

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FOR INSTRUCTORS: Spring 2025

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 each individual'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. Outside of 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 oversite of case review, interventions, case notes, treatment planning, ethical issues, and liability.

SKYE COLLINS, (they/them) is the state coordinator for the Connecticut branch of the Hearing Voices Network. Skye graduated from UConn with a degree in journalism, and uses their passion for writing, research, and interviewing to change perceptions around voice-hearing. As a Recovery Support Specialist and a certified HVN facilitator, they have advocated more effective support systems for people who hear voices, see visions, and have other alternate experiences. Their work emphasizes the impact of language and word choice within mental health care, as well as the critical role cultural stigma or acceptance play in individual outcomes.

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 Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services he worked in Connecticut's Department of Corrections as a Nurse and Facility Staff Educator. While with CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services he has functioned as a Nurse Consultant and Clinical Educator.

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.

TARA HALL, Author, Coach and Certified Transformational Trainer in the Success Principles who creates and facilitates highly engaged and experiential trainings, workshop; hosts and moderates speaking engagements for educational settings, businesses and professional development conferences. Conducts customized trainings with an emphasis on leadership development, organizational culture, staff engagement, communication and coaching for personal and professional development. Trainings are conducted in person and virtually.

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 the method. 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.

LINDA LENTINI has over 20 years of peer service experience and 15 of those years have focused on emphasizing the mind-body connection around mental health and addiction recovery. After exploring many options to support her personal healing journey over the past 25 years, she discovered Breath-Body-Mind (BBM). In this training, Linda will share the Coherent Breathing, part of BBM, that is evidence-based to balance the parasympathetic and sympathetic branches of the nervous system. Linda is a Rehab Therapist at Ct Valley, Hospital, a Level Four BBM teacher, Executive Director of the Breath-Body-Mind-Foundation, Yoga and Qigong instructor, Aromatherapist, and trained in Stephanie Covington Healing/Beyond Trauma.

CYNTHIA MARTIN is an accomplished leader with over 20 years' experience in diversity, equity and inclusion education, consulting, strategic planning, and project management. Excellent facilitator with strong platform skills and curriculum development. Led over 500 skill-based educational programs for over 25,000 people across industry, age, and all levels of employment. Recognized as an expert in social justice education, empowering others to change.

RUTA MAZELIS was the editor of The Cutting Edge: A Newsletter for People Living with Self-Inflicted Violence, an internationally distributed quarterly on the topic of self-injury, founded in 1990. Ms. Mazelis has provided presentations and publications on this topic, as well as others such as trauma and trauma-informed systems of care, to a variety of audiences. A survivor of trauma herself, she has experience in providing services in mental health and substance abuse programs as well as in service and policy development, and research. Now working privately, she was on the staff of the Mental Health Empowerment Project and the Sidran Institute, serves on the board of the National Trauma Consortium, was a program manager for the National Center for Trauma-Informed Care, and serves as a consultant to various projects at local, federal, and international levels.

GIA MONTELEONE is the program specialist for the substance exposed pregnancy initiative of Connecticut. She is a recent graduate with a degree in psychology. With a strong commitment and passion to education and growth she serves as a very valuable resource to the program. Her fresh perspective and enthusiasm for the initiative gives very good insight into the CAPTA and CARA legislations.

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.

KIM PLATT, L.C.S.W., L.A.D.C., has over sixteen years of experience as a clinician, program director and consultant in the behavioral health field. She serves as faculty at Manchester Community College and maintains a private practice.

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.

SHANE SCOTT is a licensed clinical social worker and a Connecticut native. Shane received his Master's Degree from University of Connecticut School of Social Work in 2012. He believes that compassion, understanding, and fostering a holistic approach are an integral part of the healing process. As a dynamic and skilled social worker, Shane brings a vast array of experience beginning in 2005, where he began his career with working in with youth and families across the life span and in a variety of settings, including schools and communities. In addition, Shane has experience working with individuals that are experiencing depression, anxiety, trauma, and substance abuse conditions. Shane also has a strong passion and skill in working with individuals experiencing gender and sexual identity issues. Shane also has a talent with facilitating trainings, workshops, and coaching other professionals. Shane has a strong passion for personal and professional growth and has a strong passion as being a Social Worker. Shane also enjoys music, movies, and traveling, and physical exercise.

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.

JENNIFER TIRADO was certified as a Recovery Support Specialist by Advocacy Unlimited in 2016. Shortly after, she became trained as a Hearing Voices Network Facilitator. Jennifer has worked in a variety of settings, including social clubs, employment and residential programs, clinical crisis intervention teams, and community support programs. Through her journey, Jennifer's focus has been promoting alternatives that focus on choice and seeing the person served as the expert of their own experience. She has a wide breadth of experience facilitating a wellness, creative and other support groups. Jennifer began to work for the Wildflower Alliance in 2021 and began coordinating Connecticut's Alternatives to Suicide Network through Advocacy Unlimited in early 2022. Through her effort, Jennifer has successfully established Alt2u groups in all five DMHAS regions in CT.

DAVID TOLIN, Ph.D., is the Founder and Director of the Anxiety Disorders Center at the Institute of Living, and an Adjunct Professor of Psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine. He was the 2014 President of the Clinical Psychology Division of the American Psychological Association, and a principal investigator for the National Institutes of Health. He received the Award for Lifetime Contribution to Psychology from the Connecticut Psychological Association. Dr. Tolin is the author of over 150 scientific journal articles, as well as the books *Doing CBT: A Comprehensive Guide to Working with Behaviors, Thoughts, and Emotions* and *Face Your Fears: A Proven Plan to Beat Anxiety, Panic, Phobias, and Obsessions*. Dr. Tolin has been featured on the reality TV series *Hoarders*, *The OCD Project*, and *My Shopping Addiction*, and has been a recurrent guest on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *The Dr. Oz Show*, and *Anderson Live!*

AVIVA VINCENT, Ph.D., L.M.S.W., V.S.M., earned her doctoral degree from Case Western Reserve University, Veterinary Social Work Certificate from the University of Tennessee, a fellowship with Animals in Society, and trained at The Institute for Interdisciplinary Salivary Bioscience Research, "spit camp". She is an instructor in the Veterinary Social Work and Veterinary Human Support Certificate Program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Her research interest includes exploring the physiological impact of the human-animal bond; specifically, the potential animal support to reduce fear and anxiety in stressful situations. She is co-founder and owner of Healing Paws LLC, the only VSW practice in Northeast Ohio. Dr. Vincent is on the advisory board of the Center for Human Animal Education Research and Education at Ohio State University, board of directors for the International Association of Veterinary Social Workers, and is founder of the human-animal interactions workgroup with the National Association of Social Workers-Ohio chapter. Dr. Vincent is a contributor to the forthcoming volume *The Comprehensive Guide to Interdisciplinary Veterinary Social Work, and Career Paths in Human-Animal Interaction for Social and Behavioral Scientists*.

BRENDA WESTBERRY is the President and Founder of Westberry Consulting where she has been involved in providing training and workshops for community organizations and agencies throughout the country. She is a retired Adult Probation Chief from the Connecticut Judicial Branch with over 34 years of experience in working with the criminal justice population, substance abuse treatment agencies, the addicted client population and recovery organizations. Brenda is a 21-year veteran professor in the Sociology, Anthropology, Criminology, and Social Work, Department at Eastern Connecticut State University, A faculty member and Instructor for the NE-ATTC, at Brown University, The New England School of Addiction Studies and the New England School of Best Practices. Brenda is a consultant for the Black Addiction Counselor Education (BACE) program through ADCARE where she provides training for addiction professionals. Brenda is an active member of the NAAP, NACSW.

LISA WIBORG, L.I.S.W-S, V.S.W., completed her graduate degree in Social Work at The Ohio State University and her post-graduate certification in veterinary social work from the University of Tennessee. She has worked in direct clinical settings such as hospital social work, hospice care, and private adoption. Lisa is currently implementing her expertise on the human-animal bond in her current work in hospice. She has also developed a private practice, Healing Paws LLC which focuses on providing social work support into veterinary clinics in Northeast Ohio. Together with her Clinical Scholars Team, she will be implementing an evidenced based program to reduce compassion fatigue and burnout in veterinary medicine and promote the utilization of mental health services in the field. Lisa is currently the lead medical social worker for her hospice agency and continues to focus on education and support in the veterinary social work field with Healing Paws, LLC.