



16th Annual
NC "One Community in Recovery" Conference
Healing Together: Building Stronger Communities
March 5-7, 2025
Embassy Suites by Hilton, Greensboro Airport
Greensboro, NC

Provided by Northwest Area Health Education Center (AHEC),
a program of Wake Forest University School of Medicine and part of the NC AHEC System
with support from the Behavioral Health Springboard at UNC and the NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities
and Substance Use Services with funding from the SAMHSA Community Mental Health Services Block Grant

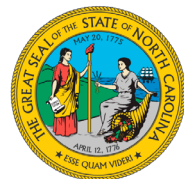


Wake Forest University
School of Medicine

NORTHWEST AHEC
PART OF NC AHEC



SCHOOL OF
SOCIAL WORK
Behavioral Health
Springboard



NC DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES
Division of Mental Health,
Developmental Disabilities and
Substance Use Services

Welcome!

Thank you for joining us as we highlight some of the most progressive recovery practices in our state. This conference is an inspiring, informative event designed to foster the continuing growth of the North Carolina recovery movement, to teach participants how to get recovery programming up and running in their communities, to showcase some of the most progressive recovery practices, and to bring the community of providers and individuals in Recovery together as students and partners. Our goal is to educate and motivate participants to apply principles of Recovery in their personal and professional lives.

Planning Committee

Bernice Adjabeng, DMgt, MA, MSW, Program Dir., NCCPSS Program, Behavioral Health Springboard, UNC-CH School of Social Work
Tanasia Boyd, NCCPSS, CRC, Grants Manager, Sunrise Community for Recovery and Wellness
Susan Buchanan, NCCPSS, Transition and Housing Peer Support Specialist, Vaya Health
Tracy Effler, NCCPSS, Complex Care Peer Support Specialist, Vaya Health
Maia Hughes, NCCPSS, Programs Coordinator, Sunrise Community for Recovery and Wellness
Ellen Kesler, MLS, MPH, CPH, Continuing Education Coordinator, Northwest AHEC
Courtney Lytle, Operations Director, Sunrise Community for Recovery and Wellness
Felishia McPherson-Mitchell, NCCPSS, NCLMHC, NAMINC Peer Leadership Council Chair
Wes Rider, BSW, Mental Health Advocate
Brandon Rollings, Special Projects Manager, NC CPSS Program, Behavioral Health Springboard, UNC-CH School of Social Work
Delton Russell, Population Health Recovery Specialist, Partners Health Management
Karen Russell, NCCPSS, Recovery Community Center Director, Hope Center, Burke United Christian Ministries
Patty Schaeffer NCCPSS, COAPS, Executive Director, WellSurgent
Reid Smithdeal, MSW, LCSW, Behavioral Health Assistant Director, Cherokee Indian Hospital
Alabama Stone, CPSS, Peer Support Program Coordinator, Early Psychosis Intervention Advisors in NC (EPI-NC)
Ann Marie Webb, Peer Support Program Manager, NC DHHS, Division of MH/DD/SUS
Sharon Young, PhD, Clinical Psychologist, Full Circle Community Wellness

Continuing Education Credit

The conference and pre-conference workshops offer up to 12.25 hours of credit for participants attending all sessions.

- Up to 12.25 Contact Hours from Northwest AHEC
NC Licensed Clinical Social Workers may use contact hours from Northwest AHEC for license renewal.
- Up to 12.25 hours (Category A) continuing education for NC psychologists.
- Up to 12.25 NBCC Contact Hours. Northwest AHEC has been approved by NBCC as an Approved Continuing Education Provider, ACEP No. 5465. Programs that do not qualify for NBCC credit are clearly identified. Northwest AHEC is solely responsible for all aspects of the program.
(Wednesday: 4.0 Contact Hours, Thursday: 5.75 Contact Hours, Friday: 2.5 Contact Hours)



To Receive Credit

- Sign and initial the attendance roster each day - make sure your email address is correct.
- You will receive an email with a link to the evaluation and certificate by March 21.

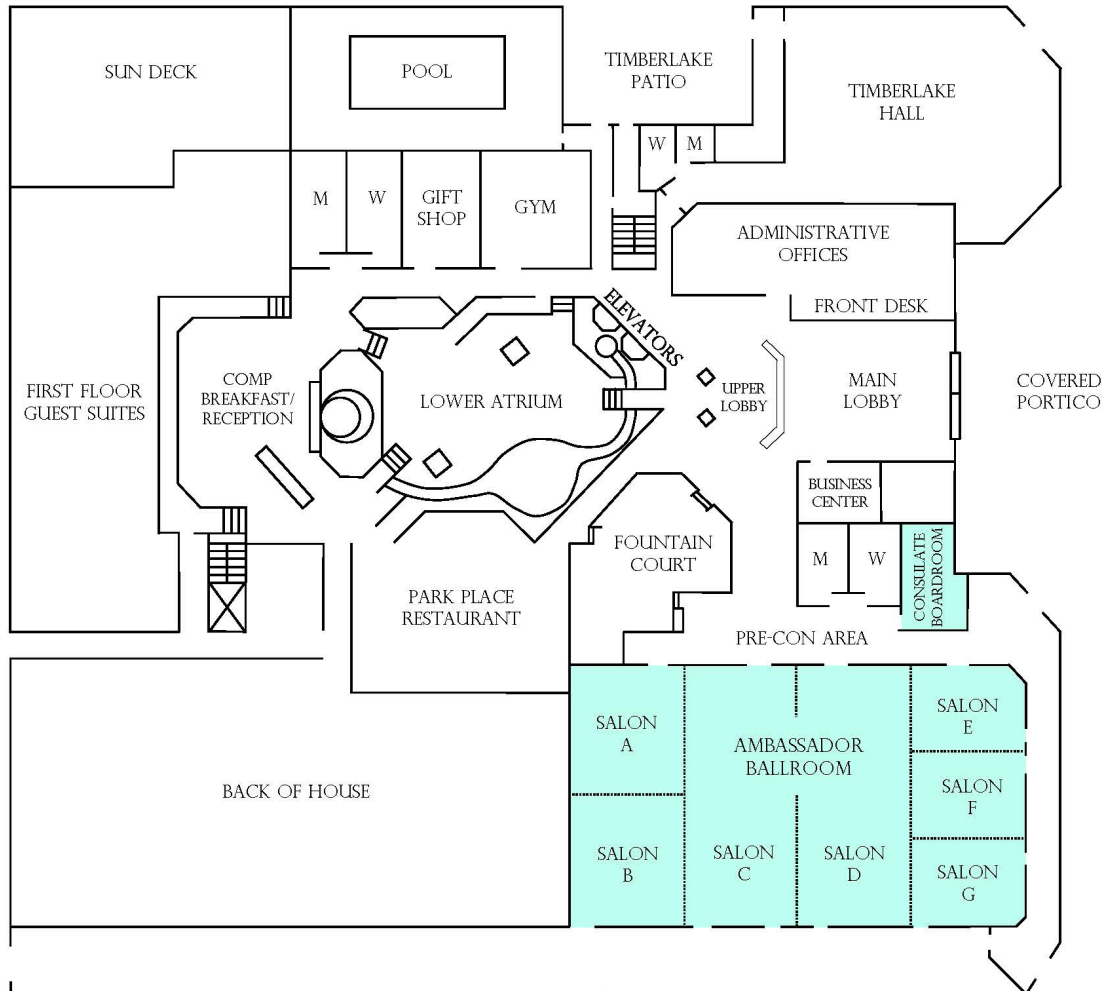
Handouts and Presentations

Use the following steps to access handouts and presentations:

- Login to your NC AHEC account with your email and password, at <http://nwahec.org>.
- Click on "My Courses and Events."
- Select "16th Annual NC "One Community in Recovery" Conference.
- Click on "Access Course Materials."

Hotel Map

EMBASSY SUITES BY HILTON GREENSBORO-AIRPORT



Thank You to Our Supporters & Exhibitors!

Recovery Ally



Exhibitors

Addiction Recovery Care Association (ARCA)

Alliance Health

Boulder Care

Carolina Dunes Behavioral Health

Easterseals PORT Health

First at Blue Ridge

NAMI North Carolina

Narcotics Anonymous

NC ATOD

NC AHEC Digital Library

North Carolina Certified Peer Support Specialist Program

NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Use Services

Peer Recovery Center

Recovery Innovations

Sunrise Community for Recovery and Wellness

TROSA

Please visit our exhibitors in Timberlake Hall, across from the lobby.

Wednesday, March 5, 2025

Noon **Registration and Box Lunch**

12:30 pm **Addressing the Connection of Brain Injury, Public Health and the Legal System in North Carolina**

A brain injury is an invisible disability that can affect a person's behavior, ability to process information, and physical condition. Research dating back more than 30 years tells us that mental health disorders are commonly observed in TBI patients. In the first year post-injury, up to 77% receive a psychiatric diagnosis. Anxiety, mood, and substance-use disorders are common and often present co-morbidly. These individuals also face higher rates of mental health disorders which are associated with worse health outcomes, increased mental health care utilization, and poorer quality of life.

Join DRNC and their resident TBI expert and survivor to provide an overview of the different types of brain injuries and dispel common myths about individuals with brain injuries, mental health, and its relevance to our state public health and the legal system. This will include learning about various strategies and tips for communicating with clients with brain injuries and opportunities to practice and engage with other attendees through interactive activities. This session will also share information on DRNC's newly launched Brain Injury Community Screening Program.

Upon completion of this session, participants should be better able to:

- Identify general characteristics and components of brain injury types and their correlation with mental health, public health and the legal system.
- Address misconceptions and biases surrounding individuals with brain injuries and mental health and how these impact the receipt of support and services. Examples of effective Brain Injury accommodations and strategies will be discussed.
- Discuss and apply best practices when engaging with individuals with brain injuries and mental health. Attendees will learn how to implement brain injury screenings into their work.

Faculty

Desireé Gorbea-Finalet, MA, came to North Carolina from Puerto Rico in 2017 and brought her passion and tenacity along with her. She joined Disability Rights North Carolina in September 2021 as the Traumatic Brain Injury Justice Initiative Project Manager. Her work centers on developing and implementing an innovative Traumatic Brain Injury Screening and Supportive Services Initiative program in various community-based service settings in North Carolina. Her passion for disability rights advocacy stems from her lived experience with multiple disabilities, including being a numerous TBI survivor and having Narcolepsy Type 1. She holds a Master of Arts in Peace and Conflict Studies focusing on International Peace Development from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Minor in Criminal Justice from the Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico.

1:30 pm **Break**

Wednesday, March 5, 2025

1:45 pm

Exploring Alternatives to Involuntary Commitment in North Carolina

In North Carolina, involuntary commitment is a significant legal and mental health procedure designed to ensure the safety of individuals who are deemed a danger to themselves or others due to severe mental illness. However, this process can be invasive and traumatic and may not address the underlying needs of individuals effectively.

In this session, we will provide a comprehensive overview of the various alternative approaches that can be employed to support mental health and well-being while minimizing the use of involuntary commitment. This panel discussion will feature a diverse group of stakeholders to discuss real-world applications and challenges.

Participants will leave with a well-rounded understanding of the alternatives to involuntary commitment and practical knowledge on how to implement and advocate for these approaches within their communities. By exploring and promoting alternative methods, we aim to enhance the quality of mental health care and support individuals in a more humane and effective manner.

Together, let's work towards a more supportive and compassionate approach to mental health care in North Carolina.

Upon completion of this session, participants should be better able to:

- Discuss how IVC has been used and misused, and why there is a need for alternatives.
- Describe alternative strategies and interventions that NC is currently offering or working toward offering.
- Discuss the lack of alternatives overall and the need to generate new ideas, locations, and methods for managing crisis, and expand the reach of existing models, as well as crisis prevention in existing services.
- Foster collaboration between mental health advocates, professionals, law enforcement, social services, and community organizations to create a cohesive support network that prioritizes individual needs and well-being.
- Identify the ways that peer workers are critical to the process of diverting from IVC/utilizing alternatives, and hopefully encourage those with no peers on their teams to add a peer worker.

Faculty

Bodi Bodenhamer, Alema Gregg, Mel Kennedy, Alia Martin, Jennifer Melvin, Andrea Montgomery, Heather Palmateer, Alabama Stone

4:45 pm

Adjourn

6:30 pm

Ice Cream Social Plus Story and Music Jam Extravaganza!

This event is based on the lively and long tradition of Poetry Slams. Poetry slams traditionally feature performance poetry that is delivered to a live audience. Each piece is short and is delivered with either poetry that rhymes or in prose style (a poem that almost reads like song lyrics). For this event, however, participants are invited to share stories of wellness and empowerment in any verbal or musical form. Each participant will be limited to three and a half minutes, which will create a dynamic forum that affords opportunities for many people to share within a relatively short time period.

The ice cream social will begin at 6:30 pm and the Story Jam will begin at 6:45 pm. We hope you will arrive in time to enjoy some delicious ice cream then to participate in this special event either through participation or by being an audience member.

We look forward to seeing you at this special event where we will share together, learn together, and grow together because we do it best together!

Thursday, March 6, 2025

9 am **Welcome, Announcements, Overview**

9:10 am **Greetings from NC Division of MH/DD/SUS** - Kelly Crosbie, MSW, LCSW, (she/her)
*Director, Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services,
NC Department of Health and Human Services*

9:30 am **Revolutionizing Recovery: Turning Pain into Purpose**
- Devin Lyall

In this powerful and inspiring keynote, Devin Lyall shares her journey from addiction and despair to becoming a leader in recovery advocacy and community transformation.

Through the lens of lived experience, she explores the importance of creating recovery ecosystems that provide comprehensive support—housing, employment, harm reduction, and peer-led services—to ensure that recovery is not just possible, but probable.

This speech challenges communities to rethink traditional approaches, embrace innovative solutions, and empower those with lived experience to lead the way in revolutionizing recovery.

Attendees will leave with a renewed sense of purpose, actionable strategies, and the belief that by doing what is necessary and possible, we can accomplish what once seemed impossible.

Devin is the Founding Executive Director of Wilkes Recovery Revolution, Inc., whose mission is to create a community where recovery is possible through restoring hope, repairing lives, and rebuilding the community. Devin Lyall is an Individual directly impacted by substance use and mental health and brings the lens of lived experience to her work. Wilkes Recovery Revolution (WRR) now hosts eleven unique programs: Phases Transitional Housing, Wilkes Harm Reduction Collective, R3 Recovery Community Center, Project Healing Our Workforce, Fresh Start Farm, Wilkes Fresh Mobile Market, Revolution Thrift Store, Wilkes Crisis Intervention Team, Post Overdose Response Team and Hope Warriors.

Devin is the recipient of the Great State Hero Award for Crisis Assistance, the 2021 Chairman's Award from the Wilkes Chamber of Commerce, the 2020 Recovery Champion Award through NC One Community in Recovery, the 2022 Harm Reduction Hero Award Addiction Professionals of North Carolina, Todd E. Whitworth National Humanitarian Award, 2023 Harm Reduction Hero Award through the NC Alcohol and Drug Council, and the organization was recently awarded the National Recovery Community Organization of the year award in Washington, DC.

Her story and WRR's work have been featured in The Economist, the Winston-Salem Journal, NC Health News, Spectrum News, VICE Media, and WRAL Television, and she recently presented her first TEDx Talk. Devin is an avid dog lover who is the prime definition of rescue foster failure and takes the most pride in enjoying adventures with her children and family.



10:45 am **Break**

Thursday, March 6, 2025

11:05 am

Breakouts

Room AB

Life Skills Curriculum for the Homeless Population – *Amy Swanger*

Many of those who find themselves out on the street are lacking in many of the life skills that most of us take for granted. Skills dealing with general knowledge in areas like food and nutrition, money management, job skills, and general health and wellness, are at a deficit in this population. I have implemented a curriculum in a weekly class at Bethel House, where I teach our clients the basics in each of these areas in the hopes of filling the gap in areas where they may be lacking. This presentation will expand on the areas that I have found helpful in working with the homeless, providing ideas for others to implement a class like this in their own clientele. Activities will include the attendees creating their own class in addition to the ones I provide.

Room C

Enhancing Organization Wellness through Peer Support – *Mark Palinski, Tyler Grooms*

In this session, participants will explore the role of peer support in enhancing organization wellness. We will talk about different approaches and actions that organizations can use to cultivate a supportive and inclusive environment. Through personal lived experience, discussions, and group activities, participants will gain insights into leveraging peer support to promote overall wellness, resilience, and empowerment within their organizations.

Room D

Changing the Narrative around Suicidality – *Nancy Johns*

Suicide is a public health issue today, not just a mental health issue. Backed by research, "Talk Saves Lives". However, for those of us who have attempted suicide or live with chronic suicidal ideations daily, talking is not an option. There are very few places we feel safe enough to express our feelings and emotions without being "criminalized". Hospitalization and forced medications are not the only solutions to suicidality. Suicide is complex and there needs to be a change in the narrative around it and it is going to take the community to come together for its prevention. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a community to care. We can all make a difference in someone's life by learning how to support those who are considering suicide. Together, we can create a stronger, more compassionate community. More support is needed to be given to those who have attempted or have ideations. Suicidality is not always a wish to die. Many times, it is our brain working around options to alleviate suffering. Also, suicidality doesn't always imply a mental health condition. Society and lack of access to appropriate resources for a good quality of life play a major role. So much more needs to be done and can be done. We need empathy, compassion, support, and connection. When we as a community can come together to provide these essentials, healing can begin!

Room EFG

Family Centered Treatment-Recovery: An Intensive Home-based Approach to Substance Use, Trauma Treatment, and Recovery – *Samantha Ryan, Amanda Burgin*

Family Centered Treatment-Recovery (FCTR) is an innovative practice and systems-of-care model that weaves together the evidence-based Family Centered Treatment (FCT) model and best practices in substance use treatment. FCTR addresses substance use and the underlying family systems and trauma histories that contribute to or maintain the cycle of trauma and addiction. This intensive, home-based approach removes barriers associated with traditional substance use treatment and leverages the power of the family system in the recovery process. FCTR navigates the complex interplay between addiction and trauma from the context of family by addressing the intersection of substance use, trauma, and the resulting impact experienced by all family members. FCTR empowers the family to lead the recovery process by engaging family strengths, values, and attachment bonds.

Thursday, March 6, 2025

12:20 pm Lunch

1:30 pm

Breakouts

Room AB

ODAAT NC: Building Resilient Communities Through Support and Advocacy – *Jemm Merritt, Kelly Redfern*

ODAAT NC: Leading Change Through Diversity and Community Collaboration highlights the essential role of community partnerships in creating inclusive, supportive environments for marginalized groups. By emphasizing the importance of diversity in peer support and advocacy, ODAAT NC fosters collaboration between health systems and underserved communities. This presentation aims to guide health professionals in understanding how inclusive practices and direct community engagement improve outcomes, promote equity, and strengthen the overall resilience of those facing significant challenges.

Room C

Hope Mission of Coastal Carolina – *John Sortirkys, Gene McLendon*

In this session, we will provide programming information on Hope Mission of Coastal Carolina. We will discuss our mission and why and how we provide recovery and reentry services to combat poverty, homelessness, and substance use.

Room D

Nature and the Mind: Mindfulness through Nature – *Barjohn Hall*

In this session, we will cover the following objectives to provide participants with a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between nature and mental health, along with practical tools and strategies for implementation.

Understanding the Connection: Participants will be able to articulate the psychological and physiological benefits of spending time in nature, including its effects on stress reduction, mood enhancement, and overall mental well-being.

Mindfulness Practices in Nature: Participants will learn and practice mindfulness techniques that can be applied in natural settings, enabling them to enhance their awareness and presence while engaging with the environment.

Integrating Nature into Daily Life: Participants will develop a personalized action plan to incorporate regular nature exposure into their routines, fostering ongoing mental health benefits and a deeper connection to their surroundings.

Room EFG

Harm Reduction at the Heart: A Holistic Organization-Wide Approach – *Joshua Hampton, Justin Shytle*

At Sunrise Community for Recovery and Wellness, a non-profit staffed entirely by certified peer support specialists, our mission is to create community wellness through shared lived experience and provide authentic peer support for all. We have a lot of amazing programs and while our Harm Reduction program is a cornerstone of our work, this presentation will explore how harm reduction principles are evident throughout our entire organization. We will discuss the holistic strategies we implement across all our programs, illustrating how these practices not only support individual recovery but strengthen our community as a whole. Discover how our innovative approach can serve as a model for integrating harm reduction into other recovery community organizations.

2:45 pm

Break

Thursday, March 6, 2025

3 pm

Breakouts

Room AB

The PLC is where U Should Be.....NAMINC Peer Leadership Council – *Felishia McPherson, April Barber-Scales, Karen Russell, John Weeks*

This session will include an educational and informative panel style presentation of What NAMI PLC is, Purpose, Affiliate/State/National mission, how to join and the benefit of Peer Leadership Support and Meeting Peer Leaders up close and personal as #LivingProof of RECOVERY.

Room C

Forensic Peer Support: An Integrated Approach – *Chablis Dandridge, Amanda Martin, Jasmine Milton*

This session covers the history and development of forensic peer support in NC and what is being done to recognize and legitimize the profession in NC. We will discuss the rise of FPS in various counties, how Medicaid expansion will grow the profession over the next decade, and what we can do as a community to ensure the efficacy and integrity of the profession stays intact.

Room D

What I Have Learned Living with Autism and Schizophrenia – *R.V. Kuser, Marlene Kuser*

"History of Disability in Art and Alternative Perspectives of Sight and Sound" The presentation begins with an overview of Disability in Art, which has a scope of hundreds of years. Then using audio and video, local author R.V. Kuser, will share his uncommon everyday sensory experiences, especially of sight and sound, as a person living with autism and schizophrenia. R.V. is on a lifelong quest for ways to overcome misperceptions about people with disabilities. To let everyone know, we CAN do anything. With his wife, Marlene, they both give a greater insight into autism and schizophrenia when speaking publicly and advocating.

Room EFG

Preliminary Research and Emerging Trends in Peer Recovery Support Services: Insights from the ETSU Addiction Science Center – *Hannah Warren, Angela Hagaman*

Peer support specialists (PSS) undoubtedly play a crucial role in fostering sustained recovery and enhancing client outcomes. Unfortunately, the PSS role is poorly understood by many and currently lacks a standard taxonomy for setting-specific work activities, which complicates studying the impact of peer recovery support services. This presentation will delve into preliminary findings from a 9-state pilot study of peer worker settings and activities, as well as additional ongoing efforts of the ETSU Addiction Science Center to study PSS work across a variety of service models and geographic regions. This presentation will also outline future directions and potential areas for development in peer recovery support services.

4:15 pm

Adjourn

4:30 pm

PSS Workgroup Meet and Greet

Join the NCCPSS Workgroup in the lobby to learn about their role and get your questions answered! The North Carolina Certified Peer Support Specialist (NCCPSS) Workgroup is composed of representatives of Certified Peer Support Specialists (CPSS), staff of Behavioral Health Springboard (BHS) and the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services (DMH/DD/SUS).

The role of the Workgroup is to provide input on policies for the NCCPSS Program to enhance the certification, training, and accountability of CPSS in NC. The workgroup works with the Behavioral Health Springboard (BHS) and the NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Use Services (DMH/DD/SUS) staff to identify strategies to achieve this goal.

Evening Activities

6:15 pm

Recovery Champion - Youth/Young Adult Awards Dinner

Recovery Champion Award

The Recovery Champion Award is given to people who have dedicated their individual talents, whether through professional work or volunteering, to successfully promote mental health and/or substance use recovery. These individuals are recognized for promoting recovery-oriented programming, creating system-wide recovery-oriented change, or supporting the recovery process of specific individuals. This award recognizes three individuals: one each from the western, central and eastern regions of North Carolina.

Congratulations to this year's recipients:

- **John Weeks - Western Region**
- **Carlisa Booker - Central Region**
- **Tara Tucker - Eastern Region**

Youth/Young Adult Voice Award

The Youth/Young Adult Voice Award recognizes and celebrates a youth/young adult under the age of 26 in North Carolina who has dedicated their individual talents, whether through sharing their story, advocacy or volunteering, to successfully promote resilience in mental health and/or substance use recovery.

Congratulations to this year's recipient: Anna Buckley

7:30 pm

Room C

Karaoke with DJ Poe Mack

After a day of insightful talks and discussions, unwind and show off your singing talent at our Karaoke Night! Whether you're a seasoned performer or just want to have some fun, we invite all conference attendees to come and sing their heart out. Don't miss out on this chance to connect with fellow attendees in a relaxed, fun atmosphere. We can't wait to see you there!

Room 224

All Recovery Meeting

The All Recovery model is described as a more inclusive and non-prescriptive approach to recovery. It's built on each individual's personal recovery journey. All Recovery embraces and supports all positive changes individuals make in their lives to attain and maintain recovery. It focuses on what a person can do, instead of what a person can't. All are welcome!

Friday, March 7, 2025

8 am

Walk with Hope

Enjoy a morning walk with Hope the therapy dog and her human, Karen Russell.

9 am

Moving Past Awareness: Mental Health Rights, Recovery, and Advocacy **- Vesper Moore**



In this keynote, Vesper Moore will explore the need to shift from mere awareness of mental health issues to actionable advocacy that secures rights and societal change.

Drawing from their experience in disability and mental health policy, they will discuss community-based care, self-determination, and the fight for civil rights.

Attendees will gain insight into how to move beyond conversations and towards tangible reforms that empower individuals and communities.

Vesper Moore is an Indigenous activist and leader. They are deeply committed to promoting mental health and disability rights through activism, leadership, organizing, public speaking, and education. Their work focuses on cultivating social movements and raising public awareness to foster lasting social change. Vesper has contributed to the establishment of mental health organizations worldwide and has been an advocate for civil rights in the United States. Through their advocacy, they have brought the perspectives of people with mental health challenges and disabilities to both national and international platforms.

Collaborating with the United States government and the United Nations, Vesper helps shape strategies around trauma, intersectionality, and disability rights. They have been featured on NBC News, PBS NewsHour, Politico, and at The White House. Vesper is at the forefront of legislative reform, striving to shift the societal paradigm surrounding mental health.

10:15 am

Break

10:30 am

Breakouts

Room AB

Recovery Reimagined: Building Community Relationships for Alternative Peer Supports *- LaNija Redmond*

SMART Recovery is an alternative pathway to recovery that is based in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Instead of the traditional 12-step process, this pathway involves addressing the root thoughts/ beliefs that lead individuals to addiction. Founded in 1994, SMART Recovery has embraced a grassroots approach to outreach, utilizing organic connections and fundraising efforts to establish a presence in multiple communities. This presentation will cover how to source and cultivate relationships across a network of resource providers such as MH/ SUD facilities, recovery support centers, coalitions, and more.

Friday, March 7, 2025

From there, we will cover the process of expanding across different industries by connecting across a shared mission, and how to create a sustainable network of influence. We will highlight an example of this, named the "Alaska Model". In this model, grant funds were used to introduce our program to a new state, where we then built a foundation of support from multiple organizations and volunteers that has thrived long-term. We will also explore what "recovery reimaged" means. We will analyze the benefits of having a multi-pronged approach to recovery by utilizing peer supports, recovery communities and other pathways to recovery.

Room C **Employment as a Path to Recovery: A Day in the Life of an IPS Team** – Casey Corder, Joshua Boyles, Darius Kolar, Shayne Lawlor

The members of this IPS team will take a deep dive into the workings of an IPS team, explaining IPS services, discussing the role of each team member and the impact the service can have on the lives of people living with a mental health diagnosis and/or a history of substance use. We will explain how employment can play a role in everyone's recovery journey.

Room D **Social Health and Psychological Harm Reduction** – Jenesis Nicolaisen, Kelly Redfern

Isolation and loneliness are often mistaken for one another but are distinct experiences. Social isolation refers to having little to no contact with others and lacking close relationships and social support. Loneliness, on the other hand, is the feeling of being disconnected from others and can be experienced even in a room full of friends. This feeling is often the result of immense psychological harm and attachment trauma. As of 2023, the US Surgeon General has declared a national public health crisis of loneliness and isolation. It's directly linked to higher rates of substance use disorder (SUD) and depression, as well as overdose and suicide. In response to the loneliness crisis and its impact, there is a new wave of social health organizations emerging to support more effective delivery of mental health and social support services to those most disproportionately impacted. At the heart of these programs is a deep commitment to psychological harm reduction: minimizing the harm that gets caused through unhealthy social interactions, and creating spaces where people can heal and repattern how they approach relationships and friendships in community. During this session, we will discuss the research basis for social health and introduce participants to some basic tools and techniques for facilitating socially healthy (and healing) interactions.

Room EFG **How To: Grow Your Own Peer-Led Problem Gambling Support Program** – Joshua Hampton, Mark Palinski

Sunrise Community for Recovery and Wellness, in partnership with the NC Problem Gambling Program, has launched the first ever federally funded, 100% peer-run problem gambling peer support program. Over the past year, we have navigated an amazing journey filled with both successes and challenges. This session will highlight key achievements and the barriers we have encountered, providing a comprehensive overview of our experiences. Our goal is to share what we learned, inspiring other regions in NC to embrace problem gambling peer support initiatives. Additionally, we aim to create a robust framework that other organizations can use to develop similar programs

11:45 am **Adjournment and Box Lunch**

Box lunches will be available after the final session. Feel free to stay and network or grab your lunch to go if you need to head out early. We hope you enjoy and make the most of the opportunity to connect!

Thank you for attending this year's conference! We hope to see you next year!

Meet the Presenters

April Barber-Scales is a returning citizen who served 30 years in the NC department of corrections. She is employed as a Certified Peer Support Specialist at Freedom House/Chapel Hill. She is also a motivational speaker, author, NAMINC PLC Member, IOOV presenter and the epitome of "The Living Proof of Recovery."

Bodi Bodenhamer, NC CPSS is Lead Peer Support Specialist at the UNC OASIS clinic in Chapel Hill, NC. They have worked in peer support since 2016, primarily with adolescents and young adults experiencing medical treatment for psychosis, with whom they share similar lived experience. They also have lifelong experience with creating 2D art and storytelling, which are the cornerstones of their own recovery. Bodi has provided a variety of LGBTQIA2+ ally awareness and sensitivity trainings across NC, for mental health professionals, K-12 public school educators, nurses, and counselors, as well as volunteer staff for museums and community spaces. Bodi believes in the critical nature of community connectivity in the context of recovery, and strives to grow those connections in order to show their strength and resilience and success where other, traditional modalities and avenues of treatment fail.

Joshua Boyles - Employment Peer Mentor (EPM) on the Easterseals PORT Health IPS West Team, has worked providing IPS services for over 3 years and is a NC Certified Peer Support Specialist.

Casey Corder, Senior Program Manager, overseeing IPS services at Easterseals PORT Health, has been providing IPS services since it was launched in NC in 2013. Casey has 17 years' experience working in Supported Employment services in NC.

Chablis Dandridge has been a consumer of social/human services all his life. From the justice system to the mental health system and every system in between. Chablis received his college degree while serving a 13-year prison sentence, and paralegal certification and he learned to speak Spanish fluently during that time. Today, he focuses on reform advocacy and community outreach work and has authored several books including "A Letter to My Sons, Leaving A Legacy of Love". He devotes part of his professional attention to providing transitional housing for individuals returning to the community from incarceration. He speaks publicly on human rights and social justice issues and is a tireless champion for recidivism reduction initiatives and youth intervention programs. He is a huge proponent of Forensic Peer Support and is committed to devoting the rest of his life to ensure that the profession is recognized and employed nationally and internationally.

Desireé Gorbea-Finalet, MA, came to North Carolina from Puerto Rico in 2017 and brought her passion and tenacity along with her. She joined Disability Rights North Carolina in September 2021 as the Traumatic Brain Injury Justice Initiative Project Manager. Her work centers on developing and implementing an Innovative Traumatic Brain Injury Screening and Supportive Services Initiative program in various community-based service settings in North Carolina. Her passion for disability rights advocacy stems from her lived experience with multiple disabilities, including being a numerous TBI survivor and having Narcolepsy Type 1. She holds a Master of Arts in Peace and Conflict Studies focusing on International Peace Development from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Minor in Criminal Justice from the Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico.

Alema Gregg is the Regional Director for the Triangle and the NC State Warmline at Promise Resource Network (PRN). She is very passionate about peer support work and has been supporting others as a CPSS for the past eight years. PRN currently runs a respite in Raleigh, NC which is a hospital and jail diversion for individuals struggling with mental health and/or substance use. She has been on her recovery journey for almost 18 years now. Having lived experience with mental health, substance use, homelessness, and incarceration, Alema is very passionate about providing support to individuals who are underserved, oppressed, and misunderstood. With a message of "everyone deserves and wants to feel part of something," she turns no one away and is always looking for innovative ways to create change. Collaborating with other agencies in the triangle area, her mission is to help implement a crisis intervention system within the counties she serves that will benefit everyone.

Meet the Presenters

Tyler Grooms is a compassionate and dedicated Peer Support Specialist with 3 years of experience in the mental health and substance abuse recovery fields. Drawing from his own journey of recovery, he is committed to helping others navigate their paths to wellness and empowerment. After overcoming personal challenges with mental health struggles, and substance abuse Tyler discovered the transformative power of peer support. This inspired him to pursue a role in the field, earning his certification as a Peer Support Specialist through Sunrise.

Outside of his professional role, Tyler enjoys playing golf and exploring the outdoors, which he believes contributes to personal well-being and balance. He is committed to fostering a sense of hope and possibility in the lives of those he supports. Tyler resides in Asheville, NC and remains dedicated to empowering individuals on their recovery journeys, reminding them that they are never alone in their struggles. Celebrating over 4 years in sobriety, he gives thanks to his higher power and his support system.

Angela Marie Hagaman is a Research Assistant Professor in the East Tennessee State University (ETSU) College of Public Health and serves as Co-Director of the ETSU Addiction Science Center (ASC). In this role, she provides support for a number of studies, including the NIH-funded Studies to Advance Recovery Supports (STARS) and a NIDA-funded pilot study focused on assessing the recovery community center (RCC) workforce in rural and urban areas of the U.S. Dr. Hagaman also serves as the Principal Investigator (PI) on the TN Opioid SBIRT project and Co-Investigator for the recently funded Collaborative Hub for Emerging Adult Recovery Research (CHEARR) a partnership with colleagues at UCONN. Dr. Hagaman collaborates on a number of community-based prevention initiatives, including the First Tennessee Development District's Caring Workplace Initiative and Ballad Health's Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP). Angela received her Doctorate of Public Health degree in December of 2021 at ETSU and is a National Certified Counselor (NCC).

Barjohn Hall is the founder and Executive Director of SolidShe, Inc. a nonprofit organization dedicated to mental wellness for women, teen girls and their families. She is a Certified Peer Support Specialist, a Mental Health Advocate, a Self-Published Author, an Inspirational Speaker, a Reiki II Practitioner, an up-and-coming Yoga Instructor, a veteran of the US Air Force, a mother of three beautiful children and a woman diagnosed with a mental health condition.

Through her own life's journey of living through a diagnosis of bipolar disorder, Barjohn was determined to overcome the crippling effects of negative self-talk and learned ways in which she could silence her inner critic. Along the way, Barjohn discovered that the development of self-worth and self-awareness is one of the most powerful tools a woman could ever possess. Since her revelation, SHE has been on a mission to help empower women; in mind, body and spirit and is now allowing her voice and her story to be told.

Barjohn is utilizing SolidShe, Inc. as a platform to encourage and inspire women by providing them with the necessary tools, support and a safe space of healing for those who are struggling with their mental health. Barjohn and SolidShe's purpose is to shed light on topics related to mental illness and inspire those who are suffering in silence.

Josh Hampton is a NCCPSS at Sunrise Community for Recovery and Wellness in Asheville, NC. Having almost a lifetime of experience in, and in recovery from substance dependency and criminal justice involvement, Josh now uses that experience to bring hope to others who are seeking to begin their own personal journey to recovery. Having also had lived experience with a chaotic relationship to gambling, he is now using his knowledge as a PSS to help grow an innovative program of complete community support around problem gambling.

Nancy Johns - I am a veteran and former Life Flight Paramedic. Thirty-one years ago, I suffered a TBI at work and was in a coma for three weeks. Instead of treating for a brain injury, I was diagnosed with a mental health condition and hospitalized in a state facility for 17 years. I was discharged as my guardian when the state closed the hospital with nothing but a key to an apartment that I paid for. I was offered no resources or support. During my struggle to survive, I asked for help because of suicidal ideations and was hospitalized with the promise to keep me safe. After four days, I attempted to take my life and I had

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to be defibrillated twice. I was discharged within two hours and no one on my contact list was notified. I searched and searched for support and none was available. I eventually found a support group in Colorado that saved my life. From that, I became a Certified Peer Support Specialist and today I facilitate support groups for those who have attempted or have ideations in the US and UK. I specialized in trauma and suicide. I am also a big voice for changing the stigma around suicide.

Mel Kennedy comes to us from Disability Rights North Carolina (DRNC), North Carolina's Protection & Advocacy System. Although she began her career as a psychiatric social worker at the Miami VA Medical Center, she is now a civil rights attorney and staunch proponent of harm reduction and trauma informed care. As part of her work to enhance self-determination for people with disabilities, she advocates for change in the policies and implementation of involuntary commitment proceedings.

Darius Kolar, Employment Support Professional and Benefits Counselor at Easterseals PORT Health and has over 8 years experience working in Supported Employment and Mental Health services. Darius is a Certified Work Incentives Practitioner and provides benefits counseling to individuals receiving IPS services.

R.V. Kuser is an advocate, author, educator and public speaker living in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. His life's work is dedicated to informing and educating others about the gifts of autism and schizophrenia. He is member of the NC Council on Developmental Disabilities and a Southeast Americans with Disabilities Act Trainer Member.

R.V.'s first book, "Challenged But Not Defeated - Strategies for Coping with Autism and Schizophrenia" is a short autobiography. He wrote his second book, with his wife, Marlene, "Weight A Minute - Lessons a Family Learns Thru the Gift of Autism." The Kusers have written a young adult fiction book about the importance of family and acceptance. His third book, "My Schizophrenia Story - We All Help Each Other" is a book about self-care for everyone.

Alia Martin is the Crisis Response Community EMT for the CARE team, a collaboration between Orange County Emergency Medical Services and the Chapel Hill Police Department. Alia is a state-licensed EMT-B and has been working for Orange County EMS for almost four years. She graduated from UNC Chapel Hill with a Bachelor of Science in Biology last May and started working full time in December with the CARE team after completing Crisis Intervention Training.

Amanda Martin is a person in long-term, self-defined recovery from substances, and on a daily journey of wellness and recovery from mental health challenges. She began her path into peer support in 2016, where she worked for Promise Resource Network in the Recovery Court program, sharing her lived experience of recovery, wellness, and "successful" reentry from the carceral system with those involved in Mecklenburg County Recovery Courts. Since then, Amanda has completed her bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies with dreams of using her lived experience to provide authentic and equitable legal services to disenfranchised community members as an attorney. Amanda is now the Director of Community Initiatives for Promise Resource Network, where she has hopes of not only pouring support into her team of peer support specialist but also to educate others in community about the value of lived experience.

Pastor Gene McLendon is the Executive Director of Hope Mission of Coastal Carolina. He has been leading the organization for 30 years in Carteret County, NC.

Felishia McPherson joined NAMI Durham in 2007 while working as a CPSS for Easter Seals ACT. Felishia has held NAMI affiliate offices of Secretary, VP, CIT Coordinator, created the "Ladies of NAMI" radio podcast, was elected twice to the NAMINC BOARD of Directors where she currently serves as the 2nd woman of color PLC Chairperson and a Certified CIT Coordinator. Felishia has been serving as a Peer Support Specialist for over 25 years and is a NC Licensed Clinical Mental Health Professional for 20 year who lives in recovery daily.

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Jennifer Melvin is a Peer Support Specialist serving on the CARE (Crisis Response, Assistance, and Engagement) Team, where she has served for over a year. She previously worked at Interfaith Prison Ministries, providing support to those in need. She is currently a senior at Walden University, pursuing a Bachelor of Social Work, having previously studied Sociology at Shaw University. She is passionate about helping others and balances her career with a love for fishing and cherishing time with family, especially her grandchildren. She has been happily married for 6 years.

Jemm Merritt is a dedicated advocate with a strong commitment to enhancing the lives of marginalized communities. With extensive experience in community health and advocacy, they focus on creating inclusive support systems for LGBTQ+ individuals and those facing mental health challenges. Having been in recovery for four years, Jemm brings personal insight to their work, emphasizing the importance of peer support. As the founder of ODAAT NC, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting peer support and community collaboration, they actively engage with various health initiatives, mentoring others and fostering environments that prioritize diversity and equity. Jemm is currently finishing their Master of Public Health (MPH) at the University of North Carolina and graduated from Herzing University with a bachelor's degree in health sciences, focusing on Health Policies. Their educational background and hands-on experience uniquely position them to lead discussions on the importance of inclusive practices within health systems.

Andrea Montgomery holds a Bachelor's degree in Nursing from the University of Cincinnati and has been with the RHA Health Services Mobile Crisis Management team for the past 4 years, serving as Program Manager for the last 1.5 years. Originally from Southern Ohio, she has called North Carolina home for the past 15 years. Andrea is a proud mom to two amazing daughters and has a love for all things pink, chickens, and her French Bulldog.

Jenesis Nicolaisen (they/them or she/her) is the co-founder and Executive Director of SeekHealing, an Asheville-based non-profit pioneering a novel "social health" protocol to address the loneliness epidemic, working alongside mental health providers in order to reduce deaths of despair like overdoses and suicides.

Their journey as a pioneer and thought leader in the emergent field of social health began with their own recovery from substance use disorder (SUD) and burnout working as a corporate consultant in the oil and gas industry. In the eight years since then, they have facilitated hundreds of "Connection Practice" meetings and dozens of "Listening Training" workshops in communities hard-hit by the mental health and opioid epidemics in Western North Carolina. Jenesis is a master facilitator and practitioner of social health techniques; teaching experiential and mindfulness-based techniques around interpersonal communication, social power dynamics, group facilitation, and how to democratize non-clinical trauma healing work through community relationships.

Jenesis spearheaded the development of SeekHealing's unique curriculum in collaboration with Dr. Gabor Mate, Dr. Rachel Wurzman, Sara Ness of Authentic Revolution, and the Board of Directors at the Circling Institute. Under their tenure as Executive Director, the organization has grown to serve over 3,000 people annually in Western North Carolina, 92% of whom had a documented mental health history and 37% of whom were either unhoused or housing insecure. To make that work possible at the community level, they now support other organizations and non-profits in implementing social health programs like SeekHealing's in order to reduce burnout and accelerate organizational impact, both internally at workplaces and within the communities those workplaces serve.

Mark Palinski is an advocate and leader in the field of recovery and wellness, currently serving as the Programs Director for Sunrise Community for Recovery and Wellness. Mark has firsthand experience with substance use and mental health challenges, which adds great value to his work. As a certified Peer Support Specialist in North Carolina and a committed advocate for drug user rights, he is passionate about person-centered care and supporting the rights of those in recovery. Mark is dedicated to creating supportive and compassionate care environments, believing they can transform lives. He focuses on providing access to essential resources and building spaces where people can thrive and stay well. His passion and experience make him a strong advocate for fostering healthy, supportive organizational cultures.

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Heather Palmateer is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker serving as a Crisis Counselor on the C.A.R.E. (Crisis Response, Assistance, and Engagement) Team at the Chapel Hill Police Department Crisis Unit. Prior to her work at the CHPD, Heather served as both an outpatient and school-based mental health therapist in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools/region. Heather continues to work with a few therapy clients and holds certifications in the Satir modality, as well as Cognitive Processing Therapy designed to treat Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. She attended North Carolina State University for her undergraduate and graduate degrees, enjoys spending time with her loved ones (including two cats and two dogs) and beekeeping in her spare time.

Kelly Redfern, NCPSS, is a MADNESS ADVOCATE and volunteer with community of neurodiverse vulnerable unsheltered persons of all ages and genders. They are a student of social work at Western Carolina University who is dedicated to helping humans ReDiscover the strength within themselves as a form of resilient coping skills.

As a person with lived experience with homelessness and substance use, my journey has taken me through many elements of situational trauma. I advocate and promote psychological harm reduction in the quality of listening styles of my nature to hear ideations regarding their existence and community and whether or not they want to be here participating after they have endured trauma, and host a safe space and participate daily with the local Asheville Homeless Alliance. I'm a leading member of the Continuum of Care and Buncombe County and help serve the community by bearing witness to others so that they may get through another day. I also volunteer with SeekHealing and am a certified trainer for Alternatives to Suicide. Living my strengths in recovery to show my community that collectively we serve as medicine for each other. This medicine is initiated by sharing safe space of verbal vulnerability.

LaNija Redmond is the Community Outreach Coordinator for SMART Recovery, with an active assignment to Mecklenburg NC. She holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia in Mass Communications. During her undergraduate tenure, she held multiple outreach/marketing roles at various nonprofits that specialized in serving underserved/minority communities. Her introduction to SMART Recovery started from a desire to learn about the intersection between addiction and mental health after her adoptive mother lost the battle to Alzheimer's/Dementia. From that event, LaNija became an advocate for peer support and exploring how alternative peer support models can aid individuals healing from trauma as well as addiction.

Sam Ryan is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Licensed Clinical Addiction Specialist, Certified Criminal Justice Addictions Professional, and Certified Clinical Supervisor. She is currently an implementation director with the Family Centered Treatment Foundation assisting organizations with utilizing the Family Centered Treatment model and piloting innovative programming including Family Centered Treatment Recovery. Her experience in working in the mental health and substance use profession includes providing individual, family, and group therapy to individuals of all ages. Her specialties include working with addictive behaviors, self-harm, and justice systems involved individuals. Sam also trains and educates fellow clinicians, mental health professionals, and community stakeholders. She has previously been involved with Gaston County Collaborative, Lincoln County Collaborative, and facilitated use of harm reduction strategies.

Justin Shytle is a Peer Support Specialist and Harm Reduction Coordinator at Sunrise Community for Recovery and Wellness.

John Sotirkys is a retired US Marine, currently serving as the Director of Peer Recovery Center in Morehead City where he is developing new programming for PRC and Eastern NC, utilizing Peer Support.

Amy Swanger is a certified peer support specialist in North Carolina and is also a licensed clinical mental health counselor in North Carolina. Amy received her bachelor's degree from Western Carolina University in 2008, her NCPSS in 2015, and her LCMHC from Montreat College in 2023. Amy Currently works at Bethel House, a homeless resources center in Waynesville, North Carolina, as a therapist and social worker. Amy also volunteers in the Haywood County detention center, where she teaches psychoeducational groups and also runs a support group along with her peers from NAMI Haywood. Amy serves as the vice-president of NAMI Haywood and also serves on the CFAC for Vaya Health.

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Hannah Louise Warren is a doctoral student in the East Tennessee State University (ETSU) College of Public Health and serves as an implementation specialist at the ETSU Addiction Science Center. In this role, she provides support for several studies, including the NIH-funded Studies to Advance Recovery Supports (STARS) and a NIDA-funded pilot study focused on assessing the recovery community center (RCC) workforce in rural and urban areas of the U.S. Additionally, Hannah also collaborates on the First Tennessee Development District's Caring Workplace Initiative which aims to increase help-seeking behaviors and decrease stigma surrounding substance use disorder and mental health challenges among the regional workforce. Having personally navigated the challenges of substance use and mental health, Hannah is committed to advancing the field of recovery science and helping others thrive throughout their unique recovery journey.

John D. Weeks is a working North Carolina Certified Peer Support Specialist since 2010, a member, volunteer, facilitator for multiple NAMI Signature programs, a Board Member of NAMI South Mountains NC affiliate and NAMI NC Peer Leadership Council with training in Wellness Recovery Action Planning, Supported Employment/Employment Peer Mentor, Forensic Peer Support, Certified Older Adult Peer Support State trainer and is currently working on Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor credential. He has worked for two providers under numerous service definitions and is currently with Partners Health Management Jail Reentry team. Additionally, John is a contractor with UNC Chapel Hill as a Peer Support Curriculum reviewer and class observer, now also working on co-developing the state's Unified Curriculum with 3 Honors AS degrees and Healthcare Information Technology Pro certification. A native of Colorado, he has been a Rutherford County NC resident since 2005 with family ties to the military, 7 children, 12 grandchildren, and 3 great grandchildren.

