

## **BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FOR INSTRUCTORS: Winter 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.

LUIS M. ANEZ, PSY.D., is an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine and serves as the Director of Hispanic Services for the Connecticut Mental Health Center. His research and professional interests focus on training and education and community-based Hispanic Behavioral Health Services.

JENNIFER BERTON, PhD LCSW, is the founder of The Rose Center for Learning, which creates trainings for clinicians to build clinical skills rooted in community support. Dr. Berton has published articles in journals, magazines, and blogs and is the author of *Ethics for Addiction Professionals* (2014). For more than 20 years, Dr. Berton has been working with various populations in a variety of mental health settings, and has been providing clinical training on many topics. She received her Masters and Doctorate from UC Berkeley, and is licensed in the states of Connecticut and Rhode Island. Visit <http://myrosecenter.com>.

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.

RACHEL BOUCHER, LCSW, is currently the Clinical Director at Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Prior to working in the Domestic Violence field, she worked as a clinician, supervisor and program director for 10 years providing mental health and substance use treatment to a variety of age groups in both outpatient and residential settings. Rachel has worked with survivors of violence as well as people who use violence in behavioral health settings. Rachel is passionate about providing training on domestic violence to behavioral health professionals as there is minimal training available on this topic despite its relevance and frequency. In all areas of her work her goal is to support people in obtaining resources, tools, and information to be more competent and feel more confident in their role.

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.

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.

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.

DANA KUKUCKA started with DMHAS as a trainer for Whiting Forensic Hospital in the spring of 2024. She has over 15 years' experience in developing curriculum, educating staff of all disciplines, and providing trainings in both the classroom and congregate care settings. She began her career as a tenured Middle School Teacher serving 10 years in the Connecticut Public School system creating and implementing daily curriculum, mentoring new teachers and developing teaching plans based on student need. Dana also has experience delivering and implementing evidence-based models in programs designed for juveniles involved in the criminal justice system placed through CSSD and individuals with developmental disabilities through DDS. She has vast experience collaborating with quality assurance professionals to ensure material is presented with fidelity and has facilitated a variety of CBT based groups throughout her professional experiences. Dana is an experienced train the trainer presenter, providing training and support to frontline staff, supervisors, program managers and directors while in her previous role at DDS and was actively engaged in the creation and delivery of new hire trainings.

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.

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.

TERESA NIEVES (she/her) is a queer, neurodivergent Disruption Coach and Unconventional Strategist based in Connecticut. With over 17 years of experience in nonprofit management, leadership development, and program design, she specializes in helping people and organizations break free from limiting narratives and build spaces where authenticity and impact thrive. Through coaching, facilitation, and Reiki healing, Teresa supports women, non-binary, and gender-diverse folks in rediscovering their power, creating meaningful change, and building lives that feel true to who they are. She brings both professional expertise and lived experience to her work, blending strategy with compassion to spark lasting transformation.

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.

MANUEL PARIS, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the Yale University School of Medicine and Deputy Director of Hispanic Services for the Connecticut Mental Health Center. He also serves as Director of Training for the Latinx Track of the Yale Psychology Pre- and Post-Doctoral Fellowship Program at the Hispanic Clinic. His professional contributions focus on the evaluation of cultural/linguistic adaptations of evidence-based interventions, multisite training and fidelity monitoring, workforce development, and public policy advocacy.

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 Director of Social Work and Multicultural Services 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.

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.

JOHN WATTS D.C.J., is a retired Chief Probation Officer with 20 years of experience working at the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch, Court Support Services Division (CSSD). Dr. Watts has taught at Gateway Community College since 2016. He is a national trainer and consultant with the SAMHSA's GAINS Center and Policy Research Associates and holds certifications as a Criminal Justice Addiction Professional (CCJP) and Forensic Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (F-CBT).

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.