



# HENDERSON COUNTY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CONFERENCE 2026



**Connected for Impact:**  
Evidence, Experience, & Innovation

**03 . 23 . 2026 - BRCC**

## **Keynote and Workshop Speaker Bios**

**Kara Ashley-Gilmore, LCMHC, ATR-BC, SE**, is a therapist and educator who champions the use of creativity as a powerful pathway to wellness and healing. As a Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor, Board Certified Art Therapist, and Somatic Experiencing® Practitioner, Kara founded and owns Mountain Creative Arts Counseling. Her clinical practice is dedicated to helping individuals navigate complex trauma, specializing in working with adult survivors of childhood abuse and neglect, as well as new mothers struggling with perinatal mood & anxiety disorders. Beyond the counseling room, Kara provides clinical supervision and training to professionals pursuing their art therapy credentials and facilitates judgment-free expressive arts workshops and retreats. She is also an active board member of the Arts Council of Henderson County and a studio artist at the Art Place Studios. Through every role, Kara empowers others to tap into their innate creative resources to achieve profound healing and greater resiliency.

**Samantha Berkowitz, MPH, RD, LDN**, is a registered dietitian specializing in nutrition for neurodivergence, eating disorders, and chronic conditions using a non-diet, weight-neutral approach. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Culinary Nutrition from Johnson & Wales University and her Master of Public Health from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is the founder of Unmasked Nutrition, a virtual group practice in Western North Carolina, and the host of the Nourishing Neurodivergence Podcast, where she highlights the unique needs of different neurotypes. Samantha is dedicated to creating a safe space for clients to unmask, delivering highly individualized care, with a particular focus on the intersection of neurodivergence and eating disorders.

**Kelly Caravella, PhD** is a clinical psychologist and assistant professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is an expert in child development, with a specialization in autism and developmental disabilities. Her clinical work centers on diagnosing autism and related conditions. In her research, Dr. Caravella investigates barriers to accessing timely diagnosis and intervention for young autistic children, with a particular focus on those who face heightened challenges in obtaining care.

**David Chastain, PhD**, has worked as an educator, counselor, lecturer, and professor for over 40 years. He has held leadership positions in many substance use disorder treatment settings for both adolescents and adults. He served as a core faculty member for the Hazelden Betty Ford Graduate School of Addiction Studies (Center City, MN) for six years, adjunct instructor for six years at Madison College (Madison, WI), and adjunct

instructor for seven years at Upper Iowa University, Madison Center (Madison, WI). Currently, for Brevard College (Brevard, NC), Dr. Chastain has taught Introduction to Psychology, Abnormal Psychology, Theories of Counseling, and three courses he wrote: Grief, Loss, and Death; Substance Use, Addiction, and Behavior; and The Psychology of Families. Dr. Chastain holds a PhD in Counseling, and his MA is in Addiction Studies. Dr. Chastain held the Clinical Substance Abuse Counselor credential from the state of Wisconsin (1994- 2023).

**Reverend Philip Cooper, CCHW, CPSS**, a Western North Carolina native, is an accomplished reentry expert and criminal justice reform advocate. He is the Founder and Chief Change Agent of Operation Gateway Inc., dedicated to leveraging lived experience to transform lives and reduce the stigma on recovery and reentry. He also founded Voices of Appalachia, a state-funded initiative tackling behavioral health stigma in marginalized communities. Reverend Cooper has been recognized with numerous honors, including the MLK Service Award, the Attorney General's Dogwood Award, the 2024 Recovery Role Model Award, SAMHSA's 2024 Innovator of the Year, Bank of America's Neighborhood Builder, and TIME Magazine's 2025 CLOSER Honoree. He is an Appalachian Leadership Institute Fellow, a Leading with Conviction Fellow with JustLeadership USA, and an ambassador for Just Economics of WNC. As Pastor of Friends of John Recovery Ministry, he champions the belief that those closest to the problem are closest to the solution.

**Kelly Crosbie, LCSW, MSW**, brings over 30 years of experience leading and delivering public services for individuals with mental health and substance use needs, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and traumatic brain injuries. As Director of the NC Department of Health and Human Services' Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services (DMH/DD/SUS), she oversees North Carolina's community-based public system supporting individuals, families, and communities across the state. Over the past 13 years, Kelly has held several key leadership roles within NC DHHS in addition to her current role, including Assistant Director of Behavioral Health and Chief Operating Officer at NC Medicaid. A licensed clinical social worker and person with lived experience, Kelly is deeply committed to advancing equitable, person-centered care.

**Lisa Curtin, PhD**, is a Professor of Psychology at Appalachian State University, where she serves as the Program Director and Director of Clinical Training for their Clinical Psychology Psy.D. program. She received her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Virginia Tech after completing a predoctoral internship at Brown University Alpert School of Medicine, and her undergraduate degree in psychology from Florida State University. Her research focuses on rural mental health (e.g., stigma), understanding and treatment of substance use problems, and social factors and body image.

**Terance Dawkins, LCSW**, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in North Carolina & South Carolina. Terance received his Undergraduate & Masters Degree in Social Work from Winthrop University. He also owns his own private practice, entitled Missing Pieces Counseling Services, located in the community where he grew up. Terance is a part of the advisory board for the South Carolina Society of Clinical Social Work & the Spartanburg Area Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities. Through his own childhood experiences and the experiences of his clients, he has discovered the importance of the different beliefs and lessons that are learned through family interactions and daily interactions. This has led to his interest in Intergenerational Trauma and the impact it has had throughout generations. Terance seeks to utilize his skills to educate and destigmatize mental health. He believes Mental Health is for everyone and hopes to reduce the self-imposed barriers that prevent clients from utilizing Mental Health Services.

**Sarah Erdman, MS**, serves as the Training Developer with Creating a Family: Support • Train • Strengthen/Foster • Adoptive • Kinship. She holds both a B.A. and an M.S. in Education and brings over 30 years of experience teaching across all age levels in public schools and private college settings. Having been trained in the Neurobehavioral Approach by the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Consultation and Training Services, Sarah is also the lead developer and facilitator of two evidence-based trainings on prenatal substance exposure for parents and child welfare professionals, which to date have reached over a thousand participants nationwide. A frequent presenter on this critical topic, she is also the mother of two and a licensed foster parent.

**Tracy George, MPH, CHES, CYT**, is a Lecturer of Psychology at UNC Asheville, where she teaches health psychology, mindfulness-based behavior change, and human sexuality. Her work focuses on practical, evidence-based strategies for promoting well-being through social connection and experiential learning. She has presented on behavior change in educational and community settings and integrates neuroscience-informed approaches to health promotion across her teaching. Tracy developed the SMART pod method in her undergraduate classrooms and has since adapted it for use in employee wellness programs and community groups.

**Beth Glueck, PhD, LCMHCS, NCC**, is the Integrated Care Program Manager at Community Care of North Carolina (CCNC) where she provides program management on behalf of NC DHHS for the statewide Collaborative Care Model Capacity Building Fund. She provides education and practice support around behavioral health integration to practices. She previously worked as a licensed counselor for over 20 years in a variety of settings (community mental health, emergency department, college, and private practice). Beth completed her doctorate in Counselor Education at NC State University with a dissertation focusing on behavioral health clinicians working in integrated care primary care settings. She holds a master's degree from Appalachian State University in Community Counseling and a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is licensed in North Carolina as a Licensed Clinical Mental Health Health Counselor Supervisor and as a National Certified Counselor.

**Beth Harmer, DSW, MSW, LCSW, LCAS, CCS**, is a dedicated social work educator and clinician with almost 20 years of experience in mental health and addiction services. She earned her Doctor of Social Work degree from the University of St. Thomas in 2021 and her Master of Social Work degree from Western Carolina University in 2010. She joined the Social Work faculty at Western Carolina University in 2016 and currently serves as the Assistant Department Head and Graduate Program Director. Beyond her academic role, Dr. Harmer is an active community leader by serving in executive positions on the Addiction Professionals of NC and Sunrise Community for Recovery and Wellness boards. She is passionate about improving mental health and addiction services through the education, training, and supervision of others.

**Mark Harvey, PhD**, has conducted research on natural resource allocation dilemmas, human visual sensitivity to and memory for atmospheric haze, the design of informal learning environments (e.g., museums), and the influence of ecolabels on consumers. His courses emphasize the critical evaluation of primary sources (in Research Methods) balanced against the value of striving to produce frontier research and scholarship (in advanced and Senior Seminar courses). Harvey's recent research seeks to contribute to the understanding of how the human relationship with the natural world develops and may contribute to wellness and pro-environmental values.

**Parisa Kaliush, PhD**, is a National Institute of Mental Health T32 Postdoctoral Fellow in Reproductive Mood Disorders at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She earned her Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the University of Utah (May 2024) with specializations in child & family health and behavioral medicine. She completed a clinical psychology internship at UNC on the Reproductive Psychology track (2023-2024).

**Brea Kuykendall, MHS** has been on staff at Land of Sky for nearly four years, coordinating health promotion and disease prevention funding and programs. She leads the Community Health Worker Program at Asheville Terrace and Arrowhead Apartments, provides technical assistance to senior centers, and delivers community education to support healthy aging and chronic disease management.

**Christine Lau, RN, LCSW**, is both a registered nurse and a licensed clinical social worker with experience in palliative care and behavioral health. She has worked in direct clinical services, leadership, and consulting roles, and now serves as a behavioral health clinician focused on supporting healthcare staff. With over 20 years in the field, Christine brings a practical perspective to trauma-informed organizational development and staff support.

**Lamarr Lewis, MA, LAPC, NCC, CPRP**, his lifelong mission is to leave the world better than ow he found it. He is a dedicated advocate, author, and agent of change. With a focus on the human side of workplace culture, he has supported diverse groups including individuals living with psychiatric disabilities, people in recovery from substance abuse, and at-hope youth (He does not use the term at-risk). His career spans over twenty years with experience in community-based mental and public health, as a therapist, consultant, public speaker, facilitator, trainer, and human service professional. Lamarr integrates “A therapist’s lens to organizational problems,” fostering accountability, healing, and equity in the communities he serves. He is an alumnus of Wittenberg University graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology with minors in Africana Studies and Religion. He later received his master’s degree in clinical mental health counseling from Argosy University. He has been a featured expert for such organizations as; Boeing, Region IV Public Health Training Center, the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network, Fulton County Probate Court, Mississippi Department of Health, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, ASTHO, NNPHI, and many more.

**Taylor Ludwig, LCSW, LCAS, CCS, QS, RYT**, is a licensed clinician, supervisor, and yoga teacher with more than a decade of experience supporting individuals, couples, and families across the continuum of community mental health. A North Carolina native, she earned her undergraduate and graduate degrees in Social Work from East Carolina University and now calls Western North Carolina home. Through her practice, Tailored Wellness, Taylor focuses on trauma recovery, clinical supervision, and community education that fosters healing and connection. Her work is grounded in the belief that emotional well-being and the body are deeply intertwined. Taylor is currently pursuing the Dual Track Certificate in Sex Therapy and Sexuality Education at the University of Michigan, expanding her expertise to help bridge the gap between sexual health and mental health care. Passionate about creating access to affirming, quality services for all people, she is especially dedicated to increasing resources in North Carolina.

**Derek Martinez, LCMHC**, currently works for Your Next Chapter Counseling and specializes in working with OCD and anxiety-related disorders. Derek graduated from the University of Florida in 2019 with a master's degree in education and a specialist degree in marriage and family therapy. After realizing his passion was not in couples or family work, but rather OCD and anxiety, he shifted to individual therapy. Derek started his training for ERP in 2018 at the University of Florida’s Springhill outpatient clinic, a component of the UF

Shands hospital system. He has specialized with OCD since graduation and has maintained a consistent case load mainly consisting of clients with OCD.

**Sarah Merritt Ryan, MS, CPSS**, is a writer, speaker, and advocate for emotional recovery from serious mental illness. She is a survivor of four psychotic breaks who made a full recovery while choosing to remain on antipsychotics for life. She is diagnosed with schizophrenia and has been in full remission, symptom-free, for 14 years. During this time, she has married, given birth to a son who is now in first grade, and rebuilt her career. She is also a Certified Peer Support Specialist through the UNC School of Social Work. Her Psychology Today posts are used as training material for resident psychiatrists at the UNC Schizophrenia Treatment and Evaluation Program (STEP) Clinic at UNC-Chapel Hill. She has been published twice in Writer's Digest on the topic of writing about mental illness. Her first book-length work of sonnets on faith amidst suffering is called *My Soul to Keep* and will be released in June 2026 by Prolific Pulse Press. She is currently working on her full-length memoir, *Threads of Truth: An Emotional Battle to Move Past Schizophrenia and Want to Be Me*. She speaks for NAMI NC, NC State University, UNC-CH Psychiatry, and various community organizations. She was honored as "Hometown Hero" in 2024 by the North Carolina Women's Courage Professional Soccer Team, Lenovo, and NAMI Wake County for her contributions to mental health in the Raleigh-Durham community. She is designated as Parent Advocate by the Wake County Public School System for parents living with mental illness. She has a degree in Journalism from UNC-Chapel Hill and a Master of Science degree in Communication from NC State. She has been published academically in the social sciences.

**Sarah Pfau, JD, MPH**, has enjoyed 30 dynamic years of health policy and health care law work in private sector, national non-profit, academic, public interest law, and State government venues. She has extensive experience with legislative drafting and analysis; multi-state policy research; federal grant and State government contract technical writing; business development; and project management. Sarah synthesizes and distills complex concepts, including federal and State regulatory updates, for non-legal audiences and professionals with diverse roles within their agencies. She has an expert working knowledge of U.S. HHS agency regulations; NC DHHS Medicaid managed care contract oversight; and Medicaid managed care health plan and provider agency operations.

**Julianne Power, PhD, MS**, is the Evaluation Scientist at the Mountain Area Health Education Center in Asheville, North Carolina. She received her doctorate in Health Behavior from the Gillings School of Global Public Health at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and her Master of Science in Health Promotion from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Her research interests include using digital tools, like telehealth, to increase access to healthcare for rural populations. In her spare time, she enjoys hiking and biking with her dog.

**Sarah Reives-Houston, PhD, PsyD (ABD)**, is the Assistant Dean for Workforce Development and the Director of Behavioral Health Springboard at the UNC School of Social Work. She has a Ph.D. in education psychology and is finalizing her PsyD in clinical psychology. She has an MS in Human Development and a graduate certificate in Clinical Addictions. Sarah is certified in child and adolescent trauma and is an adult and teen MHFA instructor. She has over 15 years of professional experience in developing training and curriculum content focused on the treatment, intervention, and prevention of trauma, mental health, and substance use challenges for child and family systems. Her lived experience in trauma, substance use, domestic violence, and mental health within her ecological system fuels her passion for this work and her commitment to being a support for those who are serving the most vulnerable members of our community.

**Emily Roberts, MA, LCMHCS**, is the director of behavioral health at Mountain Area Health Education Center in Asheville. She is a licensed clinical mental health counselor with a Master's in Marriage and Family therapy. She is passionate about helping people grow and supporting clinicians in their professional roles. In her free time, you'll find her spending time with her sons.

**Yolanda Robinson, PhD, LCSW**, is the owner and a practitioner for Abide Inclusive Therapy located in Hendersonville, Asheville, and Raleigh. Prior to establishing this practice, Dr. Robinson's career has included work with the US Military overseas, clinical director for a residential facility, and primary clinician for the mental health unit of Maine State Prison. Dr. Robinson received a Master's in Social Work from NYU and a Doctorate in Clinical Social Work from the University of Tennessee. She currently holds licenses in North Carolina, Maryland, South Carolina, and Maine.

**Courtney Rogers, PhD**, earned her PhD in Clinical Health Psychology from UNC Charlotte in 2021. She is a Licensed Psychologist and completed her predoctoral internship and postdoctoral fellowship at River Valley Health (formerly Cherokee Health Systems) in East Tennessee. Dr. Rogers has provided clinical services in a variety of settings, including primary care and OB/GYN clinics. She is currently an Assistant Professor of Psychology and the director of the psychology master's program at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, NC.

**Marisa Schorr, PsyD**, earned her PsyD in Clinical Psychology from Western Carolina University in 2025. She has worked in integrated care as a Licensed Psychological Associate and now as a postdoctoral fellow at a federally qualified health center in rural northwestern North Carolina. Her clinical and research interests include stigma, treatment of perinatal mood disorders, and rural mental health.

**Cori Search, MA**, serves as a Regional Ombudsman with the Land of Sky Regional Council Area Agency on Aging, which covers Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania counties in North Carolina. In this role, Cori advocates for residents in long-term care settings such as nursing homes and assisted living facilities, ensuring their rights are protected and their concerns are addressed. She provides education, mediation, and support to older adults and their families, helping them navigate care transitions and resolve issues related to quality of life and elder rights. Cori is part of a team dedicated to promoting dignity, independence, and well-being for seniors across the region.

**Jenna Sharrits, MA, GCPH**, has held various roles over the past three years and now serves as a Digital Navigator. She supports older adults with technology access and use, consults with partner organizations, and promotes digital equity. Jenna ensures digital literacy efforts align with community needs, best practices, and local resources.

**Shuchin Shukla, MD, MPH**, was born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana. He completed medical school and public health school at Tulane University and completed a residency at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx, New York. He is board-certified in family medicine and addiction medicine. He has served in leadership positions related to population-based projects focused on overdose, addiction, HIV, Hepatitis C, and carceral health. He now works as a consultant for the North Carolina Technical Assistance Center, a state-funded consortium focused on overdose and addiction among people involved in the criminal justice system. He also serves as Chief Medical Officer for Goldie Health, which provides case management software for post overdose

response teams, and as medical director at Greenville Comprehensive Treatment Center and Goldsboro Comprehensive Treatment Center, both opioid treatment programs.

**Nate Sowa, MD, PhD**, is a Clinical Associate Professor within the UNC School of Medicine, specializing in consultation psychiatry and the development and implementation of innovative care delivery models. His work focuses on integrating virtual care solutions to improve access and equity in mental health services. Dr. Sowa has led statewide initiatives to expand telepsychiatry and digital behavioral health tools, addressing critical gaps for adolescents and young adults. His research and clinical practice emphasize evidence-based strategies that leverage technology to overcome barriers such as geographic isolation, stigma, and workforce shortages. He is passionate about translating data-driven insights into practical solutions that enhance resilience and well-being for people across North Carolina and beyond.

**Colleen Tarantino, MA, NBC-HWC**, is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Public Health in the Beaver College of Health Sciences (BCHS) at Appalachian State University. I serve as the Experiential Learning Coordinator for undergraduate and MPH internships and practicums. I am an academic with clinical mental health and prevention experience specific to substance use. I have been a member of the BCHS SBIRT Team since 2017, which has trained students and professionals across multiple disciplines since 2015.

**Raymond Turpin, PsyD**, is a clinical psychologist and the founder of The Pearl Institute in Western North Carolina. He holds degrees in psychology from the University of Georgia and the University of West Georgia and earned his doctorate from the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. Dr. Turpin has worked across diverse settings, including psychiatric hospitals, emergency units, residential treatment centers, schools, and community clinics. In 2004, he co-founded Jackson County Psychological Services, expanding free and low-cost mental health care across multiple school districts. A longtime researcher of therapeutic applications for ketamine and other psychedelic compounds, Dr. Turpin provides ketamine-assisted psychotherapy and integration services at The Pearl Institute, where he also supports trauma-informed care for veterans, first-responders, and individuals with treatment-resistant conditions. He serves as a mentor in the Certificate in Psychedelic Therapy and Research program at CIIS and maintains a private practice in Waynesville, NC.

**Natalie West, DNP, PMHNP**, is a Psychiatric Attending at an Acute Crisis Stabilization Unit and holds a Doctorate in Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing Practice. With over 30 years in the field, she brings deep expertise in complex trauma, emotional dysregulation, and addiction recovery. Her journey began in 1991 as a combat medic in the U.S. Army, shaping her commitment to resilience, crisis intervention, and compassionate care. Dr. West has served in trauma-level facilities and now leads acute psychiatric care for individuals in critical need. She integrates evidence-based practices with real-world frontline experience and is a passionate advocate for community mental health and recovery services. A dedicated mentor, she supports the next generation of behavioral health professionals.

**Zach White, LCSW, LCAS**, has served in various behavioral health clinical roles in Western NC for the past 15 years. His previous experience includes both inpatient and outpatient settings, providing care to adolescents and adults. For the past 8 years, he has been the manager of OBOT services at MAHEC Family Medicine in Asheville, coordinating care for over 500 patients. Zach's efforts to expand access to treatment for OUD throughout WNC include facilitation of the WNC Opioid Roundtable and providing technical assistance

through the NC Star project. His clinical interests include treating the effects of trauma and adverse experiences, psychedelic medicine, and advancing integrated behavioral health services.

**Jay Wilson, LCSW**, is a licensed clinical social worker whose career reflects a wide range of experiences supporting individuals, families, and communities. He has worked in settings that span grief services, child and family programs, residential treatment, and correctional environments, which gives him a unique perspective on resilience and healing across the lifespan. As the founder of Therapy and Sneakers, Jay blends clinical expertise with cultural connection to create engaging, strength-based approaches that reduce stigma and promote wellness. His work emphasizes identity, belonging, and practical strategies that empower both professionals and communities to foster authentic pathways to mental health and resilience.