage, MPA

Robyn-Jay Bage, MPA, spent most of her 35-year career in administrative and executive positions in nonprofit human service organizations, most recently as Chief Executive Officer of Women and Families Center in Meriden. Robyn has also served as a Management and Training Consultant in Connecticut and New York providing consultation and related training to various nonprofit agencies, public school districts, and university programs. She's served as Professor of Management at NVCC for the past 15 years. She says her roles as professor, mentor, trainer, and nonprofit executive have enabled her to bring together two of her passions: The education of future leaders and the art and science of management.



Dr. B. Sudie Akinrotiba

Dr. B. Sudie Akinrotiba is Program Director of Charter Oak State College's Baccalaureate Social Work Program. She is a licensed master social worker that specializes in coping skills, depression and women's issues. Dr. Akinrotiba received her doctorate in education and as a social work educator, practitioner, and social services consultant, she works in the areas of community mobilization, diversity, equity, and inclusion both in the United States and abroad.



Alberto Cifuentes, Jr.

Alberto Cifuentes, Jr., LMSW, is a NASW member and doctoral candidate/graduate assistant at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. His primary areas of social work interest include criminal justice reform, LGBTQ+ rights movement, sex worker rights and health, HIV/STI prevention, and sex-positive social work theory, education, and practice. He has spent much of his professional career advocating for underrepresented and marginalized communities through direct action, community organizing, social justice education, and social service program implementation, enhancement, and evaluation. He currently serves as Founder/Chair of the Macro Social Workers Network of NASW/CT, previously served as Co-chair of the Latino/a Social Workers



Nilda Fernandez-Betancourt, LMSW

Nilda Fernandez-Betancourt, LMSW, works as Community Health Specialist at the University of Connecticut/CT Children's Pediatric & Youth HIV Program and is a member of the International Association of Social Workers for Groups. She is an advocate for equal access to education and health care for economically disadvantaged youth on the local, state, and national arenas. Having worked in the field of HIV/AIDS for about 20 years, she has published various abstracts and presented on youth and HIV. She has adopted a multifaceted approach to her practice, specializing in both macro and micro social work with youth, and has extensive knowledge in group facilitation, community organization, program development, policy practice and direct services to families affected by the HIV epidemic. She also serves as a field instructor for the UConn School of Social Work's Field Education Program. She loves what she does and does it with passion and compassion.



John Bonelli, MSW

John Bonelli, MSW, has worked on homeless, poverty, LGBTQ, youth, HIV/AIDS, drug policy reform, parent and other community issues. In New York City, he served as the Recruitment and Community Relations Coordinator for Project ACHIEVE, which focused on HIV prevention research. The effort led to the engagement of diverse communities throughout New York City. He coordinated the innovative and effective outreach efforts in which thousands of potential vaccine and behavioral study participants were engaged and hundreds enrolled. He recently retired as a Field Education Coordinator from the UConn School of Social Work, where he taught New Perspectives on LGBT Issues and an Independent Study on Sexuality and HIV Prevention.



Jessica Troy, LMSW

Jessica is a passionate domestic violence advocate. She has been working in the field of domestic violence since 2016 and received her Master's in Social Work and a Masters in Women and Gender Studies in 2020, where she focused her studies on analyzing abusive relationships. Jessica is a survivor of teen dating violence and adult intimate partner violence. She currently works for a grant funded program through the Office of Victim Services working with victims of crime which has a high volume of domestic violence cases. Jess feels her calling is to continue to work for victims of domestic violence and to educate therapists on the best ways to support survivors.



Amy Moylan

Amy is a changemaker when it comes to domestic violence. Having her own lived experience of childhood domestic violence Amy became a Certified Peer Support Specialist. She has been employed with Community Mental Health Affiliates for over 10 years her work has included working in residential programming as well as her current work in a grant funded program through the Office of Victim Services working with victims of crime, which has high rates of domestic violence cases. Amy uses her lived experience to help her warriors transition through their own experience as she walks with them side by side. She works everyday to ensure that others have the support and care that they need to transform their lives.



Karen Lemieux, LCSW

Karen Lemieux, LCSW is a Connecticut born and raised CCSU and UConn trained LCSW. Karen has enjoyed a very diverse, life long career in social work practice. A well-received speaker, she is sought after for her unique ability to make difficult conversations not only palatable, but enjoyable, empowering and uplifting. Her life's work has been understanding what causes and what relieves suffering through the lens of trauma. A nationally recognized expert, workshop presenter, trainer, practitioner in PTSD, war trauma and child abuse. For the last 15 years she has been called to work in the space between life and death. Karen shares openly and authentically with reverence, grace and humor from personal experience and what she is privileged to witness with a deeply held sense of sacred.



Claire McCarthy

Clare McCarthy is an educator, transgender advocate, author, and producer/host of Transqat the Podcast. A former Latin teacher of 33 years, Clare has long practice presenting complex unfamiliar material in an accessible way. Her presentations and trainings are rooted in honesty, humor, research and lived experience.

Transqat the Podcast is a safe space for respectful conversations about transgender issues. It's a place for queer people to tell their stories. Each episode is a long-form conversation. Clare's guests have included medical, legal, and mental health experts; faith leaders; artists; creators; parents; and trans youth.



Edwin Renaud, LCSW, Ph.D.

Edwin Renaud, LCSW, Ph.D. has been a social worker for over 25 years, studying at the University of Connecticut and New York University. He is currently employed by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services serving as the director of the General Psychiatry Division at Connecticut Valley Hospital.



Pat Wilcox, LCSW

Pat Wilcox is Vice President for Strategic Development overseeing the Traumatic Stress Institute, Stop It Now! Sexual Abuse Prevention, Staff Development, NEXUS Professional Development Center, and Quality Improvement in New Britain, Connecticut. She specializes in helping organizations improve their treatment of traumatized people. She created the Restorative Approach™, a trauma- and relationship- based treatment. She is a Faculty Trainer for Risking Connection®, has presented internationally on trauma-informed care and is an Adjunct Faculty at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work and the University of St. Joseph's. She was NASW's Social Worker of the Year in 2012.



Aminah Ali, LMSW

Aminah Ali, LMSW is the Clinical Coordinator for Klingberg Family Center's TFC and PPSP programs. She has been a valued member of the Klingberg Family Center staff for almost 18 years, and has been an RC training for 6 of those years. Aminah has combined 19 years of experience in community service, the child welfare system, home based therapy, and as a 3-5-7 clinician. She has committed her career to helping youth tell their stories and fill in blanks on their journey to full and integrated lives. As co-Chair of the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Awareness & Sensitivity (IDEAS) committee, she is a Diversity Trainer and promoted inclusive and culturally informed culture at Klingberg.



Sara Rodrigues, DSW, LICSW

Sara (she, her, hers) is the Executive Director of Balanced Learning Center. She earned her DSW from Simmons University and has over 20 years of experience working with children and families in outpatient clinics, private schools, community mental health, home-based treatment programs and residential facilities. The principles of wraparound are a major component of her work as she believes that families are the experts on their own experiences, strengths and needs. Understanding that navigating the system can be a challenge, Sara focuses on building an integrated team of both natural and professional supports can help a family meet their goals for themselves in a way that is sustainable. Sara specializes in working with neurodivergent individuals and those on a different developmental trajectory.



Noël Hiers, LCSW

Noël Hiers is the owner of Collaborative Perspectives, LLC. She is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with over twenty-five years of experience. Her expertise comes from working in outpatient settings, residential settings, street outreach, and in school settings as a child study team member and as the director of a School Based Youth Services Program. Through NJ's Child Welfare Training Partnership, she has trained hundreds of DCP&P employees throughout New Jersey on the topics of adverse childhood experiences, supervision, substance use disorders, resiliency, adolescent development, and cultural competencies to support LGBTQI+ youth. Additional topics include mental wellness for teachers, NJ's Intoxicated Drivers Resource Center curriculum, traumatic loss, de-escalation, the Question, Persuade, Refer training for suicide prevention, and other clinical topics. She is currently using Shinrin-Yoku (Nature Therapy) in her work to help clients of all ages struggling with anxiety and depression. She earned a degree in Psychology from The College of New Jersey and her Master's degree from Bryn Mawr's Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research.



Dr. Nancy Grechko, Psy.D

Dr. Grechko is a clinical psychologist with a private practice in Vernon, CT. Besides providing direct clinical care in her community, she also supports mental health practitioners through supervision and consultation as well as clinical training workshops. Dr. Grechko is passionate about supporting mental health practitioners do the work they love while taking care of their professional and personal needs.



Dori Smith, LCSW

Ms. Smith has over 25 years of public education experience including as a School Social Worker and several administrative positions. Her positions have involved a high level of special education expertise. She currently is contracted as an independent consultant serving as a Surrogate Parent and educational advocate supporting students and families in the special education process.



Dr. Stephanie R. Paulmeno, DNP, MS, RN, NHA, CPH, CCM, CDP

Dr. Paulmeno is a Registered Nurse, Gerontologist, and Licensed Nursing Home Administrator with a Doctorate in Nursing Practice and two degrees in Gerontology. She is nationally Board certified in Public Health, Case Management, and as a Dementia Practitioner. She has practiced for over five decades as a clinician, administrator/CEO, educator, researcher, author, and international public speaker addressing health, public health, aging issues, mental/behavioral health, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. She has been awarded several life-time achievement awards from different organizations. Her 56-year career has spanned the practice areas of pediatrics, psychiatry, geriatrics/long-term care, and public health. She founded and operated Global Health Systems Consultants: A public health consulting firm (2009-2023) and was inducted into the International Nursing Honor Society (Sigma Theta Tau).

She currently serves on multiple Boards and Advisory Boards as well as on college and agency Advisory Councils. Her current Board service includes the Southwestern Connecticut Area Agency on Aging (SWCAA); Board Chairman of The Patient is U Foundation (TPIU); Co-lead of the Health Sector of the (International) Charter for Compassion (CFC); Trustee of the Connecticut Nurses' Foundation (CNF), and a Founding Board Member of both At Home in Greenwich and Wheel it Forward: A lending library of durable medical equipment (WIF). She was an Executive Board Member/Commissioner on the Connecticut Commission on Health Equity for its full duration (2008-2016) and served as Treasurer and Past-President of the Connecticut Nurses' Association (CNA) (2017-2021). She serves on the Dean's Advisory Council of the Quinnipiac University School of Nursing. She serves on the Connecticut Nurses Honor Guard, and is a long-tenured Red Cross Nurse with a numbered pin, as well as a member of the Greenwich Medical Reserve Corps.



Carla Rash, Ph.D.

Carla Rash, Ph.D., is Licensed Clinical Psychologist and an Associate Professor in the Calhoun Cardiology Center and Department of Psychiatry and Medicine at UConn Health. Her research focuses on addiction treatment, particularly among health disparity populations. She serves on the SAMSHA Contingency Management Taskforce, the Opioid Response Network Stimulant Workgroup, and the SAMSHA Technical Assistance Publication Series for Contingency Management, and she is a consultant for the New England Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC).



Patricia McIntosh, LCSW, MPH

Patricia McIntosh, LCSW, MPH is the Deputy Director of Social Services for the City of Hartford. She previously served as Director of Community Safety and Wellness for the City, where she was responsible for leading innovative and collaborative programming to address issues of mental health, justice involvement, community violence, housing insecurity, education access, and quality of life. In her current role, projects such as the Hartford Emergency Assistance Response Team (HEARTeam) and a Citywide Self-Care & Wellness Initiative continue to thrive and advance as tools for addressing mental health and wellness in the City of Hartford. Ms. McIntosh's expansive professional career in major metropolitan U.S. cities, combined with her diverse cultural heritage and life experiences, accentuate her commitment to a career in service where compassion reigns, disparities are dismantled, and communities are better positioned to thrive.



Casie DeRosier, LMSW

Casie has over ten years of experience in direct clinical services and four years of supervisory experience. Since 2018, she has been the Project Director for two MAT-PDOA grants, two Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DHMAS) grants, and a grant with the City of Hartford. She leads the MAT team, The Transitional Case Management (TCM) team, Opioid Education Family Support (OEFS) team, and the Community Response Services (CRS) programs. Specifically, she is well prepared to start up new clinical and recovery support services from the ground-up, including hiring, overseeing compliance, licensing, training completion, and supervising staff. In addition, she has direct experience working with clients who have criminal justice involvement and a strong background in substance use and crisis management. Her experience is helpful in the management of client care and with unequivocal understanding of behavioral intervention, observations, and motivational interviewing.



Heidi Lubetkin

Over the past 25 years, Heidi has dedicated her work to a healthcare agency providing senior leadership through management, supervision of programs, overall budget analysis and quality assurance. Her experience includes creating environments and systems to support patient's recovery and improved quality outcomes while addressing social determinants of wellness. As Vice President of Clinical and Support Services, she manages outpatient services at two licensed mental health and substance use clinics and two satellite offices; supervises programs for those affected by HIV/AIDS; assists with to domestic violence interventions; provides senior leadership to the State of Connecticut's first subsidized assisted living facility with specialized mental health and substance use services; and oversees treatment for clients on parole or probation. While working in direct care, she witnessed how management practices affect clients and how important integration of clinical services is to recovery and to addressing social determinants. She is inspired by the opportunity to blend Community Renewal Team's holistic services with medication assisted treatment and supporting person-centered services in these expanded services proposed in the MAT-PDOA program.



Tiffany Hubrins, LCSW

Tiffany Hubrins is a licensed clinical social worker with 11 years of experience working with children, youth, and adults with various clinical presentations. She is currently employed at Wheeler Health as the Director of Outpatient and Community Based Programs overseeing the Youth Mobile Crisis Program (MCIS). Tiffany specializes in crisis intervention with children and youth. Tiffany has also had experience in managing a crisis program within an emergency department. Tiffany is a certified trainer in Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBRIT) and Question, Persuade, and Refer (QPR). Tiffany earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from Alabama State University and a Master of Social Work degree from University of Connecticut. Tiffany was also the 2022 recipient of Wheeler Health's Anna Tedesco Award.



Julie Berrett-Abebe, Ph.D., MSW

Julie Berrett-Abebe, PhD, MSW has spent her career working on teams at the intersection of health and mental health practice, research, and education. As an oncology social worker at Mass General Hospital for 10 years, she witnessed the ways in which personalized, precision medicine offered hope for effective treatment of physical illness but did not address the often debilitating financial, psychological, and social issues facing individuals with cancer. She therefore strives to promote integration of behavioral health and physical health care through interprofessional education and research on collaborate care, social drivers of health, and evidence-based practice models. Julie is currently an Assistant Professor of Social Work at Fairfield University, where she also directs the FCHC Scholars program (Fairfield.edu/fchc-scholars), an interdisciplinary training program funded by a \$1.6 million HRSA grant. When not at work, Julie enjoys traveling, hiking, playing the piano, and having adventures with her husband and teenage children.



Jocelyn Novella, Ph.D., LPC

Dr. Novella is an Assistant Professor in Counselor Education, a licensed professional counselor (LPC) in the state of Connecticut, and an Approved Clinical Supervisor (ACS). She previously worked for 24 years as a college counselor, the last five as director of counseling at Sacred Heart University. Dr. Novella graduated with her Ph.D. in Counseling from Oregon State University, her M.A. in community counseling from Fairfield University and a B.A. in English from Johns Hopkins University. She completed her training for Board Certification in Telemental Health. She currently is the program evaluator for the FCHC Scholars Program funded by a HRSA BHWET grant, as well as co-chair of the Connecticut Counseling Association's Public Policy & Legislation Committee.



Michelle Pagnotta, MA, LPC

Michelle Pagnotta is an Adjunct Faculty and Project Coordinator for Fairfield University Collaborates for a Healthier Connecticut Scholars Program. She is a licensed Professional Counselor and a National Certified Counselor (NCC).



Jack Paul Gesino, DSW, LCSW

Jack Paul Gesino, DSW, LCSW is a retired professor who specializes in the clinical treatment of elders and families and provides consultation and education to individuals and organization who want to enhance their knowledge and skills in helping elders thrive. He has received extensive training in neuroscience, clinical practice with couples/families, sexual intimacy, biofeedback and Positive Psychology. He is a practitioner and trainer in Positive Psychology. He has a private practice in Hamden, CT.



Kathleen M. Williamson, Ph.D.

Dr. Kathleen Williamson is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the University of Connecticut's Collaboratory on School and Child Health. She currently serves as the Project Coordinator for the Connecticut WSCC Partnership, a five-year project funded by the CDC. The goal of the Connecticut WSCC Partnership is to protect and improve the health and well-being of school-age children and adolescents in communities in CT that are medically underserved and disproportionately affected by chronic diseases and associated risk factors.

Dr. Williamson received her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of Connecticut. Her research interests relate to the coordinated, effective, and sustained implementation of multi-tiered social-emotional and behavioral supports in schools, with a focus on adolescent mental health. Dr. Williamson is a nationally certified school psychologist, and she teaches courses within the Neag School of Education's teacher preparation and school psychology programs.



Marlene B. Schwartz, Ph.D.

Marlene Schwartz, Ph.D. is Director of the Rudd Center for Food Policy & Health and Professor of Human Development and Family Sciences at UConn. Dr. Schwartz studies how nutrition and wellness policies implemented in schools, food banks, and local communities can improve food security, diet quality, and health outcomes. Dr. Schwartz earned her Ph.D. in Psychology from Yale University in 1996. Prior to joining the Rudd Center, she served as Co-Director of the Yale Center for Eating and Weight Disorders from 1996 to 2006. She has received research grants from a variety of funders including the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the United States Department of Agriculture, and the National Institutes of Health to study federal food programs, school wellness policies, the effect of food marketing on children, and strategies to address food insecurity and diet quality. She is also the recipient of the 2014 Sarah Samuels Award from the Food and Nutrition Section of the American Public Health Association; the 2020 Faculty Service Award from the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences; and the 2021 Community-Engaged Health Research Excellence Award from the Institute for Collaboration on Health, Intervention and Policy at UConn.



Ellen Smith, Ph.D.

Ellen Smith is an Associate Professor in Residence at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work, where she has worked since 2006. She has taught courses in the BSW, MSW, and PhD programs, including Human Behavior in the Social Environment, advanced practice courses, and an elective entitled Gender and Social Work: Feminist Theory and Practice. She is currently the chair of the Individuals, Groups and Families concentration. Before joining the faculty at UConn, she worked in a range of practice settings, including a school-based counseling program, a mental health program for women living with HIV/AIDS, and a prenatal clinic. She is particularly interested in the intersection of women's health and mental health.



Mariana Serrano, MPH

Mariana Serrano, MPH (she/they), is a dedicated public health practitioner with a strong focus on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) programming and advancing health equity through research and program innovation. With over eight years of experience, Mariana actively collaborates with communities to advocate for social justice by transforming DEIB efforts into effective creative strategies and restorative interventions that enhance the health and well-being of historically oppressed, underrepresented, and marginalized communities. Mariana believes in igniting social change through innovation while centering the communities that are most impacted. Mariana holds degrees from Eastern Connecticut State University and Boston University School of Public Health, which have provided them with comprehensive knowledge and expertise in the field. Currently serving as the Director of Diversity and Social Impact at Connection Inc., a prominent community-based services agency, Mariana plays a crucial role in fostering a culture of inclusion and belonging within the organization. They lead the design and implementation of impactful programs and initiatives while spearheading community and partnership engagement and driving the agency's social impact strategy. Mariana describes herself as a life-long learner who leads with authenticity, integrity, and curiosity.



Michele Klimczak, MA, LMSW

As the Assistant Vice President of Training and Grant Management for The Connection, Michele has created and delivered over one hundred original trainings. She studied at Fairfield University, Yale University, and received her MSW from Southern CT State University. She has presented at local and national conferences, most recently on topics including designing and implementing large scale systems change, retention-oriented and supportive leadership models, and self-care for practitioners. Michele is also a social worker with over twenty-five years of experience in direct care and program management. Her specialties include the neuroscience of violence and traumatic stress, trauma-informed approaches to leadership and customer care, and innovative supervisory and case management models. Through her work as the Director of the Connection Institute for Innovative Practice, she and her colleagues from Yale University have published original research in leading peer-reviewed journals. Michele's philosophy is that learning and professional development are ongoing, iterative processes that are a critical component of optimal outcomes for both leaders and direct service practitioners. Her training is delivered with a strong focus on creating a meaningful integration of theoretical knowledge with direct practice applications.



Fiorigio (Fred) Fetta, LPC, ICGC-II, BACC, CGT, AADC

Fiorigio (Fred) Fetta, LPC Professional Counselor, (ICGC-II International Certified Gambling Counselor; level II), BACC, (Board Approved Clinical Consultant), CGT (Certified Gambling Disorder Trainer), AADC (Advanced Alcohol and Drug Counselor), has provided clinical oversight for the treatment and integration programs for Problem Gambling Services with the Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services (DMHAS) in Connecticut since 2014. Prior to his work with DMHAS, he provided treatment at United Community & Family Services (UCFS) for individuals impacted by gambling disorder and affected loved ones in Eastern Connecticut for seven years in the roles of supervisor and clinician of the Better Choice Gambling Treatment Program.

Fred was also a clinician in an Opioid Treatment Program for nearly two years at Community Substance Abuse Centers (CSAC) in Hartford, Connecticut. He obtained his undergraduate degree at Eastern Connecticut State University and his Master's degree in Community Counseling at Fairfield University. Fred is chair of the National Council on Problem Gambling's Treatment Committee.



Jeremy Wampler, LCSW, ICGC II, BACC, CGT, LADC

Jeremy Wampler, LCSW, ICGC-II, BACC, CGT, LADC is the Clinical Manager for the State of Connecticut, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Problem Gambling Services. Jeremy earned his Master's in Social Work from Southern Connecticut State University, and he has been practicing in the field of problem gambling for over a decade. He currently serves as President of the International Gambling Counselor Certification Board (IGCCB), and also serves as President on the National Association of Administrators for Disordered Gambling Services (NAADGS) board. In his current role as state administrator, Jeremy provides oversight for all statewide gambling services which includes problem gambling specific clinical services, disordered gambling integration programs, outreach and engagement, prevention, and recovery support services. Jeremy is an advocate and trainer, providing education and technical assistance to other states throughout the New England region, with a focus and passion on building capacity of the clinical workforce and supporting the growing needs of other service administrators in the problem gambling field.



Kaitlin Brown, LPC, LADC, ICGC II, IGDC, BACC

Kaitlin Brown is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), Licensed Drug and Alcohol Counselor (LADC), Internationally Certified Gambling Counselor (ICGC II), holds an International Gaming Disorder Certificate (IGDC) and is a Board Approved Clinical Consultant (BACC) with the International Gambling Counselor Certification Board providing supervision to those seeking certification for Gambling & Gaming Disorders. Kaitlin is currently the Senior Director of Programs & Services for the Connecticut Council on Problem Gambling. In her role she oversees the statewide problem gambling helpline, education, prevention initiatives, and responsible gambling efforts. Kaitlin has provided direct counseling services to those with a gambling disorder as well as family members in the Better Choice Treatment Programs in CT. Kaitlin has shared her knowledge and experiences by delivering clinical and prevention training presentations relating to gambling and gaming on the state, regional and national level. Kaitlin has dedicated her career to helping those affected by Gambling Disorder and continues to make it her mission to increase community awareness of the overall impact of gambling related harm. Kaitlin is currently a part of the Executive Team for the NCPG Prevention Committee and Co-Chair for both the Prevention and Helpline Committees. In 2021, Kaitlin was honored with the NCPG Jim Wuelfing Prevention Award for her work in helping advance the field of problem gambling prevention.



Elizabeth Lynch, DVM

Dr. Elizabeth Lynch graduated from Cornell University with BA and DVM degrees. She was the Chair of the Animal Welfare Committee for the Ohio State Veterinary Medical Association. In 1997, she organized the first annual Animal Welfare Forum which helped bring to light the LINK between animal abuse and violence against humans. In 2018, she was part of a pilot program to pair therapy animal teams with children in foster care under the aegis of the CT Department of Children and Families. She is Human Animal Bond certified and holds a certificate in Human and Animal Health from the University of Denver, Institute for Human Animal Connection, College of Social Work. She is certified in the Human Animal Bond through the American Veterinary Medical Association and the Human Animal Bond Research Institute. For more than 20 years, she has worked for Pet Partners, the leading international therapy animal organization. She is a therapy animal handler, partnering with dogs, a rabbit, and guinea pigs. She is the National Program Educator, and responsible for training new therapy animal team licensed Evaluators. She is also an Evaluator and an Advocate for Pet Partners.



Judith Liu, LCSW

Judith Liu is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Clinical Intern Supervisor, Pet Partner Team Evaluator and Course Educator, Animal Assisted Psychotherapist, EAGALA Certified, and a Pet Loss and Bereavement Coach based in New York and Connecticut.

Judith adopts a diverse and integrated approach to therapy in her private practice. She is skilled in trauma-informed nature-based therapies and places a significant emphasis on incorporating animal-assisted psychotherapy. Judith is trained in several therapeutic methods, including Mindfulness, Cognitive-behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). Her approach is grounded in trauma-informed CBT principles. With the support of her canine, feline, and equine partners, Judith leverages the Human-Animal Bond alongside her counseling techniques to help clients achieve their therapeutic goals.

Judith has a broad range of experience in counseling various populations and addressing different needs. Her primary focus areas include Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Panic Disorder, Compassion Fatigue, Stress, Trauma, Grief and Loss, Anxiety, Goal Setting, Self-Esteem, Conflict Resolution, Social Skills, Team Building, and Life Balance/Transitions.

Judith Liu graduated with her Master's degree from the School of Social Work at New York University in NYC, NY. She completed her Animal Behavior and Cognition certification at Hunter College in NYC, NY. Judith is currently completing her Equine Assisted Services certification with Natural Lifemanship Institute.



Leslie Coplin, LCSW

Leslie Coplin is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and psychotherapist in private practice and through Jewish Family Services of Greenwich. She employs warmth and humor to create a therapeutic alliance where clients can notice and explore patterns of thoughts, behaviors, and relationships that may hold them back or cause them to feel stuck. Leslie's approach is client-defined, supporting individual goals, insights and identification of untapped resources to develop strategies to feel better and create change.

Until 2023 Leslie served as Outreach, Engagement and Training Coordinator at Harmony Project of YWCA Greenwich, a free and confidential resource for individuals experiencing intimate partner abuse or sexual violence. She is a CT State Certified Domestic Violence Advocate and Trainer who has taught community members, medical and behavioral health providers, educators, law enforcement, beauty professionals and family attorneys best practices to recognize, respond and refer individuals experiencing relationship abuse to support services. Her work as a primary prevention educator focused on teaching young people to recognize and navigate unhealthy relationships and practice skills to foster healthy. Leslie received her Bachelor of Science in Communications from Emerson College and Master of Social Work from Fordham University.



Glory Ogbaa, LMSW

Glory Ogbaa brings over 15 years of expertise in the field of mental health and substance abuse therapy. Her skills encompass individual counseling, couples therapy, and facilitating group sessions focused on recovery and anger management. Her experience is enriched by her work with adolescents, contributing significantly to her proficiency in addressing a wide range of mental health issues. Glory holds a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Social Work from Southern Connecticut State University and is currently pursuing her Doctorate at the same institution.



Catherine Corto-Mergins, LCSW

Catherine Corto-Mergins, LCSW, is the Director of Training at The Village for Families and Children. In her career path at the Village as a clinical social worker, she has treated many victims of trauma, provided supervision and consultation to staff and conducted numerous trainings to parents, community groups and professionals on the impact of trauma on children, families and communities, best treatment practices, supervision and consultation, implicit bias, cultural humility and working with diverse families. Catherine is a trainer for Multi-Dimensional Family Therapy, a member of the National Association of Social Workers, and a member of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network. She has a MSW from The University of Connecticut School of Social Work, a BSW from St. Joseph College and is currently a Doctoral student at Southern Connecticut



Donna Ferguson, LCSW

Donna Ferguson, LCSW, Associate Vice President of Programs, has over 25 years of experience in the field, more than 15 years of which has been providing clinical and administrative leadership to an array of treatment programs, including The Village's Extended Day Treatment program. Ms. Ferguson provides oversight to a number of evidenced based practices across program areas and works with program managers to ensure that training and practice is in line with model fidelity and best treatment practices for the children and families we serve. She has extensive experience with a variety of program types including in-home, outpatient and milieu-based programs. Ms. Ferguson received her BA in Psychology from ECSU and her MSW from Springfield College.



Melissa Aiello

Melissa graduated from the University of Connecticut with her Master's in Social Work. She gained her clinical experience by working in a variety of settings that included in milieu settings, a private practice, community settings, clinical based settings, and in an urgent crisis mental health facility. Melissa works with children, adolescents, young adults, and adults through individual and family therapy. She is a certified Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapist. Melissa uses a trauma informed and strength's-based approach through play, art, sports, Dialectic Behavioral Therapy (DBT), and traditional talk therapy. She specializes in individuals that struggle with depression, anxiety, self-esteem, and anger management.



Sheryl Scott

Sheryl Scott is a dedicated mother of two and a compassionate professional with over 11 years of experience in the field of human services. Currently serving as a Site Coordinator at an Extended Day Treatment Program, Sheryl plays a vital role in ensuring the well-being and support of individuals in need. She holds a General Arts degree from Eastern Connecticut State University, where her passion for working with children and music flourished. Sheryl's commitment to making a positive impact in the lives of others, combined with her love for nurturing young minds through creative expression, reflects her unwavering dedication to both her family and her community.



Janira Parks, MSW

I'm a life-long resident of Hartford, CT. I attended the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford, CT where I obtained my bachelor's degree in Social Work. I attended graduate school at Springfield College in Springfield, MA and earned my Master's degree in Social Work also. I've been in the helping profession for about twelve years and gained experience working with various populations. I'm currently a Clinician at the Village for Families and Children's Extended day treatment program where we provide family, individual, and group milieu based therapy, five days a week to children ages 5-12. I've been in this position for about two years which has allowed me to facilitate weekly Doc Wayne groups. stability.



April Moreira, DSW, LCSW

April Moreira, DSW, LCSW, Dr. Moreira is passionate about helping others. She has dedicated herself to the profession of social work and everything it represents. She brings this pride and dedication to the classroom, along with her child welfare experience, to inspire students on their own journey in becoming social workers. Dr. Moreira's proficiencies include: promoting positive social change, trauma informed care, cultural humility, LGBTQ+ advocacy, mindfulness, anti-oppressive pedagogy, and self-care. As a professor, she draws upon her extensive experience working in low-income areas advocating for the rights of children and their families.



Karen McLean, Ph.D., LMSW

Karen McLean, PhD., LMSW is an Associate Professor and Department Chair in the Department of Social Work at Western Connecticut State University. A graduate of the University of Connecticut where she received her bachelor's degree in Psychology, her MSW degree, and her PhD in Social Work, Dr. McLean's previous work experience included over thirty years of public service in social welfare. She is a member of NASW, sits on the Board of Directors, and is a Diversity Committee member.



Rebecca Wade Rancourt, MSW, LCSW

Ms. Wade-Rancourt joined the Social Work faculty in 2013 following 15 years of professional practice in the field. Ms. Wade-Rancourt is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker whose work has focused on the mental health needs of children and families, including residential, outpatient and in-home program settings. She has filled both direct service and administrative roles, such as executive directorship for a local child abuse prevention agency and private psychotherapy practice.



Deneen Harris, Ph.D., MSW

Deneen Harris, PhD., MSW is Associate Professor within the Department of Social Work at Western Connecticut State University. She is a child welfare practitioner that has served as a child welfare consultant and a quality assurance reviewer. Her area of research includes child welfare practice and policy, social work education, and HIV infection among older African-Americans. Dr. Harris has co-authored a text with Dr. McLean on contemporary social work practice; diversity, equity and inclusion.



Reinaldo Rojas, Ph.D., MSW

Dr. Reinaldo Rojas was born and raised in Puerto Rico, where he completed his bachelor's degree in psychology in 1995, at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez. He obtained his Master of Social Work with a concentration in Community Organizing in 2002 from the University of Connecticut. He has had practice experience in child welfare with the Department of Children and Families, community work with several non-profit agencies, and public health work with the City of Hartford and the Connecticut Children's Hospital. He completed his doctoral degree in 2015 from the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. His dissertation research was a case study of urban community development and the impact it has on the socioeconomic status of Latino residents. He also did work with Puerto Rican fathers and the relationship between parenting and culture. Dr. Rojas is currently an Associate Professor with the Department of Social Work at Central Connecticut State University, where he has done research with Puerto Rican Families displaced by Maria and is currently collaborating with a Invest Health grant in the East Side neighborhood of the city of New Britain, Connecticut.



Dr. Mitch Page, DSW, LCSW

As a licensed clinician, Dr. Page worked for 11 years at Yale University and Yale New Haven Hospital providing clinical care to individuals with severe and pervasive mental illness. He then supported fragile learners for 22 years as a school social worker and building administrator in New Britain, Connecticut. He also provided care in inpatient and intensive outpatient programs at Saint Francis and Hartford Hospitals in Hartford, Connecticut. Since 2014, Dr. Page has taught aspiring social workers at Central Connecticut State University and now serves as the Director of the Master of Social Work Program there, with a specialization in trauma-informed healthcare. His doctoral work at the University of Southern California focused on changing help-seeking social norms among active duty military and first responders suffering from post traumatic stress disorder. He brings his research knowledge and clinical experience to the important work of joining with neighborhood residents in New Britain, Connecticut to identify sources of trauma and implement sustainable, equitable solutions.



Joanne León, Ph.D.

Joanne León is an Associate Professor & Licensed Clinical Social Worker who has been practicing Social Work in the area of mental health and school social work for over 25 years. She received her Bachelor's in Social Work from Central CT State University where she is now the program director. She received her MSW from University of CT and her PhD. from Smith College. Dr. León's research revolves around the following thematic strands: providing culturally sensitive mental health services to Latine population, effects of parental incarceration on children and adolescents as well as supporting students in higher education. On her free time, Dr. León enjoys traveling and walking her dog Jax.



Sonia Figueroa, MSW, LMSW

Sonia B. Figueroa, LMSW, received her BSW from CCSU and her MSW from UCONN. She began her career in foster care and adoption services in 1994 through a BSW internship at the multidisciplinary foster care clinic of Newington Children's Hospital. She then worked for CMHA in their CHOICE foster care program and later joined the Village for Families & Children as an adoption and foster care social worker, where she served for 15 years. Throughout her career, Sonia has actively participated in multiple committees, both at DCF and within the community, focusing on issues related to foster care and adoption.

Since 2018, Sonia has been a valued member of the Social Work department at CCSU, serving as the field education coordinator and faculty member. She currently holds the positions of BSW and MSW program field coordinator and assistant professor, where she dedicates herself to educating future social workers. Sonia's teaching focuses on Social Work practice in foster care and adoption, as well as working with the Latino community, reflecting her passion for addressing the needs of vulnerable populations.

Her commitment to excellence and advocacy has made Sonia a respected figure in the field of social work, and she is dedicated to empowering students to create positive change in the lives of others.



Kimberly DiOrio-Rooney, LICSW

Kimberly DiOrio-Rooney is a licensed, independent clinical social worker in her home state of Rhode Island. She is deeply passionate about supporting children and adolescents, recognizing them as some of the most vulnerable individuals. Her mission is to empower people of all ages to express their emotions safely through a blend of clinical and non-clinical modalities. Since 2016, Kimberly has integrated expressive arts into her practice, witnessing the profound impact of using art as a therapeutic tool, especially with youth, as an effective means of therapeutic release. She currently works for PeaceLove Foundation, where she facilitates training in expressive arts curriculum.



Robin P. McHaelen, MSW

Robin P. McHaelen, MSW is the founder and former Executive Director of True Colors, Inc. She has co-authored two books, and a book chapter and several articles on LGBTQ+ youth and is a nationally recognized thought leader. She is the recipient of numerous State and National awards. Robin is an adjunct professor at Central Connecticut State University, teaching intergroup communications and human sexuality. She was recently appointed by Connecticut's Governor Lamont to the newly formed Hate Crimes Commission.



Thanks to all of our presenters! We appreciate your willingness to not only present but also the time it took to formulate your workshops.

