

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FOR INSTRUCTORS: Fall 2026

SARA MERRICK-ALBANO E-RYT 500, C-IAYT, is dedicated to guiding those facing chronic pain and psychosomatic pain disorders. As a co-founder of Yoga Therapy Associates, her vision is clear: to make the healing essence of yoga accessible and resonant. With a tailored approach that draws from traditional yoga practices infused with contemporary neuroscience insights, Sara offers specialized online yoga therapy. She also sees clients in person in Watertown and Trumbull. Her commitment is to everyone's journey, ensuring that every session is a step towards holistic wellness.

JENNIFER ALLEN, MA has been practicing Motivational Interviewing (MI) for approximately 3 years and has attended over a dozen trainings and received multiple certifications, including MITI coding, coaching, and feedback. Jennifer has also been trained to support individuals on how to learn MI techniques by certified and well-known MINT trainers. In addition to trainings, Jennifer has advanced her learning through several research-supported readings and activities to ensure she maintains the skills and knowledge to continue using the approach. Jennifer holds an undergraduate degree in psychology from the University of Rhode Island and a graduate degree in clinical psychology from the University of Massachusetts - Dartmouth. She has worked in the behavioral health and social services fields for several years. She has worked with adults experiencing emotional distress, anxiety, depression, interpersonal relationship conflicts, mood disorders, substance use, and psychotic disorders. Jennifer utilizes MI daily and has firsthand experience in the techniques' effectiveness in supporting positive outcomes. She is motivated to help other individuals in the behavioral health field learn MI to promote client wellness and treatment outcomes.

DEBRA BORZELLINO, LMFT, AAMFT Approved Supervisor and AAMFT Clinical Fellow, has a career that has extended over 25 years. Deb is a trainer and presenter of Couples Therapy, Family of Origin, Family Systems Therapy, Birth Order and Vicarious Trauma. As the owner of Pieces That Fit, LLC., Deb provides couple, family, and individual therapy. Deb provides mentorship for AAMFT approved supervisor candidates and clinical consultation/supervision to associate and licensed professionals of all disciplines. Deb focuses on the professional development of the clinician, and traditional oversight of case review, interventions, case notes, treatment planning, ethical issues, and liability. Deb was an Adjunct Professor at SCSU MFT Department and Albertus Magnus Business Department.

BILLY BROMAGE, MSW, has been working at the Yale Program for Recovery and Community Health since 2012. He focuses on working alongside people in mental health and substance use recovery and people experiencing homelessness to engage with and shape their community. This work includes civic engagement and community-building projects like Project Connect and Focus Act Connect Everyday (FACE), as well as support for groups doing advocacy and community organizing from a lived experience perspective including Witnesses to Hunger and the Unhoused Activists Community Team (U-ACT). In addition, he designs classes for psychiatry residents in partnership with New Haven community leaders and activists as a faculty member of the Social Justice and Health Equity curriculum in the Yale Department of Psychiatry. Billy was a core faculty member in the two-year Recovering Citizenship Learning Collaborative (RCLC), which was spearheaded by the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS).

ANTHONY CRETELLA, R.N., is a Registered Nurse who has worked as a Medical / Surgical Nurse since 2010 in the state's largest hospital systems. Before coming to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services he worked in Connecticut's Department of Corrections as a Nurse and Facility Staff Educator. While with the CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, he has functioned as a Nurse Consultant and Clinical Educator.

MARIA del CARMEN RODRIGUEZ, MBA, is a nationally recognized Certified Sound Healer, Holistic Wellness Advocate, and Community Leader with over a decade of experience integrating ancestral healing traditions with modern sound and vibrational therapies. Co-founder of SoulCare Love, LLC, dedicated to empowering individuals and communities through culturally rooted healing practices, sacred sound, and holistic wellness education. Passionate about women's wellness, ancestral wisdom, restorative healing, and cultural preservation through sound therapy, plant medicine, and community-centered care.

MICHAELA FISSEL, MA, is a Breathwork Practitioner, Meditation Facilitator, 200-Hour Wild Essence Yoga Teacher, and works in the role of Executive Director at Advocacy Unlimited, Inc. Michaela has studied recovery for nearly 16 years and recently completed a graduate degree in Conscious Studies where she explored breathwork as a method for supporting recovery from trauma. Through an integrative approach, Michaela invites a new way of perceiving and responding to distress from a place of empowered present awareness.

ANNIE HARPER, PHD, is Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine, where she has been working at the Yale Program for Recovery and Community Health (PRCH) since 2012. She is a qualitative researcher, trained as a cultural anthropologist (not a psychiatrist!), and studies the relationship between finances, poverty, and mental health, with a particular focus on the financial lives of people with serious mental illness. Her goal as a researcher is to understand what we can do to better support people with their financial challenges in a way that maximizes their well-being, dignity, and autonomy. She believes that we must not simply help individuals to change their behavior but also change systems that shape what is possible for people, including the banking system. Her research is action-oriented, and community based, studying questions identified by those most impacted by a problem with the goal of developing practical solutions. Annie was core faculty in the two-year Recovering Citizenship Learning Collaborative (RCLC), which was spearheaded by the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS).

DAVID HOWE, L.C.S.W., has over 40 years of experience in the mental health and addiction recovery field as an administrator, psychiatric clinician, consultant, and trainer. He served as Director of Recovery Services and Consumer Affairs Director from 2007-2014 at Connecticut Valley Hospital. During that time, he was twice honored with the State of CT Distinguished Managerial Services Award for his administrative oversight, research and implementation of Person-Centered Recovery-Oriented Services. Known for his ability to effectively improve systems through creative problem solving, he pioneered a collaborative patient/staff committee that implemented significant reduction in the use of restraint and seclusion on inpatient units. He has developed and implemented a variety of innovative recovery-oriented initiatives that have ongoing influence on services and culture at CVH and the surrounding state mental health and addiction community. David is Clinical Director of the St Vincent DePaul Mission of Waterbury and is a member of the adjunct faculty in Psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine.

BOB JOPE, LMHC, has been a member of the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers since 2010. He teaches Motivational Interviewing (MI) as an adjunct faculty member at Salve Regina University, Rhode Island College, and University of Massachusetts; he is also a consultant with the Addiction Technology Transfer Center at Brown University and works as an MI coder for a nationally recognized coding lab. Bob is the lead trainer for Jope Consulting Services, has taught MI at agencies all over New England, and consults internationally on teaching and coding methods. Holding a master's degree in clinical psychology, Bob has worked in the mental health, child welfare, and substance abuse fields for the past twenty-five years. He was originally trained in MI by Stephen Andrew in 2007, and has since trained with Ali Hall, Alan Lyme, Bill Miller, and Terri Moyers. Bob has also developed and taught program-specific MI training applications and has trained thousands of people in various levels of Motivational Interviewing.

MARY-K O'SULLIVAN, LMFT, LADC, LPC, has been working as a Clinical Manager and Clinical Trainer for over 30 years. She has worked in both the private and public sectors in the fields of criminal justice, substance use disorders, co-occurring disorders, and clinical supervision in both inpatient and outpatient programs. She has worked as a trainer for the Department of Corrections, the Judicial Department, the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Social Services, UCONN Medical School, the Department of Education, and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services in the State of Connecticut as well as working as a Clinical Preceptor for the SARP program at the Groton Naval Submarine Base. She has trained both Nationally and Internationally, including spending 10 years training with David Powell, PhD. and spending time in Singapore assisting their treatment system leaders in developing skills in co-occurring disorders treatment. She currently provides training and/or clinical supervision and oversight to

Private Non-profits, DOC staff, DCF staff, DOL staff, CSSD staff including adult and juvenile probation officers, parole officers, juvenile residential services staff, bail staff, women's and family matters staff, clinicians, case managers, and medical staff.

JEFFREY QUAMME, Chief Executive Officer of the Connecticut Certification Board, a workforce development agency focused on the SUD prevention, treatment, recovery, and harm reduction industry. He is an internationally certified master's level addiction counselor and clinical supervisor and holds credentials as a Certified Nonprofit Executive and Certified Nonprofit Consultant. Quamme is an expert trainer, podcaster, and author, and has been active in the field since the summer of 1988. He has spoken across the country on issues such as provider ethics, the therapeutic relationship, and clinical supervision. Quamme is also the Executive Director of the Connecticut Certification Board, focusing on competency and ethical practice in prevention, treatment, and recovery.

EDWIN RENAUD, L.C.S.W., Ph.D., began his career at the Veterans Administration and has worked with survivors of trauma for over twenty years. He has published on the topics of attachment characteristics in combat veterans and working with trauma survivors in forensic settings. He is currently the Division Director for General Psychiatry at Connecticut Valley Hospital.

CHRISTINE SAARI, MA, E-RYT 200, C-IAYT, navigating her own path through anxiety and trauma has instilled in Christine a deep-seated passion for helping others find their way. As a co-founder of Yoga Therapy Associates, Christine specializes in aiding those with anxiety and trauma, emphasizing practices that are both empowering and approachable. Her strength lies in her ability to listen and adapt, individualizing yoga therapy to resonate with each person's unique needs and preferences. Offering online and in-person sessions in Madison and New Haven, Christine's approach is a blend of empathy, expertise, and genuine desire to guide others towards healing.

DONALD SCHERLING, Psy.D., L.A.D.C., is a Senior Clinical Consultant, Health Educator, Behavioral Health Wellness Coach, assistant in the Care for Caregivers Yoga program, & a Clinical Faculty member in the Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences at Berkshire Medical Center in Pittsfield, MA. Dr. Scherling is a certified trainer for the Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR Institute), the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC), and a Senior Clinical Consultant and Trainer with the Connecticut Dept. of Mental Health & Addiction Services, the CT Women's Consortium, and other regional and state-wide agencies in the Northeast.

JENNIFER SPIRITO, LCSW, with over two decades of experience across diverse clinical settings, including the DMHAS Young Adult Services (YAS) program, in-patient hospital medical units, community mental health agencies, and private practice. She is an EMDRIA Certified Therapist and an EMDRIA Approved Consultant, specializing in Complex Trauma and First Responders. As one of the Clinical Directors of the Fairfield County Trauma Response Team, Jennifer plays a leadership role in assisting first responders and community members affected by critical incidents through education, therapy, and community outreach. In addition to her clinical practice, Jennifer offers educational training and consultation for fellow therapists focused on EMDR and special populations. She is passionate about supporting other clinicians in building fidelity and confidence in trauma treatment. Her clinical work is grounded in the belief that EMDR is a powerful and effective modality for healing, and she brings this passion into each of her roles.

RAYMOND TAFRATE, Ph.D., is an associate professor and clinical psychologist at Central Connecticut State University, as well as a fellow and supervisor at the Albert Ellis Institute for Behavior Therapy. He is also an author, consultant, and trainer.

ELSA WARD, MS, CAC, is the Director of Recovery and Community Affairs, for Connecticut's Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). She represents DMHAS in national organizations and events as well as helping to ensure meaningful contact, input, and dialogue with diverse representatives of the recovery community throughout Connecticut. Prior to coming to DMHAS, Ms. Ward held a variety of roles over the past 22 years in the private non-profit world, primarily focused on helping those with co-occurring disorders. This has included more traditional settings such as residential, intensive outpatient and detox, then branching out into homeless outreach and engagement programs, supportive housing, peer recovery support and then designing and implementing a paid work apprentice program for people with barriers preventing them from competitive employment. Ms. Ward has an associate degree in Drug and Alcohol Counseling and is a Certified Addictions Counselor (CAC) and bachelor's and

master's degrees in human services. Ms. Ward brings with her the very essence of empowering people with MH/SUD/COD towards change.

KELVIN YOUNG is a compassionate and visionary leader dedicated to empowering individuals and communities through holistic healing practices, with a special focus on sound healing as a transformative path to recovery and personal growth. Committed to fostering inclusive spaces, Kelvin passionately advocates for the recognition and elevation of BIPOC healers within the wellness community, ensuring that diverse voices are celebrated and supported in the field of holistic health.