

# 2026



*19th ANNUAL*

# GEORGIA SCHOOL OF ADDICTION STUDIES

## PROGRAM BROCHURE



Imagining a Bold New Future

with Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery

August 30 - September 3, 2026

Hyatt Regency, Savannah, GA

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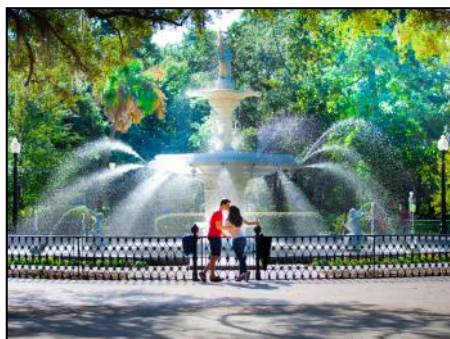
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## **PLEASE REMEMBER TO...**

- Keep name badges accessible for scanners.
- Arrive to sessions at the scheduled times.
- Silence cell phones during all sessions.

*Welcome to Savannah*



# Welcome Letter

Dear Georgia School Attendees,

Welcome you to the 19th Annual Georgia School of Addiction Studies and the beautiful city of Savannah! Our theme, "Imagining a Bold New Future with Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery," invites us to envision what is possible when we work together to strengthen every stage of care. It challenges us to embrace innovation, share knowledge, and build systems that promote wellness, provide effective treatment, and support lasting recovery. Throughout this conference, we will explore new ideas and proven strategies to create healthier, more resilient communities for generations to come.

Over the next four days, you will experience workshops, plenaries, and keynote presentations highlighting innovative ideas, best practices, and personal journeys. We have worked hard this year to put together a program that offers both workshops you will find interesting and workshops you need to meet licensing and certification needs.

This year's lineup includes legendary entrepreneur Johnny Cupcakes, who will take us on a journey to understand how telling the stories of our organizations can help us connect to our communities and bring about positive change. In addition, last year's highlight of the week, Carlos Whittaker, returns; Mallori DeSalle promises to make us laugh; and Rikki Barton is ready to help us connect our work across communities.

Again this year, we will use the GSAS Conference App, where you can view the entire conference agenda and your personal schedule, scan in and out of workshops, access workshop handouts, network with other attendees, view hotel maps, and more. If you need any assistance with the app, please don't hesitate to stop by the registration desk.

For many attendees, the Georgia School has become an annual tradition, leading to fond memories and friendships. We would like to welcome back and thank those who have attended over the past 18 years, and welcome the new attendees to the Georgia School tradition. We encourage you to take advantage of this conference's amazing networking opportunities and develop relationships that will last for years.

Please visit our exhibitor tables to learn about the various prevention, treatment, and recovery resources available in Georgia. We also encourage you to participate in one or all the scheduled events and enjoy one of the most charming cities in the nation.

I would like to personally thank the members of the Georgia School Board for their support and guidance, which made this event possible. I hope that you find this year's School full of new ideas and new opportunities for partnership. Please enjoy the conference, take time to celebrate our successes, and embrace the important work ahead.

Sincerely,

*Jessica Andrews-Wilson*

Jessica Andrews-Wilson, MS, ICPS  
President, Georgia School of Addiction Studies



# Georgia School Board

**Alcohol and Drug Abuse Certification Board of GA**  
Dr. Crystal Smalldon, CADC II, MATS

**American Addiction Recovery Association**  
Jeff Breedlove, CARES

**Council of Accountability Court Judges**  
Erica Acebo-Johnston, LCSW, CAADC  
Sherna Tolbert, MSW

**Criminal Justice Coordinating Council**  
Jay Neal  
Kristen Lee

**DeKalb County Superior Court**  
Lasheika Kassa, CADC II, MATS, GSAS Vice President

**Georgia Addiction Counselors Association**  
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Kelly Moselle, MA, MS, CAC II, CMAC, CCS, CMATS, CAMS II

**Georgia Association of Community Service Boards**  
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**Georgia Council for Recovery**  
Laurisa Guerrero, MPH, CARES  
Emily Ribblett, MBA, CARES, GSAS Treasurer  
Jeff Breedlove, CARES

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Tom Watkins, Ph.D.  
Steve Cooksey  
Yomi Makanjoula  
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Donna Dent, MISM, MS, ICPS  
Theodore Carter, Jr., MPA  
Christopher Wood, ICPS, GSAS Past President  
Christy Doyle, MSW, LPD, LCSW

**Georgia Department of Corrections**  
Antonio M. Johnson LPC, CADC-II, CAADC, CPCS, CCS  
Chris Austin, MPA, CADC-II, MATS

**Georgia Department of Human Services - Division of Family and Children Services**  
Natalie R. Green, DSW, LMSW

**Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice**  
John Izzo, LPC, GSAS Parliamentarian  
Tania Appling, Ph.D.

**Georgia Department of Public Health**  
Caroline Baer, MPH

**Georgia Health Policy Center, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, Georgia State University**  
Susan McLaren, MPH, FACHE

**GUIDE, Inc. (Gwinnett United in Drug Education)**  
Amira Abdulhafid, MPH

**Heritage Foundation**  
Nicole W. Gatlin, LPC, CPCS, RPT-S™, CEAP, MAC, CAAC, CACII, SAP, CCS, ACS

**Licensed Professional Counselors Association of Georgia**  
Gale Macke, LPC

**Mercy Care**  
Vincent Washington

**National Association of Social Workers- GA**  
Cheryl Bonneau, JD, MSW  
Dr. Davine S. Ricks, LCSW, MAC, E-CADC

**Penfield Addiction Ministries**  
Donnie Plummer, CACI

**Prevention Credentialing Consortium of Georgia**  
Jessica Andrews-Wilson, MS, ICPS, GSAS President

**Recovery Place**  
Leslie Backus

**Southeast Addiction Technology Transfer Center**  
Dawn Tyus, Ph.D., LPC, MAC, NCC

**Voices for Prevention (V4P)**  
Ester Lopez, MPS, ICPS

**Student Representative**  
Iman Pew, LCSW

**Thank you to all our Board Members for their dedication and service to the Georgia School.**



# Overview

The 19th Annual Georgia School offers a unique opportunity for professional development, information exchange, and networking. It is designed to address the need for knowledge and skill development through advanced training and will begin on Sunday, August 30th, at 2:00 p.m. and end on Thursday, September 3rd, at 12:30 pm. The Georgia School grew from many years of experience with and support of the Southeastern School of Alcohol and Drug Studies, which was among the oldest existing regional training events of its kind. The Georgia School will continue to faithfully listen to the needs of participants and diligently work to create a positive learning environment that has been an important part of the training of thousands of substance abuse prevention and treatment professionals.

## Registration

Please register early—space is limited! You can view the full announcement and register at [www.thegeorgiaschool.org](http://www.thegeorgiaschool.org). Below are the conference registration fees and registration dates.

- **Registration: June 15th - July 31st**      **\$675**
- **Late Registration: August 1st - on site**      **\$750**

Partial week registrations are also available; Sunday - \$125, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday - \$250 each day, and Thursday - \$150.

When registering please make sure you review the workshops carefully so that your workshops do not overlap one another. There are a variety of 6 hour and 3 hour workshops being offered—all workshops must be taken in full in order to receive CEU credit. If you register for a 6 hour workshop you may not take a 3 hour workshop on the same day. You may make changes to your workshop selections after completing the registration process—deadline for making changes is Friday, **August 7, 2026**.

For inquiries related to registration, please e-mail [info@thegeorgiaschool.org](mailto:info@thegeorgiaschool.org)

## Lodging

Please make your reservations as soon as possible. A limited number of rooms are being held for the Georgia School at the Hyatt Regency (2 West Bay Street, Savannah, GA) at the rate of \$181 plus tax for single or double occupancy. **August 7, 2026 is the deadline for reserving your lodging at this rate.**

For reservations you may use the Georgia School website, [www.thegeorgiaschool.org/hotel-travel](http://www.thegeorgiaschool.org/hotel-travel)

Please Note: Parking is included in your room rate if you are staying at the Hyatt Regency. Also be aware that there is no self-parking, only valet service. If you are not staying at the Hyatt Regency you will need to find parking elsewhere. To find other parking options you may visit this City of Savannah link [HERE](#)

# Overview

## Continuing Education Hours

Application has been made for CE hours through the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Certification Board of GA (ADACBGA); Georgia Addiction Counselors Association (GACA); Licensed Professional Counselors Association of GA; Georgia Society for Clinical Social Workers. Specific participant attendance records will be executed at the end of each workshop segment to support the award of individual CE hours certificates.

Application will also be made for credit hours through the Prevention Credentialing Consortium of Georgia (PCCG). We are providing prevention domain numbers after some descriptions to assist you with workshop selection as it relates to the prevention certification.

### **Prevention Domains**

Domain 1: Planning and Evaluation

Domain 2: Prevention Education/Service Delivery

Domain 3: Communication

Domain 4: Community Organization

Domain 5: Public Policy and Environmental Change

Domain 6: Professional Growth and Responsibility

## Food Service

Registered participants will have continental breakfast each day, assorted snacks and refreshments throughout the day and lunch on Monday and Wednesday. Be sure to look for our “big” breakfast on Thursday morning. For those with special dietary needs please indicate this on your registration.



# Keynote Speakers



## Johnny Cupcakes

### Entrepreneur and branding expert

Johnny's fast-paced story-telling illustrates an underdog, anything-is-possible story of entrepreneurship, grit, & reinvention while creating the World's First T-shirt Bakery from the trunk of his car, disrupting an industry, and being sought after by the world's largest brands. With global pop-ups & high-profile collaborations w/ giants such as The Simpsons, Power Rangers, Sesame Street, Nickelodeon, Weezer, VW, and Linkin Park, Johnny Cupcakes was featured in INC magazine's INC500 as the CEO of one of the world's fastest growing independent businesses and named The Willy Wonka of Marketing. In his presentation, Johnny will share his experience with branding and show us how telling the stories of our organizations can help us connect with our communities as we work to bring about positive change.



## Carlos Whittaker

### Author, storyteller, and motivational speaker

Carlos Whittaker is a best-selling author, expert storyteller, and impactful speaker to all kinds of audiences— from auditors to teachers to non-profit leaders to dermatologists. No matter who you are, his message is for you. Carlos uses his vast and varied personal life experience to captivate and engage audiences in ways that few else can. Whether your team is suffering from burnout, conflict, distraction, or disengagement, Carlos is sure to reinvigorate them with insight, humor, and inspiration.



## Mallori DeSalle

### Therapist, Humorist, Trainer, and Oreo Sommelier

Mallori DeSalle is a licensed mental health counselor, an internationally certified prevention specialist, motivational interviewing trainer and a certified humor professional. As a speaker and trainer, she has sparked curiosity in both the young and young-at-heart. Her passion for creating a lasting impact led her to the public health field and for the past 18 years she has worked at Prevention Insights, a center within the School of Public Health at Indiana University, Bloomington. Mallori collaborates with people all over the world. She served on the Board of Directors for the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor and, in 2021, became a TEDx speaker.

# Plenary & Lunch Sessions

## Monday Morning Plenary

Welcome to the Georgia School of Addiction Studies  
Georgia School Board Members



## Monday Lunch- Welcome to the Georgia School

Affirmations: Small Words, BIG Impacts  
Mallori DeSalle

## Tuesday Morning Showcase

Leading with Purpose: A Commissioner's Vision for  
Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery  
DBHDD Commissioner Kevin Tanner

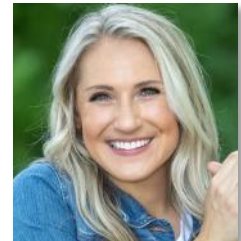


Curiosity Leads to Change  
Carlos Whittaker

Short Stories by a Short Guy Who Sold Millions of Short Sleeved T-shirts...  
And Why THAT Matters to Prevention, Treatment and Recovery Professionals  
Johnny Cupcakes

## Wednesday Morning Plenary

Scrolling Into Risk: Social Media, Substance Use, and Mental Health  
Rikki Barton



## Wednesday Lunch- Awards Luncheons

### Prevention Awards Luncheon:

Presentation of the Ray Avant Excellence in Prevention Award and the  
Prevention Rising Star Award



### Treatment/Recovery Awards Luncheon:

Presentation of the Paula Crane Excellence in Treatment Award, the  
Buddy Horton Organizational Excellence in Treatment Award, and the  
George Braucht Recovery Champion Award

## Thursday Morning Closing Plenary

Reflection and Closing  
Georgia School Board Members



# Special Events

## All Week

### The Great Token Hunt- Hunt it down. Cash it in. Walk away a winner.

Get ready to explore, connect, and win! Each day, select exhibitor booths will have special tokens available for attendees to collect. Participants can visit booths, learn about products and services, network with exhibitors, and win prizes!

## Monday

### Silent Auction

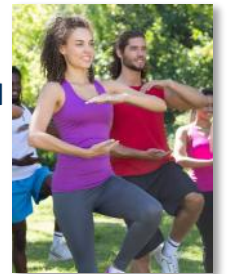
The Silent Auction begins on Monday. Please place a bid on one or more of the wonderful items and help support the Georgia School. All funds raised go to scholarships.



## Tuesday

### Tai Chi Session - 7:30am

Discover the calming, flowing movements of Tai Chi in this beginner-friendly session designed to improve balance, flexibility, and mental clarity. This class focuses on slow, intentional motions and deep breathing, helping you connect body and mind while reducing stress. No prior experience is necessary—just wear comfortable clothing and come ready to move at your own pace.



## Wednesday

### GSAS Night Out at Starland Yard - 6:00pm

The GSAS Board invites you to an evening of food and fun at Starland Yard, a beloved Savannah food hall! The venue is home to three local restaurants — Pizzeria Vittoria, T-REX BBQ, and Uncle June's — as well as a rotating selection of food trucks. Your ticket includes round-trip transportation via air-conditioned trolley to and from the Hyatt Regency, gratuity included. Food and drinks are not included. You are also welcome to make your own way to Starland Yard and do not need to purchase a trolley ticket to attend. We look forward to seeing you there! Trolley ticket is \$15 per person (must be pre-paid via registration system). The trolley will leave the Hyatt at approximately 6:00pm and return at 8:30pm. Tickets are very limited. (\*Please note for our friends in recovery that Starland Yard does have a bar on premises).



## All Week

### 12 Step Meeting - 9:00pm to 10:00pm



# Program Agenda

## Sunday, August 30th

### **1:00 - 6:00pm: Conference Check-In**

Feel free to beat the Monday morning crowds and check-in on Sunday evening.

### **2:00 - 5:00pm: Pre-Conference Workshop**

#### **How Humor Helps: Using the Science of Silly to Connect with Communities**

**Mallori DeSalle**

Humor isn't just entertainment—it's a powerful, evidence-based tool for building trust, strengthening relationships, and fostering meaningful engagement. In this interactive workshop, participants will explore the "science of silly" and how humor can be used intentionally to connect with diverse communities. Drawing on research from psychology, communication, and neuroscience, we'll unpack why humor works, how it lowers barriers, and what makes it effective (or ineffective) across different cultural and social contexts. Participants will learn practical strategies for using humor authentically—whether in outreach, leadership, education, or community organizing—without alienating or undermining their message. Through real-world examples, guided activities, and a bit of lighthearted experimentation, attendees will practice incorporating humor into their own communication styles. By the end of the session, participants will leave with a clearer understanding of how to use humor thoughtfully to build rapport, invite participation, and create more human-centered connections. (Prevention Domains 3, 4)

## Monday, August 31st

### **7:00am: Conference Check-In**

### **8:00-9:00am: Morning Plenary**

### **MONDAY 6 HOUR WORKSHOPS (9:30am-5:00pm) Sessions – A/B**

#### **Telehealth Meets Artificial Intelligence in the Digital Age: What Clinicians Need to Know**

**Lucy Cannon**

As telehealth has evolved, technology now supports not only human-to-human interaction but also computer-assisted communication, allowing for clinician-guided, patient-guided, and computer-guided approaches to care. Research has shown that structured, technology-supported dialogue can be effective in mental health and other healthcare applications. Together, telehealth and artificial intelligence can broaden access to care and more effectively serve individuals in urban, rural, and historically marginalized communities by improving the availability, responsiveness, and delivery of behavioral health services. (Kuziemy C et.al, 2019)



**MONDAY AM 6 HOUR WORKSHOPS continued (9:30am-5:00pm) Sessions – A/B****Documentation and Treatment Planning for Mental Health Professionals****Jennifer Acker**

This interactive training workshop is designed to enhance participants' competence and confidence in mental health documentation and treatment planning. The primary goal is to support clinicians in developing clear, clinically sound, and ethically compliant records that promote effective client care, measurable outcomes, and strong interdisciplinary communication. Through a combination of hands-on instruction, guided practice, and collaborative learning, participants will build practical skills they can immediately apply in their clinical work. The workshop will include real-world case examples, allowing participants to actively engage in the process of developing treatment plans and documentation in small groups. This experiential approach ensures participants leave with both a strong conceptual understanding and practical tools for high-quality clinical documentation.

**MONDAY AM 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS (9:30am-12:30pm) Sessions – A**

**Note: Please review your workshop choices carefully. If you plan on attending a 6 hour workshop on this day then you will not be able to attend a 3 hour workshop.**

**From Military to Calling: Rebuilding Meaning & Purpose in Recovery****Garrett Biss**

Loss of meaning and identity can undermine recovery long after substance use stops-especially for veterans transitioning out of military service. This workshop examines how rebuilding purpose strengthens engagement, resilience, and long-term recovery. Participants will learn practical, strengths-based tools to help individuals transform adversity into direction and align daily choices with recovery-supportive values.

**Restoration in Recovery: A Faith-Informed Framework for Addressing Life-Controlling Issues****Andrew Jones**

Recovery from addictions and life-controlling issues requires more than abstinence - it requires restoration of identity, purpose, relationships, and spiritual well-being. This interactive workshop introduces the Believe For It Restoration Model, a faith informed recovery framework guiding individuals from brokenness to wholeness through structured reflection, accountability, and personal transformation. The approach integrates 12-step recovery principles with faith-based practices including reflection, meditation, moral inventory, and relational restoration. Applicable in clinical, faith-based, peer, and community settings.

**Digital Dopamine: Navigating the Intersection of Technology, Substance Use, and the Hijacked Brain****Janice Johnson Dowd**

Digital platforms such as social media, gaming, streaming, and online shopping activate the same dopamine-driven reward pathways as drugs and alcohol, creating unique challenges for individuals in recovery. This session explores how excessive tech use can become a substitute for substance use, reinforcing addictive patterns and jeopardizing sobriety. Drawing on current neuroscience, we'll examine the "hijacked brain" and how chronic tech stimulation mirrors chemical dependence. Special attention will be given to adolescents and young adults. Participants will gain practical tools for assessing digital overuse, recognizing substitution behaviors, and integrating mindful tech habits into relapse prevention planning.

## MONDAY AM 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS continued (9:30am-12:30pm) Sessions – A

### **Rebuilding Trust in Early Recovery: Practical Strategies for Integrating Families into MAT Treatment**

**Madalyn Brooke**

This interactive workshop provides addiction professionals with practical frameworks and tools for effectively integrating family members into the early stages of MAT treatment. Participants will explore the neurobiological and psychological processes that shape early recovery, learn how family dynamics influence relapse and recovery trajectories, and develop skills to facilitate productive family involvement within clinical settings.

### **From Stagnant to Strong: Reenergizing Group Work Across the Continuum of Care**

**Meghann Perry**

Group sessions remain a cornerstone of care delivery across prevention, treatment, and recovery settings, but even the most seasoned facilitators can face reluctant learners or fall into predictable patterns that make groups feel stale. Whether you're brand new to facilitating or a seasoned veteran, this highly interactive session will offer skills, concepts and engagement techniques for creating dynamic, effective containers for learning and growth where participants feel safe, valued, and empowered. (Prevention Domains 2, 3, 6)

### **Beneath the Surface: The New Reality of Adolescent Mental Health**

**Michael Nerney**

Mental health experts once anticipated a decline in depression and anxiety across all age groups, including pre-teens, teenagers, and young adults. However, this has not been the case. Ongoing challenges such as limited economic opportunities, increased reliance on virtual learning, social isolation, and sleep disruption have persisted and, in many cases, intensified distress among adolescents. Across the country, city and county mental health services report a 30% increase in teen mental health visits. Frequently, these young people arrive in emergency rooms seeking help for symptoms associated with depression, including loss of motivation, hopelessness, persistent sadness, and suicidal thoughts. This raises an important question: how can we recognize these warning signs in young people, and what steps can we take to help them find relief and support? (Prevention Domains 2, 6)

### **The Importance of Camaraderie and Collaboration**

**Preston Gainey and Willie Marion**

Frontline workers and support staff working with incarcerated youth do demanding, high-stakes work - and without the right support, that work can lead to burnout, disconnection, and declining well-being both on and off the job. When colleagues trust each other, communicate openly, and show up for one another, the impact goes beyond good feelings - it drives better outcomes, higher productivity, and stronger morale across the board. This interactive workshop explores how camaraderie and collaboration can transform the workplace. Through a mix of discussion, video, and hands-on activities, participants will walk away with practical strategies they can apply immediately with their teams. (Prevention Domains 3, 6)

### **Setting the Tone - Creating Welcoming and Responsive Spaces**

**Marissa Carlson and Maura McGowan**

What are some of the smaller ways that we can create welcoming spaces in structured programming and services, as well as during more informal interaction points? Through activities and discussion, participants will explore ways to put our meeting spaces, classrooms, and organizations forward as safe spaces for individuals of any and all identities in which to feel respected and comfortable being their full selves. (Prevention Domains 2, 6)



**MONDAY AM 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS continued (9:30am-12:30pm) Sessions – A****Community Voices in Action. Learning how to Navigate Georgia's Policy Landscape and Building Effective Relationships with Legislators****Ester Lopez**

Effective communication requires more than passion. It requires an understanding of how policy decisions are made, how to communicate with lawmakers, and how to sustain momentum throughout the year. This interactive workshop provides participants with practical tools to navigate the Georgia policy landscape and become confident voices for their communities. (Prevention Domains 5, 6)

**Build a Toolkit with Us: A Hands-On Lab for Substance Misuse Prevention****Dawn Oparah and Damien Tillman**

"Build a Prevention Toolkit with Us" is not a lecture, it's a hands-on lab experience where participants actively create blueprints and present real prevention toolkits that can be used in communities across Georgia and beyond. Participants will work in small teams and rotate through a series of interactive "toolkit stations," each focused on a critical component of prevention education: content, communication, visual design, outreach, and more. Teams will be challenged to think critically about what communities actually need, how people engage with information, and how we move from awareness to action. This workshop is designed to generate real ideas and outputs, including content ideas, outreach strategies, and social media concepts that will directly inform the campaign's toolkit development, digital engagement strategy, and community training efforts. (Prevention Domains 1, 2, 3, 4)

**MONDAY PM 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS (2:00pm-5:00pm) Sessions – B**

**Note: Please review your workshop choices carefully. If you plan on attending a 6 hour workshop on this day then you will not be able to attend a 3 hour workshop.**

**Political Outrage Cycles and Social Media Addiction****Crystal Smalldon**

This course examines the relationship between political outrage cycles and compulsive social media use. Participants explore the psychological and neurological mechanisms that reinforce outrage-driven engagement and its impact on mental health, substance use, and recovery. Assessment considerations and counselling strategies to support emotional regulation and healthier digital engagement are discussed. (Prevention Domains 2, 6)

**Motivational Interviewing; Talking Change Within Your Community****Mallori DeSalle**

Creating meaningful change in communities often starts with a single conversation-but not all conversations inspire action. This 3-hour interactive workshop introduces participants to Motivational Interviewing (MI), an evidence-based communication approach designed to help people explore ambivalence, strengthen motivation, and move toward positive change. Participants will learn the core principles of MI, including how to engage with empathy, ask powerful questions, and listen for "change talk." Through guided practice, real-life scenarios, and skill-building exercises, attendees will develop techniques to support individuals and groups without judgment, pressure, or confrontation. Whether you're working in public health, education, social services, or community leadership, this workshop will help you communicate more effectively and collaboratively-empowering others to identify their own reasons for change and take meaningful steps forward.

## MONDAY PM 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS continued (2:00pm-5:00pm) Sessions – B

### **Beyond the Single Story: An Introduction to Narrative Therapy**

**Meghann Perry**

Storytelling is the foundation of the therapeutic relationship and an extremely effective tool to support growth and healing, especially for those who have experienced mental health and substance use challenges. Narrative therapy offers both clinical and non-clinical professionals a roadmap to healing through the power of re-storying, or "second stories," helping clients shift from a deficit-based identity to a strength-based one. This session offers an introduction to narrative therapy principles and practices, equipping participants with new tools and concepts to celebrate the resilience of their clients and unlock their unlimited growth and potential through the power of narrative therapy.

### **Re-Rooted: Faith, Recovery, and the Impact of Spiritual Community**

**Jeff Breedlove and Seth Harris**

Faith and spirituality are powerful drivers of long-term recovery, and Georgia's faith-based organizations, providers, and communities are doing meaningful work to support people on that journey. This session examines the history, pathways, and evidence behind faith's role in recovery; explores trauma, attachment, shame, and brain science through a spiritual lens; and highlights narrative data from Georgia faith leaders that points toward greater collaboration across the recovery community.

### **The Developing Adolescent Brain: Neurobiology, Risk-Taking, and Substance Use**

#### **Vulnerability**

**Janice Johnson Dowd**

Adolescents are often seen as impulsive, emotional, and unpredictable, but neuroscience reveals a deeper, more compassionate story. This presentation examines the dynamic changes happening in the teenage brain and how these shifts affect behavior, decision-making, risk-taking, emotional regulation, and relationships. Participants will leave with a neuroscience-informed perspective for working more effectively with teens. We'll simplify complex concepts using accessible, real-world language, connecting the latest research to the everyday challenges faced by educators, caregivers, and youth-serving professionals. (Prevention Domains 2, 6)

### **Hope that Heals**

**Tricia Mills**

This workshop introduces the Hope That Heals curriculum — a comprehensive, strengths-based program for individuals in recovery and the professionals who support them. Drawing from Positive Psychology, Hope Theory, Choice Theory, and Post-Traumatic Growth, participants will explore recovery as a journey of transformation that rebuilds identity, relationships, and purpose. Counselors will gain a trauma-informed framework and innovative engagement tools to meet clients where they are and empower lasting change. Together, we cultivate hope as the foundation for sustained healing and growth.

### **Stoke the Fire: Turning Your Coalition Meeting from Frozen to Hot-Functioning**

**Albert Gay**

Every coalition member showed up for a reason - a loss, a calling, a faith, a fire. But passion alone doesn't produce outcomes. This workshop uses the Communities That Care (CTC) model and the Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) to help you stoke that fire and channel it into a hot-functioning, evidence-based prevention coalition. (Prevention Domains 3, 4)



**MONDAY PM 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS continued (2:00pm-5:00pm) Sessions – B****Evaluating What Matters: Improving Programs and Communicating Results Across Audiences****Brian Simmons and Darrell Robinson**

This workshop introduces participants to the core principles of program evaluation and demonstrates how to use evaluation findings to strengthen programs and clearly demonstrate outcomes. Attendees will learn how to define program goals, identify meaningful outcomes, and select indicators that reflect progress and effectiveness. The session also explores practical strategies for communicating program success through accessible, audience appropriate data storytelling. Participants will engage in hands-on activities and discussions designed to build confidence in planning evaluations and sharing results with diverse stakeholders. (Prevention Domains 1, 3, 4)

**Cracking the Code: How to Build Trust with Today's Adolescents****Michael Nerney**

Research consistently shows that strong social and emotional connections-often referred to as a therapeutic alliance-are essential to effective prevention, intervention, and treatment outcomes. For adolescents, however, building trust can be especially challenging due to normal developmental factors such as increased skepticism, greater risk-taking, and heightened self-consciousness associated with the "imaginary audience." In this session, participants will explore the three core components of trust and learn practical language and behaviors that foster and sustain meaningful, trust-based relationships with adolescents. (Prevention Domains 2, 3, 6)

**Engaging Youth in Meaningful Ways!****Maura McGowan and Marissa Carlson**

Youth engagement is a win-win proposition! It provides critical benefits for young people, the adults who work with them, and the communities they live in now and in the future. Meaningful Youth Engagement is an intentional process of involving young people as equal partners having a say in the world around them. In this session we will explore the benefits of youth engagement to youth, organizations, and communities, ways to meaningfully engage youth, and ways meaningful engagement can look. (Prevention Domains 2, 3, 4)

**Youth Suicide and Opioid Use: Understanding Risk, Prevention, and Intervention****Charlotte Spell**

This course examines the complex and growing intersection between youth suicide and opioid use, including misuse, opioid use disorder (OUD), and overdose risk. Participants will explore current trends, shared risk and protective factors, and the impact of trauma, mental health conditions, social determinants of health, and stigma on youth outcomes. The course emphasizes early identification, prevention strategies, and evidence-based interventions that promote safety, resilience, and recovery. Special attention is given to culturally responsive, developmentally appropriate, and trauma-informed approaches across school, community, and clinical settings. (Prevention Domains 2, 6)

## **Tuesday, September 1st**

**7:00-9:00am: Conference Check-In**

**8:00 – 9:00am Orientation to Prevention Credentialing - Ari Russell**

### **TUESDAY AM SHOWCASE (9:00am-12:30pm) Sessions – C**

**Kevin Tanner - Commissioner, Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD)**

**Carlos Whittaker - Author, storyteller, and motivational speaker**

**Johnny Cupcakes - Entrepreneur and branding expert**

### **TUESDAY PM 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS (2:00pm-5:00pm) Sessions – D**

#### **Reconnected: Rediscovering the Art of Being Human in a Disconnected World**

**Carlos Whittaker**

In this restorative, hands-on breakout, Carlos Whittaker invites frontline helpers to slow down and reconnect with what makes us truly human. Building on his How to Human keynote and drawing from his time with monks, Amish farmers, and his Human School course, Carlos will guide participants through practical tools and transformative rhythms that restore presence, deepen empathy, and protect their capacity to care-in work and in life.

(Prevention Domain 6)

#### **From Disgrace to Faith: The Neurochemistry of Shame, Substance Use Disorders, Trauma, and Recovery**

**Merrill Norton**

We all feel shame. For some, shame can have a detrimental impact on the sense of self, interfering with healthy mental and emotional function. The presentation explores the recovery from the internalized shame of a substance use disorder which triggers an instinctual "fight-flight-freeze" syndrome that creates the relapse syndrome. An overview of the Anger-Shame-Anxiety cycle, appropriate interventions necessary to avoid relapse from anger and shame, and practical applications of the Twelve Steps to the individual with anger and shame issues will be given. An updated report on the healing power of the faith for recovery has on the neuroinflammation of SUDS will be also included.

#### **Not Your Father's Gambling**

**Gina Hutto**

The field is seeing more process addictions, such as gambling. There are many facets to gambling and it continues to evolve. Many of the clients we treat may be involved in some form of gambling, which can further complicate their recovery from substance use. This workshop will look at traditional forms of gambling and how the field is evolving and changing. Participants will be exposed to various screening tools and resources for treatment and will review the current state of gambling in Georgia and the changes that may be coming, so clinicians can be prepared to meet the demand.



**TUESDAY PM 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS continued (2:00pm-5:00pm) Sessions – D****Repairing the Mission Within: Relationship Health & Reintegration in Recovery****Garret Biss**

Veterans often lose the relational structure of unit and mission after military service, while stigma, shame, and strained relationships can undermine OUD/SUD recovery. This session explores relationship health as a protective factor against return-to-use, focusing on rebuilding connection with self, others, and community. Participants will learn practical, repeatable tools to reduce shame, strengthen recovery-supportive relationships, set effective boundaries, and support reintegration. While grounded in veteran experience, the strategies apply broadly to trauma-impacted individuals navigating recovery.

**Unscripted AI: Practical Tools, Ethical Boundaries, and the Future of Care****Tracey George**

Artificial intelligence is rapidly entering behavioral health practice-but many clinicians and leaders are unsure how to use it ethically, safely, or effectively. This interactive workshop offers a practical, plain-language introduction to AI in behavioral health, with a focus on real-world applications, ethical boundaries, and human-centered care. Participants will explore how AI can responsibly reduce administrative burden, support quality improvement, and enhance professional effectiveness-without replacing clinical judgment or compromising client privacy. Designed for clinicians, supervisors, and administrators, the session equips attendees to engage AI thoughtfully and confidently in an evolving healthcare landscape.

**Maternal Peer Support in Communities****Xaren McClain and Emily Riblett**

GC4R Maternal Peer Support (MPS) in Communities provides non-clinical, lived-experience support to pregnant and postpartum individuals facing challenges related to mental health, substance use, recovery, and DFCS involvement. Trained maternal peer specialists offer emotional support, advocacy, and encouragement in hospitals (including ED, L&D, NICU, and Mother/Baby units) and community settings such as treatment courts, residential programs, and correctional facilities. Working alongside medical staff, peers reduce stigma, support engagement in care and recovery, and connect families to resources-without providing clinical services-while empowering mothers through pregnancy, birth, postpartum, and reunification journeys.

**Post-Incarceration Syndrome (PICS): Understanding Trauma, Relapse, and Recovery in Reentry Populations****Nicole Wiesen**

Post-Incarceration Syndrome (PICS) explores the trauma-related psychological and behavioral effects of incarceration and their impact on addiction, relapse, and recovery. This session examines how institutional trauma shapes emotional regulation, coping behaviors, and substance use following release, and offers trauma-informed strategies for clinicians, peers, and service providers working with justice-impacted individuals.

## TUESDAY PM 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS continued (2:00pm-5:00pm) Sessions – D

### **Choosing the Right Prevention Strategies for Your Community (with a Mental Health Lens)**

**Bernetta Sweet, Marissa Dancy, and Latessa Pearson**

This interactive workshop will help participants move beyond simply implementing programs to intentionally selecting prevention strategies that truly align with their community's needs. Using a mental health lens, participants will explore how to choose individual-level strategies that build resilience, strengthen coping skills, and support overall well-being. (Prevention Domains 1, 2)

### **The Prevention Playbook: A Step-by-Step Guide to Better Your Life**

**John Bringuel**

The Prevention Playbook: A Step-by-Step Guide to Better Your Life is an interactive three-hour workshop that equips participants with practical prevention strategies to reduce risk factors related to substance misuse, abuse, and addiction while strengthening protective factors that support healthy decision-making. Through engaging activities, games, discussion, and guided reflection, participants move through a structured series of "prevention plays" that translate prevention science into everyday life skills. Participants explore personal triggers, decision-making patterns, emotional regulation strategies, and supportive relationships while developing a personalized Prevention Playbook that includes coping strategies, decision rules for high-risk situations, and a support network for accountability and help-seeking. (Prevention Domains 1, 2, 6)

### **Upstream Prevention: Addressing Root Causes Before Crisis Happens**

**Amira Abdulhafid**

This workshop explores a proactive, public health approach to preventing youth suicide, substance use, and mental health crises by addressing root causes before they escalate. Participants will examine the connections among these outcomes, identify key risk factors such as social isolation and adverse experiences, and explore protective factors that promote resilience and well-being. The session will equip participants with actionable tools to strengthen prevention efforts, foster meaningful partnerships, and create environments where young people feel connected, supported, and empowered. (Prevention Domains 1, 2, 6)

### **Building Resilience Early: A Proactive Approach to Youth Prevention**

**Phylcia Hancle**

Our youth are experiencing a crisis, with adolescent overdose deaths in Georgia increasing by more than 100% from 2019 to 2021, and fentanyl-related deaths increasing 800%. This workshop trains youth-serving adults to intervene earlier by shifting from crisis response to prevention. Drawing from the Youth Prevention Network model developed by CWC Alliance and Resilient Georgia, participants will learn practical strategies to make prevention a daily practice and help prepare youth to respond to real-world risk with confidence, focusing on emotional regulation and clear decision-making under pressure. (Prevention Domains 1, 2)

### **Ethics for Prevention Recertification**

**Ari Russell**

This workshop is intended for individuals seeking prevention re-certification from PCCG or IC&RC. It does NOT meet the core course requirement for those seeking initial certification. This highly interactive workshop is based on the PCCG Code of Ethical Conduct and will explore ethics as they relate to prevention competencies, program management and responsibilities to the field. (Prevention Domain 6)



**Wednesday, September 2nd****7:30-9:00am: Conference Check-In****8:00-9:00am: Morning Plenary****WEDNESDAY 6 HOUR WORKSHOPS (9:30am-5:00pm) Sessions – E/F****Finding Joy in Ethics: Moving Beyond Compliance to Purposeful Practice****Sandra V. Phillips**

Ethics is often viewed as a requirement rather than an opportunity for growth. This interactive workshop reframes ethics by exploring the "joy parts" of ethical practice—moving beyond compliance to purpose-driven clinical work. Designed for substance abuse and mental health professionals, this session highlights key areas including standards of care, stewardship, boundaries, accurate representation, non-discrimination, and culturally responsive care. Participants will engage in a collaborative activity to design a purpose-driven community event, applying ethical principles to real-world decision-making. (Prevention Domains 6)

**Resilience Rising: Restoring Balance, Building Strength****Douglas Jackson**

When we feel safe and socially connected, we are more effective in every area of our lives. But life inevitably throws curveballs. When fear, anxiety, dread—or other forms of stress—intensify, we may shut down or isolate ourselves from the very resources that help us recover. Join us as we explore the anatomy of resilience and learn practical skills that help the nervous system return to balance. This experiential workshop introduces simple tools that support regulation, recovery, and well-being. Please wear comfortable clothing, as participants will have the opportunity to learn and experience: Constant Bear and Plucking the Star & Exchanging it for the Big Dipper (Qi Gong), Resourcing and Grounding from the Trauma Resource Institute's Community Resiliency Model, An introduction to mindful meditation, An iRest Yoga Nidra practice. We may even reflect on the story of the gentleman whose life was six minutes long. (Prevention Domains 6)

**Healing Historical & Generational Trauma****Elizabeth Toledo**

Step into a transformative journey toward holistic healing with "Healing Historical & Generational Trauma"—a course designed to explore, understand, and address the far-reaching impacts of trauma that span generations and histories. This comprehensive program is for those seeking to deepen their understanding of intergenerational trauma, whether for personal growth, professional practice, or community engagement. This course offers a safe, compassionate, and evidence-based environment for participants to unearth the roots of inherited trauma, develop tools for healing, and foster resilience. Through a blend of academic theory, practical skills, and embodied exercises, you will learn to trace the lineage of trauma—and hope—within families, communities, and societies. (Prevention Domains 6)

## WEDNESDAY AM 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS (9:30am-12:30pm) Sessions– E

Note: Please review your workshop choices carefully. If you plan on attending a 6 hour workshop on this day then you will not be able to attend a 3 hour workshop.

### **The Fire Storm of Drug Use Trends 2026**

**Merrill Norton**

This presentation is to assist professionals in helping Georgia overcome the firestorm of the top 10 drug trends in the US. Based on a public health model, three types of strategies to prevent drug use can be discerned: primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. Primary prevention programs (anticipation and prevention of the occurrence of drug abuse) have mostly been directed to elementary grade school children in general. Secondary prevention (aiming at the discontinuation of infrequent drug-use) the stage (or stepping-stone) shifts from sociocultural influences to the individual at risk for a substance use disorder. Tertiary prevention (preventing the retaking of substances after achieving abstinence), research evaluating programs for prevention of abuse of alcohol and other drugs indicates a limited staying power. Professionals can provide all three types of prevention to their communities with the proper training and desire. Gas station drugs, synthetics, cannabinoids, nitazenes, vaping, and xylazine in 2026 have become a major dilemma for individuals and a complete review of the current top 10 drug trends will be reviewed. (Prevention Domains 1, 6)

### **From Struggle to Strength: Discovering the Self on the Road to Recovery**

**Sandy Queen**

This session looks at the journey from Struggle to Strength as we examine where we came from in our developmental framework, the kinds of attachments we formed, the presence or lack of protective factors within our homes and communities, our developmental journey, the effects of all of this on our nervous system,--- and most important, how the Self developed from all of these elements and what has happened to this Self because of, and as a result of, this process. The Struggle often begins outside our awareness. The Strength comes from having the right tools and right relationships to help us navigate this road as we become acquainted with the person who will be there with us - Our Self!

### **Understanding the Ethics of Bias and Resolving Cultural Differences**

**Samson Teklemariam**

Traditionally, cultural competence training has involved the conveying of information on cultural considerations and mitigate the harm that can be done to patients when there is a lack of cultural awareness. Today, cultural humility training must evolve to include enhanced ethical considerations of cultural bias, self-awareness strategies that promote a better understanding of defensiveness or emotional reactivity, and resolution strategies. This presentation will include an examination of the layers of bias, and ethical considerations in managing one's own bias. Participants will also explore cultural identity and the use of self in the therapeutic environment and how to shift to a solution-focused model for resolving differences in therapy.

### **Serving Mandated Clients: Leadership and Social Justice in Justice-Behavioral Health**

#### **Partnerships**

**Eric Watts**

Justice-involved individuals mandated to behavioral health treatment often face structural inequities and power imbalances that affect engagement and outcomes. This presentation explores coordination with justice organizations through the lens of the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MCSJCs), centering Advocacy, Social Justice, and Leadership. Participants will examine systemic barriers affecting marginalized populations and how these dynamics shape assessment, compliance, and treatment planning. Drawing on evidence-based practices-including trauma-informed care, motivational enhancement, and collaborative justice-behavioral health models-attendees will gain practical strategies for ethical, culturally responsive interagency collaboration that promotes equity, client empowerment, and improved outcomes.



**WEDNESDAY AM 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS continued (9:30am-12:30pm) Sessions – E****Replenish Your Toolbox - Taking Control of your Career Development****Monaletto Irby**

The "Toolbox" Concept reframes career growth as the intentional development of a portable set of skills rather than a linear climb up a ladder. This workshop equips leaders to move from a passive approach to a proactive, self-directed model of professional development by encouraging them to take ownership of their growth. Participants will learn how to assess their current capabilities, identify skill gaps aligned with their goals, and strategically leverage available resources such as mentorship, training, and on-the-job experiences. Emphasis is placed on building a practical, sustainable development roadmap that evolves over time, ensuring leaders are continuously adding new tools to their kit to remain adaptable, effective, and prepared for future opportunities. (Prevention Domains 2, 6)

**Conversations that Matter- Addressing Suicide in Georgia****Andrew Williamson and Amira Abdulhafid**

This workshop is designed to raise awareness of suicide across Georgia by exploring current trends and examining the factors contributing to rising rates statewide. Participants will gain insight into the local landscape of suicide prevention and leave with a deeper understanding of the challenges impacting communities. A central component of the session is training in QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer), an evidence-based approach that equips participants with practical skills to recognize warning signs, engage in supportive conversations, and connect individuals experiencing suicidality to appropriate resources. Through interactive learning and real-world application, attendees will learn how to approach and connect with someone in need to appropriate resources. Participants who complete the session and evaluation will receive a Certificate of Completion. (Prevention Domains 1, 6)

**Get Unstuck: Using the 7 Strategies for Community Change to Invigorate Your Primary Prevention Work****Rikki Barton**

Do you feel stuck in your current prevention efforts? Are things same-old-same-old and lagging in progress toward your long-term goals? It's time for a refresh of that strategic action plan with a fresh look at the 7 Strategies for Community Change. This evidence-based approach ensures the use of individual and environmental strategies that help coalitions shift the dial toward desired outcomes for the identified problems. Through hands-on activities and brainstorming, participants will learn the 7 Strategies and identify ways to expand and refresh their prevention efforts to include more diverse activities and strategies. They will leave with an action plan that can be implemented upon return to their communities in order to amplify the prevention impact. (Prevention Domains 1, 2, 5)

**From Awareness to Action: A Trauma-Informed Approach to Mental Health, A.I.D. Training, and Sustainable Wellness****Michelle Provost**

This interactive workshop equips participants with a comprehensive, trauma-informed framework for mental health awareness, prevention, and response across youth, college students, and adult populations. Grounded in current research and real-world implementation of a SAMHSA-funded Mental Health Awareness Training (MHAT), participants will engage in a 60-minute lecture on mental health needs and prevention, a hands-on experiential activity, a 60-minute A.I.D. (Awareness, Interaction, Direction) training, and a 30-minute self-care experience. The session also introduces an innovative student liaison model that expands peer support and access to care. Participants will leave with practical tools they can immediately apply in their settings. (Prevention Domains 1, 6)

## WEDNESDAY AM 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS continued (9:30am-12:30pm) Sessions – E

### **From Willing to Able: Building Readiness for Systems-Level Change**

**Kristina Clark and Kim Linkel**

Many coalitions are motivated to change community conditions-but motivation alone does not create systems-level impact. This session focuses on what it truly takes to prepare coalitions for environmental and policy work by strengthening readiness, infrastructure, and partnership depth. Participants will explore key readiness indicators related to leadership distribution, governance, partnerships, and sustainability, and learn how to use readiness data to guide coalition phase shifts. Attendees will leave with a clearer understanding of what "ready" looks like-and how to intentionally build toward it. (Prevention Domains 1, 2, 4)

## WEDNESDAY PM 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS (2:00pm-5:00pm) Sessions – F

### **Recovery Support Services and the Role of Peer Based Recovery Support**

**Lawrence Bryant**

This interactive workshop is designed to deepen participants' understanding of how peer support strengthens recovery ecosystems. Through discussion, real-world examples, and collaborative learning, participants will explore the philosophy, values, and practical application of peer-based recovery support. The session highlights the unique contributions of lived experience, the importance of culturally responsive approaches, and the ways peer support enhances engagement, connection, and long-term recovery outcomes.

### **Behavioral Health and Wellness - Implications for Promotion, Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery**

**Sandy Queen**

This workshop explores the powerful intersections between the Wellness Continuum — from Dis-Ease to Vibrant Living — and the full Behavioral Health Continuum of Promotion, Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery. Drawing on over four decades of experience in the field, the presenter traces the evolution from siloed prevention and treatment approaches to a more holistic understanding of the whole person — physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual. With mental and substance use disorders now surpassing all physical diseases as leading global health crises (SAMHSA), this session examines how behavioral health initiatives can serve as an enhancing factor in recovery, while acknowledging the complex, overlapping influences that shape individual well-being. Participants will explore how healthy development across the lifespan — from early childhood through the adolescent years and into adulthood — can be strengthened through intentional collaboration across all levels of the Prevention/Treatment ladder, fostering a unified, whole-person approach to health and wellness. (Prevention Domains 1, 6)

### **Reframing the Alcohol Narrative**

**Kelly Moselle and Amy Sorrells**

Alcohol use is deeply woven into cultural norms and celebrated as integral to social life — yet it is quietly fueling a global health crisis. The CDC reports that over one-third of adults drink excessively, and emerging research suggests that as many as 75% of adult drinkers may fall on the Alcohol Use Disorder scale without ever recognizing it. Far from harmless, even moderate drinking is now linked to anxiety, depression, and seven types of cancer. This workshop moves beyond the traditional addiction-focused lens to examine the latest psychological science, cultural trends, and wellness research driving this epidemic. Participants will review current findings on alcohol's mental and physical health impacts, explore how societal norms normalize unhealthy drinking, and leave with practical harm reduction strategies to introduce a health-centered narrative into their counseling practice. (Prevention Domains 2, 6)



**WEDNESDAY PM 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS continued (2:00pm-5:00pm) Sessions – F****The Kratom Kraze: Current and Emerging Information & Treatments for Kratom Use Disorder****Kym Leonard**

This workshop provides a comprehensive, evidence-informed exploration of kratom, an increasingly discussed substance with complex clinical and public health implications. Participants will begin by defining kratom and examining its historical and cultural origins, building a foundational understanding of how it has been traditionally used and how its role is evolving today. The session will then delve into the pharmacological effects of kratom on the brain, including how it interacts with opioid receptors and its potential for misuse, dependence, and withdrawal. Drawing on current research, participants will learn to identify evidence-based interventions for addressing kratom use disorder, as well as explore emerging treatment approaches and promising directions in ongoing research. Designed for professionals seeking to stay current in a rapidly changing landscape, this session equips attendees with the knowledge and tools to better understand, assess, and respond to kratom-related concerns in practice. (Prevention Domains 2, 6)

**Violence Prevention, Gambling, and Substance Use Prevention: Towards Better Outcomes through Risk and Protective Factors****Ted Mulherin and Benjamin Gleason**

This workshop will educate workshop participants about recent research on shared protective factors that might prevent future harm from alcohol and drug use. This workshop asks, What are the trends across youth violence, problem gambling, and substance use? What risk factors exist, and for what communities? What protective factors exist? Workshop facilitators will provide a brief review of recent research into violence prevention, problem gambling, and substance use. Then, we will explore risk and protective factors for each one, as we work to identify shared influences. The goal of this workshop is to become informed about overlaps between problem behavior, and to identify connections between substance use prevention (and interventions), and broader societal challenges. (Prevention Domains 1, 2)

**Halo & Healing: Resilience and Suicide Prevention in Human Services****Witni Jackson**

Halo & Healing: Resilience and Suicide Prevention in Human Services is a training that blends evidence-based suicide prevention with cultural humility and the power of representation. Using Beyoncé's artistry as a cultural lens, participants explore suicide risk and protective factors, practice compassionate responses to disclosures, and develop strategies to strengthen belonging, identity, and connection in prevention work. This training offers a grounded, affirming, and culturally responsive approach to suicide prevention-centering resilience, presence, and empowerment. (Prevention Domains 1, 6)

**Building Prevention-First Communities: Integrated Care Through Strategic Partnerships****Samson Teklemariam**

Prevention begins long before a person walks into treatment. This session will explore how integrated care strategies and strategic partnerships can serve as upstream prevention tools by addressing community risk factors, enhancing protective environments, and bridging service gaps. Participants will examine how community needs assessments and collaborative relationships can extend the impact of behavioral health professionals beyond the treatment center walls, creating systems of support that reduce the likelihood of substance use and promote overall community wellness. Case examples will demonstrate how local partnerships have strengthened prevention outcomes in rural, urban, and metro communities. (Prevention Domains 1, 2, 4)

## WEDNESDAY PM 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS continued (2:00pm-5:00pm) Sessions – F

### **Pathways to Success: Empowering Rural Youth Through Engagement, Education and Exposure**

**Santina Fryer**

Pathways to Success: Empowering Rural Youth Through Engagement, Education, and Exposure highlights an innovative, evidence-informed youth development model designed to equip rural youth with the life skills, confidence, and real-world experiences necessary to thrive. This session explores how structured engagement, intentional education, and meaningful exposure to careers, colleges, and community leadership opportunities can transform outcomes for young people in underserved communities. Participants will gain practical strategies, program design insights, and scalable tools to implement holistic youth development initiatives in their own regions. (Prevention Domains 1, 2)

### **Beyond the Grant: Untapped Funding Strategies for Sustainable Prevention Work**

**Kristina Clark and Kim Linkel**

Prevention efforts cannot thrive on short-term grants alone. This session challenges participants to rethink sustainability by exploring untapped and underutilized funding strategies that position prevention as a long-term community investment. Participants will examine ways to diversify funding through corporate partnerships, local philanthropy, and earned-revenue approaches, while learning how to build sustainability directly into coalition design. Through practical examples and readiness-based tools, this session equips prevention leaders to move from funding survival to financial strategy. (Prevention Domains 1, 2, 4)

## **Thursday, September 3rd**

**8:00-9:00am: Reflection and Closing Plenary**

## THURSDAY 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS (9:30am-12:30am) Sessions – G

### **Stimulant Use Disorder and Other Polysubstances: Neurobiology, Crisis Response, Overramping, and Contingency Management**

**Lawrence Bryant**

This training provides a practical, evidence-informed framework for understanding and responding to Stimulant Use Disorders (StUD) within the of administration, and the social and population-level disparities shaping stimulant use and outcomes. The course emphasizes real-world clinical and behavioral strategies, including recognition and management of acute stimulant intoxication ("overramping"), use of the AGRO+ mnemonic for de-escalation, and approaches to crisis response grounded in safety and stabilization. The training concludes with a focused examination of Contingency Management, highlighting its evidence base, core principles, implementation strategies, and compliance considerations.



**THURSDAY 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS continued (9:30am-12:30am) Sessions – G****So Long,...Farewell...Now What?****Sandy Queen**

So....we have heard the latest research. We have networked with fellow professionals and discussed the most up-to-date information that is important in our field...and we have satisfied our requirements to continue with our jobs---- but is that it? What will you DO with what you have experienced while you have been here? Has anything you have experienced here made a difference in your life? Your profession? What will you BECOME as a result of being here this week? What did you expect to happen this week? What really happened? What were you surprised about? What concerned you? What feeling are you taking away with you as you leave? Let's not just close our program guide and leave here. Let's not just file all the notes away for later -- or never. Let's go out on a high note. Let's go out in celebration of the impact we have had in our field - and on each other and on the people we serve. Whether this is your first time at the conference, or your 19th time, come spend this final session in a space of sharing and reflection. Let's go out in joy. (Prevention Domains 6)

**From Burnout to Sustainment: Using Expressive Arts in Clinical Supervision****Danyale Weems**

Effective clinical supervision is essential for developing competent, confident, and ethical addiction counselors. Strong therapeutic alliance is the core of effective addiction counseling; however, many new counselors are focused on intervention-based strategies. Confidence is often a task of building effective counselors; however, finding ways to establish this internally is a challenge. Expressive arts is a dynamic tool for Supervisor, clinician, and client; providing a non-threatening window to self-awareness and processing by bypassing the conscious cognitive blocking which both counselor and client may do. Participants will understand the role of expressive arts in clinical supervision and addiction treatment. Participants will learn to identify signs of burn-out. Participants will demonstrate at least 2 expressive arts interventions and apply strategies to enhance a reflective practice. Participants will develop a plan for self care which incorporates creative strategies.

**Integrating Recovery Support and Healthcare: Building a Continuum That Improves Outcomes and Reduces System Strain****Kendra Homesley**

This workshop explores how recovery support services can be intentionally integrated into healthcare systems to improve outcomes for individuals, families, and communities. Participants will examine practical models that bridge prevention, treatment, recovery, and long-term care; reduce recidivism and hospital readmissions; and strengthen collaboration across healthcare, justice, education, and community-based systems. The session emphasizes real-world implementation strategies adaptable across settings and populations.

**Refresh: Transforming Transitional Housing Through Recovery Capital****Gary Green**

This workshop introduces the Refresh Program, a structured transitional housing model designed to strengthen Recovery Capital and support long-term recovery for individuals with Opioid Use Disorder (OUD). Participants will explore how the program's phased approach, accountability systems, and skill-building expectations help residents stabilize, grow, and prepare for independent living. Using real program practices and data, the session highlights practical tools that agencies can adapt to enhance engagement, reduce recidivism, and improve outcomes in residential and transitional settings.

## THURSDAY 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS continued (9:30am-12:30am) Sessions– G

### **"And Love Myself Anyway": Using Poetry to Address Trauma, Attachment Wounds, and Maladaptive Coping in Clinical Practice**

**LaShonda Tucker**

This interactive workshop explores how poetry and spoken word can be used as therapeutic tools to address trauma, attachment-related wounds, and maladaptive coping. Through a live performance and guided discussion, participants will examine how to use poetry to help clients identify how unmet emotional needs shape their adult relationships and behaviors. Attendees will engage in experiential writing exercises and learn practical, trauma-informed strategies to support emotional processing, reduce shame, and promote healing in clinical and recovery settings.

### **Take a Breath: The Hidden Weight of Caring**

**Tiffany Cuthbert**

This work asks people to show up fully for clients, communities, and colleagues every single day, and not many spaces make room to talk about what that costs. This session names the invisible labor that doesn't end when the workday does. The stories you carry home that don't belong to you. The quiet calculations that run at 11 pm. The worry about someone you can't follow home. Through honest conversation, movement, and peer connection, this session creates space to say out loud the parts that usually stay unspoken. Participants will walk away with a clearer understanding of what they've been carrying, what actually refills them, and one simple tool they can use before walking into the next hard room. (Prevention Domain 6)

### **Overview of Recent Findings from the Evaluation of the Georgia Partners in Prevention Project**

**Darigg Brown, Sazid Khan, Laura Baum, and Shirley Liu**

RTI International currently partners with Georgia's Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, Office of Prevention Services (OPS) to evaluate the Georgia Partners in Prevention Project (PIPP). OPS funded 35 local prevention providers in 35 communities to implement individual- and environmental-level strategies to prevent and reduce the onset of substance misuse among youth and young adults. Additionally, OPS funded four providers to serve special populations statewide (through FY2025). During this workshop we will present findings from the FY2025 evaluation of PIPP; describe the individual- and environmental-level strategies that providers implemented in their communities; highlight provider-reported accomplishments and challenges related to implementing PIPP; and describe some of the partnerships and capacity needs that influenced successful implementation. We will also engage attendees in a discussion about activities and resources they have used to facilitate similar substance use prevention efforts in Georgia. (Prevention Domains 1, 2, 5)

### **GLOW: Illuminating Prevention Within Development**

**Erica Bacon**

Step into Sensory Glow Lab, a glow-in-the-dark immersive experience where collaboration, cultivation, and celebration come alive through all five senses. Exchange glowing beads to discover how you show up. Navigate blindfolded through a glowing maze to uncover your communication style. Create your own ice cream by choosing flavors that represent qualities you want to grow. Taste your creation by glow light and leave with a glowing bracelet, your custom ice cream, and a deeper understanding of yourself. Come ready to feel, taste, hear, see, and touch your own transformation. (Prevention Domains 3, 6)



**THURSDAY 3 HOUR WORKSHOPS continued (9:30am-12:30am) Sessions – G****Are We Moving the Needle? How Georgia is Monitoring the Impact of Its Opioid Settlement****Funds****Holly Lynde , Joseph McNeil, Hamida Jinnah, and Taylor Peyton**

This session will begin with an overview of the Georgia Opioid Crisis Abatement Trust, including its organization, how funding decisions are made, and the application process. The session will also cover how a partnership between the Georgia Opioid Crisis Abatement Trust and the University of Georgia is using a data-driven approach to measure the impact of grants from the state's opioid settlement funds to reduce overdoses and deaths, and increase recovery supports. By visually overlaying epidemiological data with data from current (and future) Trust grant recipients, the Trust is using the data analysis and visualizations to ensure the funding reaches the communities that need it the most. This session will include an overview of the Continuum of Care gap analyses, UGA's monitoring and evaluation process, as well as a look at the data visualizations. The presentation will focus on reviewing data visualizations that compare funds allocated state-wide with key epidemiological gap areas for each of the Continuum of Care areas (prevention, treatment, recovery, and harm reduction). Additional analysis based on rural and non-rural comparisons as well as source and implementation counties will be presented. Lessons learned about what works will be shared. Our presentation will help other opioid projects nationally to gain methodological insights to enable them to use data more efficiently to improve their opioid response strategies.

(Prevention Domains 1, 4)

**Current and Emerging Drug Trends in Georgia****Katy Freund**

This presentation provides an overview of the current and emerging drug trends impacting Georgia. It explores how the illicit and legal drug landscapes are constantly evolving with substances fluctuating in prevalence within the supply and changing patterns of use. The session will go over specific substances which are emerging in the state's legal and illicit drug markets and how an erratic supply can impact those who use substances, those who work to prevent overdose, people working in recovery, and first responders.

(Prevention Domains 1, 6)

**Prevention That Fits: Adapting Youth-Led Substance-Use Prevention Strategies Across Alternative and Traditional School Settings as Part of Georgia's College Adopt-a-School Prevention & Advocacy Initiative****Pallavi Singh, Martha Tingen, Aneesha Webster, LaTreece Roby, Monica Nandan, Brandon Warrick, and Amber Johnson**

This workshop highlights how Kennesaw State University (KSU) adapted two evidence-based prevention strategies, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Sources of Strength (SoS), for implementation within an alternative high school and five traditional middle and high schools through Georgia's College Adopt-a-School Prevention & Advocacy Initiative funded by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD). Presenters will demonstrate how combining emotional regulation skill-building with peer-led protective factor promotion addresses substance misuse risk in racially and economically diverse school populations. Evaluation findings will show impacts on stress, resilience, protective factors, and prevention engagement, along with practical strategies for adaptive implementation, sustainability, scalability, and youth leadership integration. Representatives from the Augusta University Oversight and Management team will also highlight the organization, implementation, oversight, and management provided across the full College Adopt-a-School initiative to support fidelity of implementation, quality, and sustainability statewide. In addition, financial management will be presented. (Prevention Domains 1, 2, 4)

# Speaker Bios

**Amira Abdulhafid** is a seasoned Public Health professional and Internationally Certified Prevention Specialist with over a decade of experience in mental health, community engagement, and program leadership. She currently serves as the Program Director for Suicide Prevention at GUIDE, Inc., where she oversees multi-tiered, evidence-based initiatives aimed at reducing suicide and promoting mental wellness across Gwinnett, Newton and Rockdale Counties in Georgia. As a certified instructor in QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer), Youth Mental Health First Aid, and CALM (Counseling on Access to Lethal Means), Amira has led the strategic expansion of these evidence-based programs—amplifying their community impact, enhancing public awareness, and driving measurable outcomes through effective training, strong partnerships, and expert grant oversight. With a Master of Public Health from Georgia State University and a Bachelor’s in Spanish, Amira brings not only subject matter expertise but also strong communication skills and a multicultural perspective. Her early work as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Honduras underscores her commitment to grassroots development, youth empowerment, and global health equity.

**Jennifer Acker** is a Licensed Professional Counselor in the State of Georgia as well as a Certified Master Addiction Counselor and Approved Clinical Supervisor. She received her Master of Arts in Marriage and Family Therapy from Richmond Graduate University and her Bachelor of Arts from Waldorf College, where she majored in Psychology and minored in Religion and Wellness. Before working as a therapist at the Summit Counseling Center, Jennifer worked as a therapist and in leadership at several Metro Atlanta Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment programs for adults and adolescents. Jennifer currently serves as a Staff Therapist, Site Lead, and Records Review Specialist at the Summit Counseling Center.

**Erica Bacon** is a dedicated Professional Development Consultant serving youth-centered sectors across Metro Atlanta. In this immersive role, she ensures that educators and youth professionals have the resources they need to thrive, creating dynamic training environments that blend learning with fun to drive effective outcomes in youth settings. Her career journey began in the corporate sector at State Farm, where she excelled as an Underwriter in the Personal Lines Auto Division. Recognized as a high performer, she also served as a Change Ambassador and Diversity and Inclusion Ambassador, spearheading team-building initiatives and facilitating leadership sessions that connected high-level executives with emerging talent. Erica’s true passion, however, lies in youth development. She dedicated over four years to the Boys and Girls Clubs of Metro Atlanta, rising from Program Instructor to Program Director. In this role, she honed expertise in project management, community outreach, fundraising, mentoring, and academic success strategies. Her experience also spans Early Childhood centers and After School programs across the region, providing her with a comprehensive understanding of developmental needs. Holding a BFA in Mass Media Communications from Valdosta State University, Erica also has formal training in video production and design. She has collaborated on creative projects throughout Atlanta and with music industry professionals, bringing compelling stories to life. Currently, she is expanding her technical skills by pursuing UI/UX Design courses, with an eye toward a future in the technology industry. Ultimately, Erica’s long-term vision is to build INTRINSIC, an organization dedicated to serving communities nationwide.

**Rikki Barton** has a passion for moving individuals and communities onward in their goals. She is the CEO/Lead Consultant of Onward Consulting and is a Certified Prevention Specialist. Rikki has nearly two decades of prevention field experience and currently serves as a consultant to assist organizations, coalitions, and state/federal agencies in the areas of substance use prevention, suicide prevention, and mental health promotion. She has extensive experience working with community coalitions, providing training, public speaking, grant writing, grant evaluation, managing funding sources, and leading a team of preventionists. Rikki trains for several national organizations including CADCA's

youth and adult programs, the Opioid Response Network, the National Coalition Institute, various SAMHSA Prevention Technology Transfer Centers (PTTCs), as well as for National Council for Mental Wellbeing as an Adult, Youth, and Teen Mental Health First Aid Instructor. Rikki holds a Bachelors degree from Pennsylvania State University and a Masters degree from Liberty University. In her free time, Rikki loves to travel to adventurous places and be active in nature with her rescue dog, Oreo.

**Laura Baum** is a social scientist working on substance use prevention with a focus on youth. She is a research public health analyst working with RTI International since 2017 and has served as the qualitative research lead on the Georgia Partners in Prevention Project and Georgia Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention Project since 2018. She has worked on many state prevention evaluations, survey data collections, and short visual reports, including for the Florida, New York, and California tobacco control program evaluations. She also conducts studies for the US Food and Drug Administration and the US Environmental Protection Agency, including leading the evaluation of a regional technical assistance center. Across these and other RTI projects, Ms. Baum conducts a variety of qualitative data collection, analysis, and reporting with a focus on survey design and implementation. Prior to RTI, she worked with the Florida Prevention Research Center conducting research in chronic disease prevention and treatment, including helping to design and pilot test a youth asthma management app. Her topics of focus include prevention research, program evaluation, social media analysis, social marketing, and community health promotion. She also has experience in GIS analysis, survey development and analysis, and is conversant in using qualitative findings to complement quantitative data.

**Garrett Biss** is a retired U.S. Marine Corps pilot, recovery educator, and program developer specializing in strengths-based, trauma-informed approaches to substance use recovery and reintegration. After leaving military service, Garret personally navigated challenges related to identity loss, disconnection, and alcohol misuse--experiences that now inform his work with high-risk and justice-involved populations. He is the founder of Diamond Mind, LLC, where he designs and delivers non-clinical, recovery-oriented training that complements treatment, accountability courts, and community-based recovery systems. His work focuses on rebuilding meaning, identity, and connection as protective factors against relapse, recidivism, and disengagement from care. Garret co-founded and has served in leadership roles at a NARR-certified recovery residence in Eastern North Carolina, where he developed peer-driven curricula grounded in positive psychology, post-traumatic growth, and recovery capital. His programs are implemented in treatment, recovery, and justice-involved settings, with a particular emphasis on veterans navigating reentry and long-term recovery. He is the creator of the Veteran Wellness, Empowerment, and Resilience Training (V-WERT(tm)) program and the CAM Framework (tm) (Connectio, Authenticity, Meaning)--models designed to strengthen engagement, restore self-worth, and support sustainable recovery without replacing clinical care. Garret is a NAADAC approved education provider and TEDx speaker whose work bridges lived experience and evidence-informed practice to equip professionals with practical, immediately applicable tools that support lasting recovery and human flourishing.

**Jeff Breedlove** serves as CEO of the American Addiction Recovery Association, strategic Policy Advisor for the Georgia Association of Addiction Professionals, and the Georgia Association of Recovery Residencies. Jeff was announced as a member of the 2023 Atlanta Business Chronicle Power 10: Health Care List as one of the 10 most powerful health care leaders in Georgia. Jeff was awarded a personal proclamation from Governor Brian Kemp in September 2023 as an outstanding advocate for peer led recovery in Georgia. Jeff was awarded Georgia School of Addiction Studies Neil Campbell Recovery Champion Award, The Erick Allen Recovery Advocate of the Year for Georgia from the Georgia Council for Recovery, The Recovery Champion Award at the DBHDD All CPS Conference, the 2026 Advocacte of the Year Award from Georgians for Prevention, and has received numerous Recovery Leadership Awards from organizations across Georgia. Jeff serves on the Board of Directors for the Georgia School of Addiction Studies and the Regional Advisory Board for the Rx Summit (the largest addiction summit in the United States), the Board of Advisors of the Christopher Wolf Campaign, the Board of Directors of the Georgia Faith and Recovery Collaboration, the Board of Advisors of Georgians for Responsible Marijuana Policy.



**Dr. Darigg Brown** is a senior behavioral scientist and former manager in RTI International's Center for Behavioral Health and Well Being. He has nearly 20 years of diverse experience in community, state, federal, and international health settings, conducting research and programmatic activities. In collaboration with the State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup and the Georgia Office of Prevention Services, Dr. Brown directed the 2019 and 2025 Georgia Social Indicator Studies to assess substance use and related consequences, and he led the relaunch of the GASPS Data Warehouse. Dr. Brown has led and co-led several federally and state-funded evaluations, including the evaluation of the Minority AIDS Initiative under the Program Evaluation for Prevention Contract, which was a national cross-site evaluation of SAMHSA funded community-based programs focused on reducing HIV/AIDS and alcohol use. He helped lead the evaluation of the Georgia Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention Project, and he currently leads the evaluation of the Georgia Partners in Prevention Project.

**John Bringuel, MA, CTP, CTT, CRBF, ICPS** John works for the Council on Alcohol and Drugs where he is the Prevention/Intervention Program Manager. John has a MA in Psychology from The University of West Georgia and holds four professional certifications. In John's 37 years of working in the field of mental health, he has worked across the service and lifetime continuums and provided training to thousands of social service and mental health providers, professionals, and the public at large about everything from "How to Make Meetings WORK?" to "Shifting the Conversation to Emotional Intelligence an Innovative Approach to Prevention!"

**Madalyn Brooke** is a behavioral health professional and social worker with extensive experience supporting individuals and families impacted by substance use disorders. She has worked across diverse treatment settings and brings an integrative approach to recovery that combines evidence-based addiction treatment, family systems work, and practical behavior interventions. Madalyn previously practiced social work in England, where she gained valuable international experience working with individuals navigating complex social, behavioral health, and family challenges. Her cross-cultural professional background has shaped her understanding of recovery within broader social and relational systems. Currently working within addiction treatment services in the southeastern United States, Madalyn focuses on medication-assisted treatment (MAT), early recovery stabilization, and strengthening family engagement in treatment. She is particularly interested in developing practical clinical frameworks that help treatment providers address conflict, rebuild trust, and improve recovery outcomes for both clients and their support systems. Madalyn is passionate about translating clinical knowledge into actionable tools that professionals can immediately implement in their work with clients and families.

**Dr. Lawrence Bryant** is a specialist in substance use disorders (SUD), HIV/AIDS prevention, nicotine addiction, vaping, and multi-perspective approaches to behavioral health issues. With a career spanning five decades, Dr. Bryant has dedicated himself to improving the well-being of older adults, the unhoused, and other underserved groups. Dr. Bryant notably led Georgia's initial response to the opioid epidemic by developing a statewide strategic plan and surveillance data for the Georgia Department of Public Health. Dr. Bryant's extensive expertise includes more than 20 peer-reviewed publications on critical topics such as HIV/AIDS, homophobia, and tobacco control. Additionally, with over 50 years as a registered respiratory therapist, he played a significant role during the COVID-19 pandemic, exemplifying his commitment to health and safety during challenging times. Currently, Dr. Bryant serves as a part-time assistant professor at Capella University and Kennesaw State University, where he mentors student dissertations and teaches courses in behavioral health, policy, health promotion, and research strategies. As the Founder and CEO of Passion and Purpose Behavioral Health Consulting Services, LLC, he brings 34 years of personal experience in long-term recovery, guiding others with passion and purpose.

**Dr. Lucy R. Cannon** is a nationally recognized behavioral health expert, consultant, and educator with over 40 years of experience in mental health, substance use treatment, and clinical social work. She is the CEO of LEJ Behavioral Health Services, LLC, where she provides training, auditing, and consultation to support organizational compliance

with Medicaid, CARF, and Joint Commission standards. Dr. Cannon holds a Doctorate in Education in Counseling Psychology and serves as an adjunct professor at Clark Atlanta University. A sought-after national speaker, she has presented for organizations including SAMHSA, NASW, TAADAS, ADACBGA, GACA, and DBHDD. She currently serves as President of the Transformational Leadership Collaborative and Treasurer of the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Certification Board of Georgia. Her work is grounded in trauma-informed care, cultural competence, 21st-century clinical supervision, telehealth, artificial intelligence, ethics, and the empowerment of clinicians and communities across the behavioral health spectrum.

**Marissa Carlson** is the Executive Director of the NH Teen Institute, a leadership development nonprofit working with middle and high school students from around NH and New England in a variety of areas including substance misuse prevention, peer mentoring, and creating positive school and community climate. As part of her role at TI, she oversees and facilitates training for youth participants, youth and adult volunteer program staff, and outside behavioral health and education professionals. She is a facilitator and trainer of trainers for multiple workshops developed through SAMHSA systems and is a member of the advisory council of the New England Prevention Technology Transfer Center (PTTC). In addition, she is the Past President of the Prevention Certification Board of NH, serves on the IC&RC board of directors, and serves as the chairperson of the IC&RC Credentialing Committee. Outside of her prevention work, Marissa is a founding member of Mill City Productions, a theatre company in Western Massachusetts. She graduated from Pomona College with a BA in Psychology, received an MS in Nonprofit Management from Bay Path University, and has been a Certified Prevention Specialist since 2011.

**Kristina Clark** is a nationally recognized expert in coalition building, nonprofit sustainability, and substance use prevention. As President and Founder of KM Clark Consulting Group, she partners with organizations across the country to enhance capacity, improve impact, and ensure long-term sustainability. Her evidence-based strategies empower communities to create transformative change. With over 15 years of experience in public health and nonprofit leadership, Kristina is a trusted national trainer for CADCA, having guided hundreds of coalitions through the National Coalition Academy. She is known for equipping communities with practical tools to reduce substance misuse and address complex public health challenges. Kristina led the Coffee County Anti-Drug Coalition to national recognition, earning multiple years of Drug-Free Communities funding and the prestigious Got Outcomes! Coalition in Focus award. She co-created the nationally adopted Count It! Lock It! Drop It!® initiative, a model campaign for prescription drug misuse prevention. She serves on the executive board of the Prevention Alliance of Tennessee, advocating for policy reforms that strengthen prevention statewide. Kristina also sits on the board of The Healing Trust, a foundation focused on health equity in Tennessee. Her expertise includes nonprofit capacity building, strategic planning, policy advocacy, and sustainability planning. A proud Air Force brat and Army Veteran's wife, Kristina brings a collaborative and adaptive spirit to her work. She lives in Tennessee with her husband, Michael, their sons Michael Joseph and Julian William, and their two dogs, Sammie "Trainwreck" Clark and Pounce the Shih Tzu.

**Johnny Cupcakes** - Why do thousands of customers tattoo Johnny Cupcakes' logos on their bodies and how does Johnny Cupcakes get people to camp out for weeks for his limited edition T-shirts at his frosting-scented, bakery-themed pop-up shops? Named "Top Innovator in Retail" by Boston Globe, Johnny Earle aka Johnny Cupcakes shares his blueprints on Building Brand Loyalty, Creating Unique Experiences, & Inspiring Innovation. Johnny's fast-paced story-telling illustrates an underdog, anything-is-possible story of entrepreneurship, grit, & reinvention while creating the World's First T-shirt Bakery from the trunk of his car, disrupting an industry, and being sought after by the world's largest brands. With global pop-ups & high-profile collaborations w/ giants such as The Simpsons, Power Rangers, Sesame Street, Nickelodeon, Weezer, VW, and Linkin Park, Johnny Cupcakes was featured in INC magazine's INC500 as the CEO of one of the world's fastest growing independent businesses & named The Willy Wonka of Marketing. Through his keynote talks and creative consulting, Johnny has shared his strategies w/ clients that include Apple, MLB, Disney, Mondelez, Audi, Harvard, Wieden+Kennedy, Marriott, INBOUND, IMEX, UKG, + P&G. Also a TEDx speaker, Johnny has



been featured in media such as MTV, NPR, NBC, Forbes, WIRED, & as a case study in several branding & business books as a leader in Customer Experience.

**Tiffany A. Cuthbert**, M.Ed., MNM, is the Founder and Executive Director of Pillars Initiative, a statewide nonprofit based in Metro Atlanta focused on mental health promotion, substance misuse prevention, and youth development. With nearly two decades of experience in nonprofit leadership and community health, she has built and led trauma-informed programs that serve some of Georgia's most underserved communities. Tiffany holds a Master of Educational Leadership and a Master of Nonprofit Management, and brings both to her work developing systems, securing funding, and building partnerships that expand access to behavioral health resources across the state. Through her consulting practice, We Are Pillars LLC, she also supports nonprofit organizations in strengthening their operations, strategy, and capacity for impact. Tiffany is a trusted voice in prevention and community health, and a dedicated advocate for emotional well-being at every level.

**Marissa Dancy** is the Regional Prevention Specialist for Region 1 in the Office of Prevention Services at the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD). Also, she works with the HIV Early Intervention Services program at DBHDD. She has been working in prevention for over 10 years. Her academic background is Public Health. Marissa has received a Bachelor of Science in Health Science from Georgia Southern University and a Master of Public Health from Augusta University. She has also worked for the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) for 6 years in Infectious Disease specifically HIV/AIDS prevention. Marissa has worked with the Regional Offices at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration as a Regional Behavioral Health Advisor. Her current focus is substance use prevention and mental health promotion. Prevention is her passion, and she is excited to continue that journey.

**Mallori DeSalle** is a licensed mental health counselor, an internationally certified prevention specialist, motivational interviewing trainer and a certified humor professional. As a speaker and trainer, she has sparked curiosity in both the young and young-at-heart. Her passion for creating a lasting impact led her to the public health field and for the past 18 years she has worked at Prevention Insights, a center within the School of Public Health at Indiana University, Bloomington. Mallori collaborates with people all over the world. She served on the Board of Directors for the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor and, in 2021, became a TEDx speaker. Perhaps her most impressive accomplishment is her international standing within the field of sandwich cookies. Mallori has dunked, twisted, and assessed more than 150 flavors of Oreo cookies. Her credentials don't impress her family, but occasionally her corny jokes do make them laugh.

**Janice V. Johnson Dowd**, MSSW, LMSW, is an author, speaker, and retired social worker with 20+ years in family therapy and addictions, and a mother of four. With lived experience of SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER and more than 12 years in long-term recovery, she translates clinical science into practical tools for repairing relationships. Janice is the author of *\_Rebuilding Relationships in Recovery\_* (North Atlantic Books) and writes the blog *\_Finding Serenity in Sobriety\_*. A frequent presenter at NASW and addiction-recovery conferences - as well as a regular podcast guest - she speaks on family repair, recovery, and mental health topics. Her work blends evidence-informed practice with real-world scripts to help families and providers move from crisis to connection.

**Katy Freund** is Georgia's Public Health Analyst with the CDC Foundation under the Overdose Response Strategy (ORS) program. With more than 20 years of experience in public health and law enforcement, she specializes in bridging the gap between public health and public safety to address complex issues around drug overdose and substance use. In her current role, Katy leads efforts to develop evidence-based prevention strategies, share overdose data, and provide training and technical assistance to partners across the state including public health agencies, community organizations, and first responders. Prior to her current position, Katy held leadership roles with the Fulton County Board of

Health and served as a police officer, bringing a unique, cross-sector perspective to her work. She holds a Master of Public Health in Global Health Practice from the University of South Florida and a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from the University of Georgia. She is committed to advancing collaborative, data-driven approaches that improve community health and reduce overdose-related harm. In her free time, Katy enjoys creating ceramic works of art, traveling, and eating spicy food.

**Santina M. Fryer** is a bold visionary, youth advocate, and builder of systems that transform lives. As the Founder of Gents and Glam and creator of the Pathways to Success Curriculum, she has dedicated her life to ensuring rural youth are not limited by geography, trauma, or circumstance. From launching innovative programs like CAMP G.R.O.W., aviation and marine science exposure initiatives, and workforce development tracks, to leading disaster recovery efforts following Hurricane Helene, Santina doesn't just talk about impact she builds it. With degrees in Public Health and Counseling, and a passion for mentoring the next generation, Santina's message is simple: Exposure changes everything. When young people see more, they become more.

**Dr. Preston Gainey** is a respected Public Safety Senior Training Instructor for the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice. Being certified as a Senior Training Instructor by the State of Georgia Peace Officer Standards and Training Council, and a Master Resiliency Instructor, he facilitates effective basic and specialized training programs in support of the agency mission, effectively enhancing the safety, security, and skills of his DJJ colleagues and partners. Using his applied research, academic and practical experience, Dr. Gainey developed and implemented a curriculum that introduces attendees to healthy resiliency building techniques to lessen the negative effects of secondary traumatic stress which relates to serving traumatized youth. The lessons are taught via a combination of lectures, discussions and group activities. During sessions, interactive group activities gave the participants a perspective of the difference between typical work stress and secondary traumatic stress. Dr. Gainey has conducted several workshops, which were based on this curriculum on a national scale. His workshops received high ratings and reviews from members of the American Probation and Parole Association, American Correctional Association, The National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice, and the Georgia School of Addiction Studies. Not only is Dr. Gainey known for his knowledge of the safety and security and of incarcerated juveniles, as made evident by his being certified as a Juvenile Correctional Officer and Field Training Officer, his experience as a Guidance Counselor, as well as a School Administrator, but he is also well versed in the care, treatment, and rehabilitation of at-risk juveniles before and after they enter the juvenile justice system. Dr. Gainey holds an Associate of Science in Criminal Justice, a Bachelor of Science in Psychology, a Master's in Counseling, and a Doctorate in Education Leadership. He was involved in three research projects that were related to character education, at-risk youth behavior, prevention, and remediation. As a self-proclaimed Worrier Nerd, Dr. Gainey enjoys conducting and reviewing research projects related to social, behavioral, and educational improvement. In his spare time, he enjoys leading mindfulness and meditation sessions with members of his community and finds it fulfilling to serve as a volunteer advocate for at-risk youth and their parents in various rural communities.

**Albert Gay** is a national trainer and consultant in the field of substance use prevention. Over the years, he has worked on many federal, state, county, and local-level projects. While working within the field of public health, he has directed substance misuse and HIV prevention strategies. He has trained healthcare workers, the United States military, and multiple coalitions within a collaborative strategy framework. In his community, Albert has served as chair and coordinator for multiple prevention coalitions. Albert is dedicated to ministry and faith-based initiatives, organizational development, youth work, public health, and mental health promotion. Currently, he serves as the lead clergyman for a ministry network and as the volunteer executive director for a small community nonprofit in Gary, IN. He is also a business owner (Albert Gay Incorporated) and managing partner for two for-profit companies. His clients include non-profit groups, faith-based organizations, community organizations, and governmental agencies. Albert Gay obtained his B.A. in English Arts from Hampton University in Virginia, and he obtained his Master of Science in Management from Oak-



land City University in Indiana. He received ministry training from Christian International's Ministry Training College in Florida.

**Tracey George**, LCSW, MHA, is a seasoned behavioral health leader with more than twenty years of experience across social work, clinical practice, and healthcare administration. She earned her Bachelor of Social Work from Tuskegee University in 2001 and began her career in London, England, working in child protection, fostering, and adoption services. She later completed her Master of Social Work at Columbia University, specializing in Advanced Generalist Practice and Programming, where she trained with an Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team serving individuals with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders. Ms. George obtained her LCSW in 2013 and has held progressive clinical and leadership roles across inpatient, outpatient, and community-based behavioral health settings in Connecticut. Her experience includes serving as Program Director of the Mid-Fairfield Substance Abuse Coalition, Clinical Team Leader and Program Director in medication-assisted treatment at Connecticut Counseling Centers, clinician with the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services/Yale School of Medicine treating first-episode psychosis, and Clinical Social Worker at Yale-New Haven Hospital in emergency and inpatient settings. Driven by a growing passion for leadership and systems-level impact, she earned a Master of Healthcare Administration from Utica University in 2019. After relocating to Georgia, she maintained a private practice during the COVID-19 pandemic, later returning to outpatient care at Grady Health Services. In 2024, she joined Ascensa Health, where she currently serves as Clinical Director, overseeing clinical operations across multiple levels of care.

**Benjamin Gleason**, PhD, is the Director of Research for the Prospectus Group. He earned a PhD in Educational Psychology & Educational Technology from Michigan State University, researching how to best support communities of learners through educational technology, and was a tenured professor at Iowa State University. Before academia, Benjamin has worked in youth and adult-serving learning spaces for almost twenty years, from designing youth-initiated community service projects and teaching high school in Richmond, California, to working as a university instructor in Guatemala. Benjamin is also a founder of the Prospectus Group.

**Gary Lamonte Green**, MA, LPC, CPCS Gary Lamonte Green is a Licensed Professional Counselor and Certified Professional Counselor Supervisor with extensive experience in addiction treatment, trauma, grief, and emotional wellness. He serves as Program Manager for Addictive Disease Intensive and Transitional Programs at Advantage Behavioral Health Systems, where he oversees residential, outpatient, and transitional housing services. Gary is the founder of Beyond the Storm, a private practice providing individualized care for individuals, couples, and families navigating anxiety, depression, trauma, and substance use challenges. Across his career, Gary has worked in residential treatment, community-based services, correctional mental health, and crisis intervention. He is recognized for developing structured, evidence-based programming, strengthening recovery-oriented systems of care, and mentoring emerging clinicians. His work emphasizes dignity, accountability, and skill-building to support long-term recovery and emotional resilience.

**Phylicia Hancle**, MPH, joined CWC Alliance with a strong foundation in health equity, youth engagement, and community-driven public health initiatives. Her experience spans nonprofit leadership, education, and public health program implementation, including managing national initiatives focused on school wellness and trauma-informed approaches in underserved communities. She is a teacher by trade and a Teach For America alum.

**Seth Harris** serves as Director of Community Engagement for HopeQuest, which provides Christ centered, clinically effective treatment for men at multiple levels of care for substance use and process addictions. He is a CARES and CPS-AD certified and works as a recovery coach and Peer Support Specialist through HopeQuest as well as The Recovery Coach ATL. Seth founded and is the head of the Georgia Faith and Recovery Collaboration, which brings together Christian leaders to equip and support the church as it grows in all aspects of recovery. He is on the Board of Governors for

American Addiction Recovery Association (AARA) and serves on Board of Directors of Never Alone Foundation. Seth is a person in long-term recovery, who advocates throughout the community, and he is co-host of The Recovery Coach Podcast.

**Kendra Homesley**, MSW, is a social worker and healthcare leader with extensive experience across behavioral health, substance use treatment, recovery support, and community systems. She has worked closely with hospitals, justice systems, employers, public health agencies, and community organizations to develop integrated approaches that improve access to care and long-term outcomes. She brings both professional expertise and lived experience to her work, offering a systems-level perspective grounded in real-world implementation. As a person in long-term recovery and with over 15 years of experience in the substance use disorder treatment world, she brings a unique perspective that not many can to this topic. Her current focus is bridging healthcare and recovery support to reduce fragmentation, improve population health outcomes, and strengthen community-based continuums of care.

**Gina Hutto**, LPC, MAC, CPCS, CAADC, CCJP, ICGC-I, BC-TMH, MATS Gina Hutto is the current Director of Court Services (DUI, Drug and Family Treatment Courts) for View Point Health. Gina has been with View Point Health since 1996, working with substance use disorders, mental health, and co-occurring clients. Prior to coming to work for View Point Health, she worked for 5 years as a Counselor Offender Rehabilitator with the Georgia Department of Corrections. Gina currently manages the treatment components of the Accountability Courts (DUI, Drug, and Family Treatment Courts) in Gwinnett and Newton counties. She began her work with Accountability Courts in 2005 and has a passion for this work. Gina has a B.A. in Psychology, as well as an M.A. in Education/Community Counseling from the University of Georgia. Gina specializes in working with substance use disorders, gambling and other addictive diseases, as well as court mandated programs and clients.

**Monaleto C. Irby** has spent nearly 28 years working in the Youth Service Field in Alabama and Georgia. Mr. Irby has served in several capacities to include Case Manager (Mental Health), Counselor and Program Director (Drug Treatment Center), and Director (Youth ChalleNGe Academy) servicing youth in Alabama; before moving to Georgia in 2007. He is currently employed with Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice for 15 years serving as a Juvenile Probation/Parole Specialist for almost 4 years before moving to the Office of Training, where he has served as a Regional Training Coordinator for the Southern and Northern Regions. Irby also served as the Program Coordinator for the Basic Community Service Training (Probation/Parole Specialist) from 2014-2016. Irby was most recently the Training Program Manager for the Northern Region. In February 2022, Irby was promoted to Deputy Director in the Office of Professional Development, where he has oversight of Field Operations Team. Irby also currently serves on the Office of Professional Development Advisory Team. He also served 6 years on the agency's Policy Committee. Irby earned his Master Training Instructor Certification through the Georgia Peace Officer Standard and Training (P.O.S.T.). Irby also made good on a vision and started his own business in May of 2020. Motivated Intervention Solutions, LLC. Focused on Leadership and Staff Development Training. He is invested in his community and lends a great deal of time speaking to groups on at-risk youth behaviors, facilitating at youth summits and youth conferences on gang activity/violence, and bullying. Irby is often featured as a guest panelist at boy's self-improvement conferences as well as mentorship conferences. Irby is dedicated to encouraging youth to seek their full potential and training youth service workers on the best practices of dealing with at risk youth and their families. Irby believes in encouraging youth and challenging them to face their fears and overcome obstacles. He is often quoted as saying, "I encourage, because I was encouraged". He is the current Ministry Lead for The Circle of Sons a boy's mentoring group at his church. Irby is a member of Georgia Juvenile Services Association, American Probation Parole Association (APPA) and National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice (NABCJ). Irby is the Immediate Past Georgia State Director for Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc (2019-2023) and current International Director of Collegiate Affairs. He is married to his beautiful wife Charlisa Irby and has one daughter, Kaelyn.



**Douglas Jackson** is a CASA volunteer and resiliency trainer dba Resilience Rising! in Northeast Georgia. During his thirty years of social work, Dr. Jackson has conducted social science research, evaluation of practice, quality assurance and written grants. Dr. Jackson facilitated the introduction of Trauma Informed Yoga into Department of Juvenile Justice facilities. Dr. Jackson is a certified trainer in the Community Resiliency Model® (CRM) and has participated in CRM trainings across Georgia. Dr. Jackson is also a certified Mindfulness Teacher. Dr. Jackson received his bachelor's degree in Political Science at Northwestern University and his Masters and doctorate in Social Work at the University of Georgia. His dissertation examined factors that predict which juveniles will become involved in episodes of self-harm and/or fights. Dr. Jackson is married to Laura Leiden and has two grown children, and three grandchildren.

**Dr. Witni N. Jackson** is a seasoned social work professional with over a decade of experience in mental health, crisis intervention, and program management. She holds a Doctorate in Social Work from Capella University, a Master of Social Work from Georgia State University, and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Spelman College. Dr. Jackson's expertise spans various sectors, including veteran services, mental health care, and community outreach. Currently working as an outpatient mental health professional, Dr. Jackson plays a pivotal role in suicide prevention and mental health services, providing crucial support and navigation services for veterans. She is a recognized subject matter expert offering education and consultation to both internal and external stakeholders. In addition, Dr. Jackson is the CEO and Founder at Kuna Consulting, LLC, where she designs and delivers accredited educational programs for social workers, professional counselors and addiction therapists across Georgia. She also provides clinical supervision and consultation as needed. Her dedication to education and training has equipped numerous clinicians with the skills needed to excel in their fields.

**Dr. Hamida Jinnah** is the Director of Applied Research and Evaluation Unit (REU) and a Research Faculty member at the Ralston Center on Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities at the University of Georgia. She is the principal investigator on several federal and state grants and contracts related to applied research, needs assessments, program development and evaluation focusing on behavioral health and intellectual and developmental disabilities. She leads the evaluation of the Opioid Abatement Settlement Fund Grants in Georgia. AREU is using a data-driven approach to measure the impact of grants from the state's opioid settlement funds to reduce overdoses and deaths, and increase recovery supports.

**Amber Johnson** is a Community Program Assistant at Augusta University supporting the State Opioid Response (SOR) College Adopt-A-School initiative in partnership with the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD). She coordinates technical assistance, training logistics, and reporting for universities implementing youth substance use prevention programs through peer mentorship. Prior to Augusta University, Amber spent over a decade in public service with the State of Georgia supporting children, families, and vulnerable adults.

**Elder Andrew O. Jones Jr., BS, MA,** is a faith-based recovery leader, author, and counselor dedicated to helping individuals overcome life-controlling issues and experience lasting restoration. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Marketing from Morgan State University and a Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling from Luther Rice Seminary. An Elder at Berean Christian Church, he has served in numerous leadership roles including Pastoral Care, Counseling Ministry, Men's Ministry, and small group facilitation. Elder Jones is the author of *From Ashes to Anointing*, a memoir chronicling his personal recovery journey. As the creator of the Believe For It Restoration Support Group, he integrates faith, accountability, and community support to promote sustainable recovery and restored purpose. His work reflects both professional training and personal experience, allowing him to connect authentically with individuals navigating recovery. Elder Jones lives each day committed to recovery, service, and helping others find hope beyond addiction. He is the devoted husband of Monica Jones, father of Terrell and Kristina, and grandfather of Seth. His life and ministry reflect a deep commitment to guiding others from brokenness to restoration.

**Dr. Sazid Khan** is a program manager in RTI International's Center for Behavioral Health and Well Being. Dr. Khan works on projects focusing on programmatic evaluation, epidemiological consultation, and training and technical assistance (TTA). He also provides subject matter expertise across RTI, including for the Justice and Data Science practice areas. Before joining RTI, he was the state epidemiologist at the South Carolina Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services, where he chaired the state epidemiological outcomes workgroup, the governor's Opioid Emergency Response Team (OERT) Data Committee, and other statewide coalitions focused on substance use. Additionally, Dr. Khan has training and experience in data analysis and reporting; program evaluation; using geographic information systems (GIS); data visualization; providing TA to an array of stakeholders; and survey development, coordination and analysis.

**Dr. Kym Leonard** is a Board-Certified Doctor of Nursing Practice who partners with local, national, and international governments and communities to advance awareness in mental health, addiction, and preventive medicine. With more than three decades of experience spanning primary care, mental and behavioral health, corporate healthcare, community health, and education, Dr. Kym brings a rare, comprehensive perspective to healthcare transformation. Her healthcare career includes working with a Fortune 500 health insurance company, hospitals, clinics and now a private practice-giving her unique insight into what is truly required to reform how healthcare is delivered. Dr. Kym formerly chaired a Rotary-sponsored Opioid Awareness Task Force, where she led the development of impactful marketing and media campaigns for school systems, communities, and local and state governments. She also wrote and directed a short educational film designed to warn adolescents and adults about the dangers of opioid misuse. As a servant-leader in the Gospel and a motivational speaker, Dr. Kym educates diverse audiences on whole-person care-addressing the interconnectedness of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. She is the founder of GKM Training Institute which serves in three divisions: The School of Counseling, the School of Ministry, and Healthcare Studies. She has led and continues to lead, train, and serve in national and international Healthcare and Economic missions. Dr. Kym is a published author and has co-authored research featured in a Johns Hopkins medical journal. Her academic background includes several undergrad degrees, a degree in Clinical Psychology, master's degrees in Education, and Leadership, and Master Addiction Counselor certification. She completed her post master's Nurse Practitioner education at the University of Massachusetts at Boston and earned her Doctor of Nursing Practice from Chamberlain University in Illinois.

**Kim Linkel** is a seasoned nonprofit and public-sector leader with more than 25 years of experience advancing prevention, coalition building, and organizational development across diverse communities. As Principal of KM Clark Consulting Group, Kim partners with nonprofit organizations, community coalitions, and government agencies to strengthen systems, build capacity, and achieve sustainable community impact through strategic planning, grant management, and organizational development. Kim previously served as Director of the Coalition for a Drug Free Batesville, where she led cross-sector initiatives focused on youth substance use prevention, secured federal and state funding, and implemented innovative youth engagement and community mobilization strategies. She currently serves as a coach on CADCA's Coalition Development Support Team, providing technical assistance to coalitions nationwide on Strategic Prevention Framework implementation, coalition effectiveness, and systems-level change. Kim is also a consultant with the Opioid Response Network, delivering training and technical assistance to communities addressing substance misuse and behavioral health challenges. Kim holds a Master's degree in Leadership Development from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College and serves on the Board of Directors for the So Loved Closet, supporting efforts to ensure youth in Southeastern Indiana have access to life's daily essentials. She is committed to helping organizations build authentic partnerships and lasting community-driven change.

**Shirley Liu** is an analyst at RTI International whose research focuses primarily on mental health and substance use programming. She has experience in mixed methods research and survey development and serves as data manager and analyst on several state and federally funded evaluations. Ms. Liu has served as a project coordinator for Georgia



Partners in Prevention Project and Georgia Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention Project since 2021. On these evaluations, she has assisted in technical assistance, data collection, analysis, and reporting.

**Holly Lynde** serves as the Executive Director of Georgia's Opioid Crisis Abatement Trust at the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Development Disabilities. In this role, she is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Trust, including facilitating an annual competitive grant process to distribute more than \$1 billion Georgia will receive from settlements with opioid manufacturers, distributors, and others over the next two decades. Holly came to the Trust after 10 years with the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government, where she established and grew their justice initiatives body of work. This work included projects focused on the intersection of criminal justice and mental health, as well as civil access to justice. Her clients included the Supreme Court of Georgia, the Georgia General Assembly, the Council of Accountability Court Judges, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, and more than three dozen county governments. Her work also included projects funded by grants from Public Welfare Foundation, the Vera Institute for Justice, and the Center for Court Innovation. As a certified Sequential Intercept Model facilitator, Holly's workshops generated millions in grant, federal, and county funding to reduce the number of people with a mental illness who are incarcerated and connect them to resources. Holly has decades of experience in fiscal and public policy analysis and has worked for the Appropriations Committee of the Washington State House of Representatives, as well as management consulting firm, Booz Allen Hamilton. Holly has a bachelor's degree from Bucknell University and a master's degree from The London School of Economic and Political Science.

**Willie Marion** is a respected Public Safety Training Instructor for the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice. Being certified as a Senior Training Instructor by the State of Georgia Peace Officer Standards and Training Council, a Resiliency Instructor, and a certified Verbal Judo through the Verbal Judo Institute, he facilitates effective basic and specialized training programs in support of the agency's mission, effectively enhancing the safety, security, and skills of his DJJ colleagues and partners. Mr. Marion's experience in safety and security, as well as with incarcerated juveniles, stems from his tenure as a certified Juvenile Correctional Officer. Mr. Marion is also in the process of attaining his certification as a certified Christian Counselor to help the disadvantaged youth who may have suffered from the same childhood trauma that he was subject to, but ultimately overcame and healed from. After his childhood trauma and disadvantages, Mr. Marion dedicated himself to advocating for change in his community and uplifting those who are underserved by mentoring youth, volunteering at the local Youth Detention Center, and providing goods and services to youth and adults through his Miracles, Signs and Wonders organization.

**Xaren McClain**, GC4R MPS Peer Recovery Coach, is a Certified Peer Specialist for Addictive Disease (CPS-AD) (CARES) who brings compassion, authenticity, and lived experience to her work in healthcare and recovery. A driven and passionate professional, she is recognized for her creativity, resilience, and ability to form genuine connections. Committed to personal growth and purposeful service, Xaren approaches every role with empathy, insight, and dedication. Before her work in recovery, Xaren spent many years as a surgical technologist, where she developed a deep respect for precision, teamwork, and compassionate care. The healthcare environment feels like home to her, a place where she thrives and finds purpose supporting peers, patients, and professionals alike. Beyond her professional life, Xaren's most fulfilling role is being a mother to her three sons, Alexander, Issac (Boogie), and Jaxen. They are her inspiration and the heartbeat behind everything she does. She pours her energy and love into raising them with encouragement, strength, and grace, embodying the same compassion she brings to her work. Music also plays a defining role in Xaren's life. The artistry and emotional power of Michael Jackson have long inspired her, providing both comfort and motivation. Whether she's coaching peers, enjoying music, or spending time with her family, Xaren leads with love, loyalty, and integrity. At her core, she is a woman of strength and purpose, devoted to her sons and dedicated to making a positive impact in the lives and communities she serves.

**Maura McGowan**, CPS, is the Program Director of the NH Teen Institute, a non-profit agency whose mission is to empower youth through personal leadership development and community engagement. Maura has worked in the field of prevention since 2002 and became involved with the NH Teen Institute in 2008 when she began volunteering for programs and working on a curriculum updating and development board. In 2017, Maura became Program Director in charge of youth programming and volunteer engagement in addition to being a facilitator for professional development trainings offered by the NH Teen Institute. She is a graduate of the New England ATTC Leadership Development Program and has served as a mentor in the New England PTTC Prevention Mentorship Program during its first two cohorts. In 2021, Maura was appointed as an advisor to the NH Governor's Youth Advisory Council, is on the advisory committee for the NH Prevention Community of Practice, and in 2025 joined the NH Prevention Certification Board.

**Joseph McNeill** is a Mixed Methods Evaluator/Researcher who has experience in evaluating Substance Abuse projects, Opioid Use Disorder projects, First Responder projects and trainings Programs, Community Resilience projects, and Criminal Justice projects. Joseph graduated from West Virginia University with a Master's of Arts in Program Evaluation and Research.

**Tricia Mills** is a Senior Associate in Mercer's Government Human Services Consulting (GHSC) group, part of Mercer Health and Benefits LLC (Mercer), where she is a Substance Use Disorder Clinical Specialist. Tricia holds both her Bachelor and Master's degrees in psychology from California State University, Chico and is a master addiction counselor and certified addiction counselor with the Board of Georgia. Tricia has dedicated over 20 years to children and families receiving services from the public behavioral health service delivery systems. She began her career as a facilitator with families experiencing complex and unique needs who were involved with multiple child serving agencies such as behavioral health (mental health and substance abuse), education, child welfare, and juvenile justice. After a decade of experience with community based organizations and direct care work with children and families she transitioned to State Government. Tricia has worked for both Georgia and the District of Columbia State Government building Systems of Care for children and families including service, program, infrastructure, policy, finance, and workforce capacity development. By combining the community based experience and state government skill sets, she has a solid knowledge-base to skillfully navigate systems while supporting families increase functioning and obtain positive outcomes at home, school/work and in the community.

**Kelly Michael Moselle**, a Certified Addiction Counselor, currently serves as the Director of Training and Education for Georgia Addiction Counselors Association. Kelly formerly served as Director of Administration at LPCA of GA. During his previous experiences facilitating innovative programs in higher education for over 16 years, he oriented students to learning outside the traditional classroom, building civic and social responsibility, and overall development. He brings this same passion to working with clients in early recovery. For the past several years, he has worked in the residential recovery field and helped many college students discover their path in sobriety. He currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Frayed Edges Foundation and the Georgia School of Addiction Studies. Additionally, he is the Chair for the Southeastern Institute on Chemical Dependency and Secretary for the Southeastern Professional Liaison Association. Whether supervising professional staff, building recovery coalitions, or working directly with individual clients or students, his dedication is the creation of an optimal experience for positive growth and recovery.

**Ted Mulherin** serves as General Manager for Prospectus Group. Mr. Mulherin began with Prospectus Group seven years ago as Training Coordinator where he delivered training and technical assistance to Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) prevention providers. Upon receiving his Master of Public Health (MPH) degree from Georgia Southern University, Mr. Mulherin completed his MPH Practicum with The Council on Alcohol and Drugs, a non-profit substance use prevention agency in Atlanta, GA, serving as Intern in delivering surveillance and environmental scans for Fayette County, GA. Mr. Mulherin was shortly hired thereafter with Gwinnett



United in Drug Education, Inc. (GUIDE, Inc.), a non-profit substance use prevention agency, and served as Program Assistant for their Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention Project (ASAPP) for six months. Mr. Mulherin took the role of Training Coordinator with Prospectus Group, thereafter. For two years as Training Coordinator, Mr. Mulherin prepared and delivered training of the Ecco system to DBHDD prevention providers, as well as, training of accredited courses as designated by DBHDD. Mr. Mulherin was promoted to General Manager of Prospectus Group in 2021, where he oversees training and technical assistance and health promotion for DBHDD provider work. His role as General Manager includes project implementation and analysis, data analysis, web- conferencing, public health approaches, cultural proficiency, evidence-based or informed approaches and substance use and mental health prevention.

**Monica Nandan** is the Director of Strategic Partnerships and Social Impact, WellStar College of Health and Human Services, and Professor of Social Work at Kennesaw State University. Her academic training is in accounting, business management, health care administration and social work. She has been in academic leadership roles for eight years, has served the community in various capacities, and has published (journal articles, book chapters, a co-edited book and journal) in diverse fields of social innovation and entrepreneurship, interprofessional education, cross-sector alliances, gerontology, and health care. She co-edited a book (2019) titled "Social Entrepreneurship, Intrapreneurship and Social Value Creation: Relevance for Contemporary Social Work Practice" Washington, DC: NASW Press; and she co-edited a Human Service Organization Journal's Special Issue (2025): Social Innovation, Social Enterprise, and Social Entrepreneurship in Social Work and Human Services. She has been involved in the behavioral health, substance and opioid misuse arena for the past nine years, engaging with stakeholders from all sectors and fields, with design thinking perspective and protocol, to help identify and understand the existing system. In this arena, she has received six grants from the Georgia Department of Public Health, Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, Cobb County District Attorney, Cobb County Fire Department, Department of Education, and HRSA.

**Michael Nerney** is a consultant in substance abuse prevention and education, with over thirty years' experience in the field. As the former Director of the Training Institute of Narcotic and Drug Research, Inc. (NDRI), his responsibilities included the management of a statewide training system which delivered more than 450 training programs to substance abuse treatment and prevention professionals annually. Mike's particular areas of expertise include Psychopharmacology, Adolescent Chemical Dependency, Relapse Prevention, Gender Differences in Communication, and Managing Violent Incidents. He is an internationally known lecturer and has served as consultant to several federal and state agencies. He has been a consultant for two of the major television networks and has appeared on the ABC program "20/20.

**Dr. Merrill Norton** is a Clinical Associate Professor at the University of Georgia College of Pharmacy with his specialty areas to include psychopharmacology and addiction pharmacy. He has also been a faculty member of the Fairleigh-Dickinson University Postdoctoral Training Program in the Masters of Psychopharmacology, Alliant International University of San Francisco College of Psychology, University of Georgia School of Continuing Education, and Berry College in the areas of Psychopharmacology and Addiction Pharmacy. His area of specialty in addiction pharmacy is the management of chronic pain in the substance use disordered patient. Dr. Norton completed his undergraduate and graduate work at the University of Georgia College of Pharmacy. He accomplished a 3 year addiction medicine fellowship under the direction of Douglas Talbott MD at Ridgeview Institute and has state, national, and international credentials in the treatment of mentally ill/addicted/chronic pain individuals. Recently, Dr. Norton received an Emmy from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences' Southeastern Chapter for his work on the Spanish language documentary Prescription Drugs, Legally Dangerous. The award was presented to a collaboration of experts in the field of addiction pharmacy and medicine for their participation and contributions to the production, which describes the dangers of prescription drug abuse in Latino populations. His new books, The Pharmacology of Substance Use Disorders and The Practitioners' Guide to Opioid Use Disorders were released in December 2018.

**Dawn Oparah** is the Executive Director for Fayette FACTOR, Inc. a non-profit organization committed to monitoring and helping improve the health and well-being of the Fayette County community as part of the GA Family Connection Partnership. She has spent over 45 years working in the human services field. In 1995, Dawn co-founded Amadi Leadership Associates, Inc., a consulting firm that offered training and consultation in organizational development, community capacity building, management, leadership development, school improvement strategies, and human development. For over three decades, Dawn has provided technical support to non-profit organizations in the areas of organizational improvement, board development, sustainability planning, strategic planning, marketing, program planning, evaluation, and resource development. Prior to becoming a consultant Dawn served as a university administrator and instructor, schoolteacher, school principal, government administrator, and a college lecturer abroad. Dawn is the author of the book "Make a World of Difference: 50 Asset-Building Activities to Help Teens Explore Diversity". Dawn also co-authored a chapter in the book Empowerment Evaluation in 2015. Over the course of her career, Dawn has served on 26 local, regional and statewide boards. Dawn is also a co-founder for AVPRIDE, a youth leadership development organization now in its 30th year. Dawn has been a resident of Georgia for 40 years. She has been married to her husband Bernard for 48 years, and is the proud parent of two sons and two daughters and the loving grandmother of four.

**Dr. Latessa Marie Pearson** is a prevention professional dedicated to advancing behavioral health and strengthening communities through evidence-based prevention strategies. She holds a Doctor of Arts in Humanities from Clark Atlanta University, a Master of Science in Developmental Education, Guidance and Counseling from Grambling State University, and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Tougaloo College. With over a decade of experience in public health, behavioral health, and prevention systems, Dr. Pearson specializes in program development, implementation, and evaluation of youth-centered prevention initiatives. Her work includes oversight of prevention programming, data-informed decision-making, stakeholder engagement, and ensuring alignment with state and federally funded initiatives. Dr. Pearson is committed to expanding access to effective prevention services, strengthening protective factors among youth and families, and supporting community-based organizations in delivering high-quality, sustainable programs.

**Meghann Perry**, CARC, RCPF, has worked at the intersection of peer support, education, arts and behavioral health for over a decade and is known internationally for her work with storytelling and stigma as well as with young people. Meghann develops curricula and interventions for substance and mental health settings across the full spectrum of prevention, harm reduction and recovery and for organizations like NIH, NIDA, NAADAC, HRSA, and the Hazelden Foundation. She leads a team of talented, dedicated facilitators redefining education and intervention for all ages in the substance and mental health field at Meghann Perry Group.

**Taylor Peyton** is a public health professional specializing in substance use disorder, mental health, and co-occurring disorders, with over a decade of experience across state government, nonprofit systems, and academic institutions. She began her career in Detroit working in reentry services and has since worked across the substance use continuum, including prevention, treatment, recovery, and research, with a focus on improving access, strengthening systems, and aligning policy and funding with measurable impact. She holds a Master of Public Health from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and dual bachelor's degrees in Political Science and Economics from the Wayne State University. She also brings lived experience with substance use disorder, informing a practical and systems-oriented approach to behavioral health policy and program design

**Sandra V. Phillips** is a Licensed Professional Counselor in Georgia with over 20 years of experience in the behavioral health field. She holds multiple credentials, including CADC II, ICADC, SAP, CGS, and NCC. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of West Georgia and later completed two master's degrees (M.Ed. and M.S.) from Troy University. She is the owner of Transformation Behavioral Health, LLC, a private group practice serving diverse populations. A trauma specialist trained in PTSD, CPT, and EMDR, Ms. Phillips provides critical incident mental health response



throughout the CSRA for insurance companies and employee assistance programs. She is also a Star Behavioral Health Provider, serving military members, veterans, and their families. Ms. Phillips is the Founder of Transformation Training Institute, Inc. (TTI), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and NBCC Approved Continuing Education Provider (ACEP), offering training on multicultural, diversity, and behavioral health topics. She is a passionate presenter who finds joy in educating and empowering others while also learning from those she serves. She believes true transformation begins with the renewing of the mind.

**Michelle Provost** is a Licensed Professional Counselor in South Carolina, psychology instructor, and behavioral health leader with over 16 years of experience in higher education and community-based mental health. She serves as a Faculty Athletic Representative at Claflin University and Project Director for a SAMHSA-funded Mental Health Awareness Training (MHAT) grant at LRADAC, where she leads initiatives focused on mental health literacy, suicide prevention, and trauma-informed care across rural and underserved communities. Michelle is a certified Youth and Adult Mental Health First Aid Instructor with specialized experience in higher education, K–12 schools, rural communities, and public safety populations. Since becoming an instructor in 2016, she has trained nearly 1,000 individuals and has secured multiple grant-funded initiatives, including the development and implementation of a STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH LIAISON MODEL within Orangeburg County schools to expand peer support and increase access to care. She holds a degree in Counseling Psychology from Radford University and is the founder of *\_Fulfilling Minds\_*, a private practice grounded in trauma-informed and holistic approaches to wellness. Her work integrates prevention and intervention through an ecological and strengths-based lens, emphasizing connection, access, and sustainability.

**Sandy Queen** has been a presenter at Schools for Alcohol and Drug studies for over 40 years. She has worked with youth and adults throughout the United States and abroad for over 45 years and is known for helping clinicians and clients take a different look at the difficult area of substance use and recovery. She is the recipient of the Halbert Dunn Award, presented by the University of Wisconsin to the most outstanding Wellness Practitioner. Sandy is dedicated to or bringing humor and creativity to even the most serious topics. Her motto: You are Good Stuff! Sandy lives in Columbia, Maryland, and is active in her local community in the areas of mental health, addiction, youth enhancement and spiritual growth and joy.

**Emily Ribblett**, MBA, Certified Peer Specialist – Addictive Diseases (CPS-AD), went through CARES #24 (Certified Addiction Recovery Empowerment Specialist) in 2017. Emily has been in long term recovery since 2015 (10 years). Emily is also a Certified Peer Specialist – Mental Health (CPS-MH). Emily currently serves as the Assistant Executive Director for The Georgia Council for Recovery (GC4R). She has worked on grant funded projects in partnership with the Georgia Department of Public Health, Augusta University, Mercer University, The Department of Behavioral Health, and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, and other organizations. Emily has overseen two successful federal Building Communities of Recovery (BCOR) SAMHSA grants. In her current role, Emily supports all aspects of GC4R with particular focus on finance and administration.

**Darrell Robinson** has worked for the University of Georgia (UGA) Carl Vinson Institute of Government since 2018 where he has served as a research professional in the Survey Research and Evaluation Support division. As a research professional, Darrell provides support in the designing, data collection & analysis, and reporting of multiple survey and evaluation projects. Prior to joining the Institute of Government, Darrell worked in the UGA College of Public Health where he spent five years as a research professional on grant-funded research and evaluation projects. Darrell received a bachelor's degree in psychology from UGA and a master of science degree in psychology from Augusta University.

**Dr. LaTreece Roby** is accomplished leader in community health, suicide prevention, and substance use prevention. She currently serves as the Director of Secondary Programs with Sources of Strength, bringing over two decades of experience in public health, health education, and policy advocacy. As a Certified Prevention

Specialist and international facilitator, LaTreece is known for her powerful ability to inspire change through evidence-based strategies and community-driven solutions. LaTreece serves on the board of Path to Hope Georgia and previously served on the board of Georgians for Responsible Marijuana Policy, where she championed responsible policy development and systemic change. LaTreece has served as Executive Director for Cobb Community Alliance to Prevent Substance Abuse, guiding prevention workgroups across Georgia. Her collaborations with institutions like Kennesaw State University have included training college students to deliver suicide and substance use prevention services across urban, suburban, and rural communities. LaTreece obtained her Doctor of Education in Teaching & Learning in Higher Education while her dissertation research focused on community involvement in bridging gaps in school-based prevention programs. LaTreece is passionate about empowering youth, strengthening adult-youth connections, and promoting equity in access to behavioral health resources. Her work continues to leave a lasting impact on schools, campuses, and communities across the country.

**Ari Russell** is a prevention consultant who has worked with communities and coalitions throughout Georgia to develop comprehensive prevention plans and apply for federal substance use prevention grants. She was the founding Executive Director of GUIDE, Inc., a community-based substance abuse prevention agency, serving in that role for over 28 years. During that time, she founded the Georgia Teen Institute, a youth leadership and empowerment initiative that prepares youth action teams to actively participate in strategic prevention planning and implementation. She was a co-founder of the Prevention Credentialing Consortium of Georgia, holds the Internationally Certified Prevention Specialist credential and serves as the board's administrator.

**Dr. Brian Simmons** is a Public Service Assistant in the Institute of Government's Survey Research and Evaluation Unit, where he has supported organizations across Georgia since 2013. His work centers on helping partners use evaluation and data more effectively to strengthen programs, improve services, and make informed decisions. Dr. Simmons specializes in developing practical, improvement-focused evaluation strategies through working closely with clients to clarify their questions, design meaningful instruments, and select methods that generate actionable insights.

**Pallavi Singh** is a Research Associate II at the Georgia Health Policy Center, where she contributes to the State Opioid Response (SOR) project, the Substance Use Intensive Residential Treatment (SU-IRT) program, and the Georgia Apex Program (G.A.P.). In her role with the SOR project, she supports the implementation and evaluation of DBHDD-backed initiatives, including Sources of Strength, Adopt-a-School, and the First Responder Strategy. This strategy encompasses Naloxone First Responder Training and the State Opioid Response Adaptation (SOAR), delivered through the Georgia Public Safety Training Center (GPSTC). Pallavi specializes in developing evaluation frameworks, conducting qualitative and quantitative analyses, and translating data into actionable insights to enhance substance use prevention and school-based mental health services. Previously, as a Digital Health Intern at John Snow Research and Training Institute (JSI), she worked on the USAID-funded Momentum Integrated Health Resilience (MIHR) project, strengthening maternal and child health systems in international fragile healthcare settings. With over five years of experience in public health, health informatics, and data analytics, she is dedicated to leveraging data-driven strategies to improve healthcare systems and outcomes. She holds an MS in Health Informatics from Indiana University and a B.Sc. in Dental Surgery from People's University, India.

**Dr. Crystal Smalldon** is a nationally recognized addiction and mental health educator with over 20 years of experience training professionals across Canada and the United States. Her work spans clinical treatment, peer support, justice involved populations, and system level responses to addiction and mental health crises. Alongside her work in training and certification, Dr. Smalldon served with the Orlando Police Department, where she worked directly with individuals experiencing substance use disorders, mental illness, trauma, and acute crisis. That frontline law enforcement experience runs parallel to her training career and continues to directly inform her educational approach, ensuring it reflects real world conditions, risk, and decision making. She currently serves as Executive Director of the Alcohol



and Drug Abuse Certification Board of Georgia and Clinical Director of the Canadian Addiction Recovery Association, overseeing professional standards, ethics, and certification programs impacting thousands of practitioners. Dr. Small-don has developed and delivered hundreds of hours of education in addiction, co occurring disorders, trauma, ethics, peer support, and justice system collaboration. Her training is known for being practical, direct, and grounded in both clinical evidence and frontline system experience, with a focus on accountability, safety, and outcomes in high pressure environments.

**Amy Sorrells** is a communications professional with more than 25 years of digital communications, content creation, public relations, and marcomms experience spanning numerous industries including technology, healthcare, sports, and media. She currently leads global communications and marketing for Oracle's efforts focused supporting life sciences research and technology. She joined Oracle in May of 2012, as part of an acquisition of technology startup Vitruve. Prior to Oracle, she was a long-time communications consultant, working with numerous technology, healthcare and media clients. She also served in communications roles with Fox Cable Networks, CNN, Turner Sports, and USA Track & Field. Amy received her bachelor's degree from Auburn University and her master's in psychology from the University of Arizona global campus. She currently resides in Atlanta with her husband and two boys.

**Charlotte Spell** is a Certified Prevention Specialist with 24 years of dedicated experience in the fields of substance use and suicide prevention. As a Master Level trainer in the QPR Gatekeeper suicide prevention program, Ms. Spell provides vital education and training to help communities identify and respond to signs of suicidal behavior. She also serves as a consultant with the Opioid Response Network, supporting data-driven approaches to opioid misuse prevention. In her full-time capacity, Charlotte Spell is the Executive Director of Let's Be Clear, GA, a statewide organization dedicated to marijuana prevention education. Through this role, she continues to lead efforts to inform and protect Georgia's communities from the risks associated with cannabis use. She received her formal education from Georgia Southern University as a Double Eagle and her informal education from her two kids, Joshua and Brooklynn!

**Bernetta Sweet** is a Regional Prevention Specialist with the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), serving Regions 4 and 6. In her role, she leads and supports community-based prevention efforts by providing technical assistance, managing regional prevention contracts, and collaborating with providers, coalitions, and community stakeholders to implement evidence-based strategies that reduce substance misuse and strengthen behavioral health outcomes. A proud veteran of the United States Army, Bernetta brings a strong foundation of leadership, discipline, and service to her work. Her passion for substance use prevention is deeply personal, rooted in her own family experiences, which continue to drive her commitment to supporting individuals and families impacted by addiction. With a professional background in the treatment field, including her leadership as a Program Director, Bernetta brings a well-rounded perspective across the full continuum of care, from prevention to treatment. She is especially passionate about homeless prevention and advocating for vulnerable populations through community-centered, sustainable solutions. In addition to her professional work, Bernetta is an accomplished speaker and community leader who is dedicated to empowering others, strengthening communities, and creating lasting impact through prevention.

**Kevin Tanner** is the Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities. He has served as county manager of Forsyth County and served four terms as a State Representative for District 9. He has spent thirty-four years in public service. Commissioner Tanner received his undergraduate degree from North Georgia College and State University and earned his Master of Public Administration from Columbus State University. He has been heavily involved in community and civic activities in the North Georgia area for many years. Commissioner Tanner and his wife Stacie have been married more than twenty-four years. Stacie is a public school kindergarten teacher, and they are the proud parents of three daughters: Kaitlyn, Abbie, and Chloe. He serves as a Deacon and Sunday school teacher at Bethel Baptist Church where his family has attended for seven generations.

**Samson Teklemariam**, LPC, CPTM, is the Vice President of Clinical Services for Behavioral Health Group (BHG), where he oversees integrated treatment and counseling services across 22 states. He is a nationally recognized clinical leader and workforce development expert in addiction treatment, mental health, and recovery services. Samson has worked across correctional settings, community mental health, and substance use treatment programs, and now guides large-scale clinical initiatives that increasingly emphasize prevention and early intervention as essential pillars of care. He previously served as Director of Training and Professional Development for NAADAC, where he led national initiatives on clinical supervision and co-occurring conditions. He currently serves as the Southeast Regional Vice President for NAADAC and on the Advisory Council for the NBCC. With a focus on elevating care quality and workforce capacity, Samson brings a collaborative, prevention-informed lens to improving outcomes in behavioral health.

**Damien Tillman** is a dynamic project director, workshop facilitator, author, and consultant in the non-profit and education sectors. Based in Brooklyn, NY, and holding a master's degree in education, Damien has spent over 20 years designing and leading initiatives that empower individuals and communities to create their own solutions. A proven innovator, Damien has led statewide efforts to connect mental health resources with Christian, Muslim, and Jewish faith communities across Georgia, including presenting at the prestigious Georgia School of Addiction Studies (GSAS) Conference. His work spans partnerships with non-profit executives, school administrators, and teaching artists to develop innovative programs, resources, and curricula serving diverse populations in both New York City and Georgia. Driven by a belief in equity, collaboration, and measurable impact, Damien continues to design strategies and lead projects that transform challenges into sustainable opportunities for growth.

**Martha S. Tingen**, PhD, RN, is a Professor of Medicine and Pediatrics at the Medical College of Georgia and the Georgia Cancer Center at Augusta University. Her research focuses on cancer prevention, tobacco prevention and cessation, and addressing health disparities in under-resourced populations through community-based interventions. She has led multiple federal and state-funded initiatives targeting substance misuse prevention, cancer prevention, and early detection by screening, and improving youth and family health outcomes.

**Elizabeth “Lizz” Toledo** is a dynamic and inspiring voice in the fields of social justice, advocacy, and trauma recovery. With over four decades of experience, Lizz brings unparalleled expertise and a deeply personal commitment to creating systemic change. Her journey—from growing up in a working-class immigrant family in Hartford, Connecticut, to becoming a world-renowned trauma therapist—embodies resilience, empowerment, and hope. Lizz is not just a speaker; she is a movement builder. Her presentations ignite conversations that matter—on equity, liberation, and healing. Audiences leave her sessions informed, inspired, and equipped with actionable strategies to foster inclusive communities and dismantle systems of oppression. Areas of Expertise • Social Justice and Advocacy: 45 years of activism in movements for liberation and equity. • Trauma Recovery: Global leader in therapeutic approaches for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and complex trauma. • Community Empowerment: Proven track record in developing programs for marginalized communities, including LGBTQ2S individuals, communities of color, and survivors of violence.

**LaShonda Tucker**, LMSW, is a Licensed Master Social Worker with a Master of Social Work from the University of Georgia, a Master of Science in Conflict Management from Kennesaw State University, and a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Michigan. She integrates clinical practice with creative expression to support trauma-informed care and promote healing in individuals with complex life experiences. With over nine years of experience, LaShonda has worked across adult day programs, nonprofit organizations, hospital settings, and the court system. Her clinical work includes psychoeducation, crisis intervention, assessments, discharge planning, and resource coordination, helping individuals build practical skills to navigate mental health and life challenges. She currently serves as a Group Counselor at an Atlanta-based substance use disorder (SUD) treatment facility, where she works with adults experiencing co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders. In her role, she incorporates expressive arts interventions—



including poetry, music, and reflective writing—to help clients explore trauma, identify maladaptive coping patterns, and engage in cognitive and emotional processing. LaShonda has developed and facilitated creative writing-based groups that support narrative reframing, emotional regulation, and self-expression within therapeutic settings. Her work emphasizes reducing shame, increasing self-awareness, and fostering connection—key components of recovery-oriented care. In addition to her clinical work, LaShonda is a writer, spoken word artist, and published author. She brings a unique interdisciplinary approach that blends behavioral health, education, and the arts to create engaging, transformative experiences for both clients and professionals.

**Brandon Warrick** is a Program Coordinator at Augusta University’s Medical College of Georgia (MCG), where he provides technical support, training, financial, and programmatic oversight for the State Opioid Response (SOR) College Adopt-A-School (CAAS) initiative, which currently partners with seven University System of Georgia institutions. He previously oversaw the state’s Suicide Prevention initiative, also with MCG, which facilitated three suicide prevention coalitions. Brandon is a certified Question Persuade Refer (QPR) instructor and a Master Trainer for Hope Squad, an evidence-based, school-based suicide prevention program that empowers youth to provide intentional outreach to their peers. He brings over eight years of experience in health and wellness promotion. Brandon will also complete his MBA in August 2026.

**Eric Michael Watts** is an experienced clinical leader with a strong foundation in community behavioral health, serving in roles ranging from Mental Health Clinician to Clinical Director within organizations dedicated to accessible, research-informed care. His career includes years of direct service in county jails, hospitals, crisis response programs, and community-based treatment centers, where he has worked to expand high-quality services for individuals facing complex mental health and substance use challenges. He is exceptionally committed to advocating for justice-involved and economically marginalized populations, drawing on deep experience building community partnerships and developing programs that improve outcomes for underserved clients. He brings a leadership style grounded in collaboration, integrity, and a belief in the transformative power of accessible behavioral healthcare.

**Aneesha Webster** brings over 15 years of experience in behavioral health, reentry services, and crisis response across state and local systems. She currently serves as the State Opioid Response Specialist at the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, where she leads implementation of statewide opioid prevention strategies, monitors program performance, and provides technical assistance to community providers. Her background includes supervising emotional support programs, coordinating care for justice-involved populations, and trauma-informed services for youth. Aneesha holds a Master’s degree in Forensic Psychology from the Chicago School of Professional Psychology and has a strong commitment to advancing community-based prevention and intervention efforts. She is a U.S. Army veteran and passionate about enhancing systems of care for vulnerable populations.

**Danyale Weems**, LCSW, RPTS, RST C/T (Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Registered Play Therapy Supervisor, Registered Sand Tray Therapist Consultant/Trainer), is a trauma focused group practice in West Georgia, USA. She is a certified AutPlay and TF-CBT Therapist. She specializes in working with children, adolescents adults and families who are experiencing complex trauma, have neurodevelopmental challenges, and addictions among many other mental health difficulties. Danyale integrates play therapy, sand tray therapy, expressive arts, and somatic experiences with EMDR. Danyale is certified in Childhood Dissociation. Danyale is currently pursuing a certification in litigation with abuse and neglect cases (coercive control, conflictual divorce cases). Danyale has advanced training and education in providing addiction treatment to adolescents, juveniles and adults. She began her career with juveniles, co-occurring adolescents in residential treatment and adults in outpatient methadone maintenance programs. Danyale provides clinical supervision and consultation across the country and

trains locally, nationally and internationally on a variety of topics specific to children, teens, play therapy, neurodivergence, trauma and EMDR

**Carlos Whittaker** is a best-selling author, expert storyteller, and impactful speaker to all kinds of audiences- from auditors to teachers to non-profit leaders to dermatologists. No matter who you are, his message is for you. Carlos uses his vast and varied personal life experience to captivate and engage audiences in ways that few else can. Whether your team is suffering from burnout, conflict, distraction, or disengagement, Carlos is sure to reinvigorate them with insight, humor, and inspiration. With his person-oriented talks, *How to Human* and *Moment Maker*, Carlos will remind your organization that when we are good to ourselves, we can be even better for others. Humans do not exist in the vacuum of the workplace, so when we address the things going on in the background, we create a greater capacity for relationships, work, creativity, and patience. Carlos will equip your team to become not just better employees, but better coworkers, leaders, friends, parents, spouses, and, most importantly, better humans. Join Carlos and countless others in the pursuit of being human together. He and his wife Heather live in Nashville, Tennessee, with their three amazing children, where you can find them working on the family farm, planning trips around the world, and dancing to Single Ladies (seriously, Google it).

**Dr. Nicole Wiesen** is a public health-trained social worker, trauma specialist, and national speaker whose work centers on the intersection of incarceration, trauma, addiction, and reentry. She is the creator of the Post-Incarceration Syndrome (PICS) framework and the founder of *\_Returning Her Home\_*, a trauma-informed transitional housing program for justice-impacted women. Dr. Wiesen brings extensive experience in behavioral health, community-based reentry, and systems-level training, and regularly presents on trauma-responsive care, recovery-oriented practice, and public health approaches to justice involvement.

**Andrew Williamson** serves as the Program Coordinator for LGBTQIA+ Substance Abuse Prevention. He joined GUIDE in January of 2023. Andrew focuses on substance abuse prevention among college-age young adults in the LGBTQIA+ community. Before joining GUIDE, Andrew worked across the Atlanta food scene developing skills to not only keep himself well-fed but also to build communities. He spent time learning to foster safe, meaningful spaces for people to come together. Andrew is a Marietta native. He received his Bachelor of Science in Public Health at Georgia State University. While at Georgia State, Andrew found his interests in mental health and research. Collaborating with a local non-profit, he developed his research skills while evaluating their prevention program. Andrew is looking forward to broadening his understanding of mental health and utilizing his skills for the LGBTQIA+ community. In his free time, Andrew enjoys frequenting farmers markets on the weekends and bringing together close friends and family to enjoy a good home-cooked meal.



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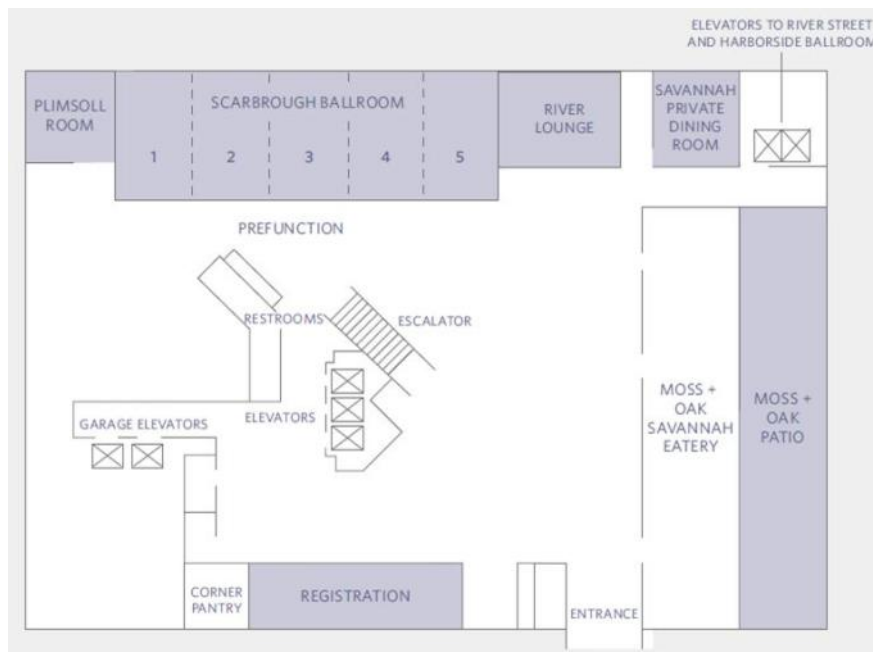


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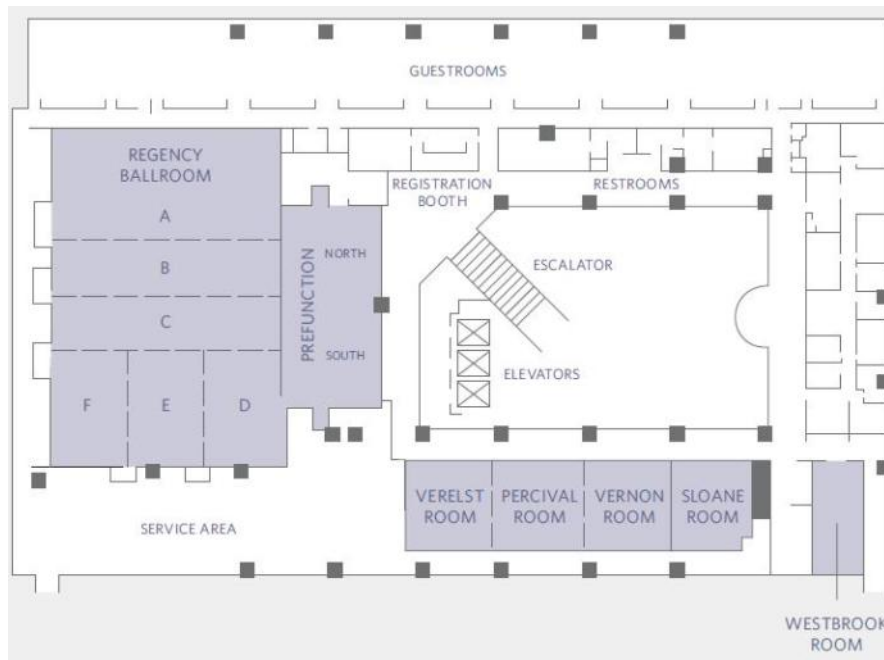


# Hyatt Regency Floor Plan

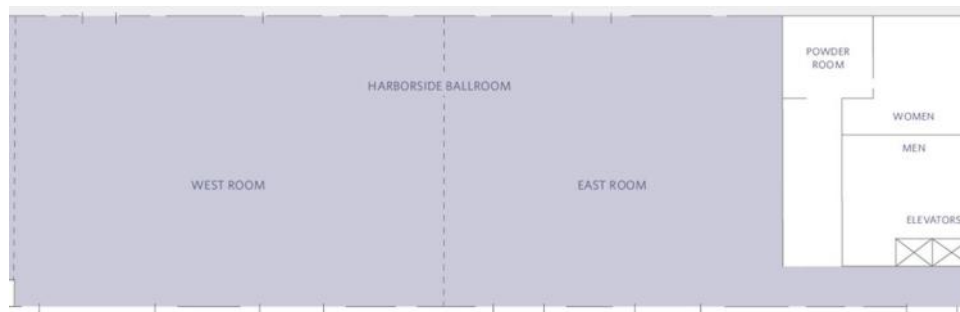
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