



17th Annual
NC "One Community in Recovery" Conference
Rooted in Resilience, Reimagined Through Change
March 4-6, 2026
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 NC Certified Peer Support Specialist Program, UNC-CH School of Social Work
and the NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Use Services
with funding from the SAMHSA Community Mental Health Services Block Grant



NORTHWEST AHEC
PART OF NC AHEC



**School of
Social Work**



**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, Director, NC Certified Peer Support Specialist Program, UNC-CH School of Social Work

April Barber-Scales, Certified Peer Support Specialist

Susan Buchanan, NCCPSS, Transition and Housing Peer Support Specialist, Vaya Health

Tracy Effler, NCCPSS, Complex Care Peer Support Specialist, Vaya Health

Ellen Kesler, MLS, MPH, CPH, Continuing Education Coordinator, Northwest AHEC

Felishia McPherson-Mitchell, NCCPSS, NCLMHC, NAMINC Peer Leadership Council Chair

Wes Rider, BSW, Mental Health Advocate

Brandon Rollings, Special Projects Manager, NC Certified Peer Support Specialist Program, 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

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 pre-conference and conference workshops offer up to 11.25 hours of credit for participants attending all sessions. (Wednesday: 3.0 Contact Hours, Thursday: 5.75 Contact Hours, Friday: 2.5 Contact Hours)

- Up to 11.25 Contact Hours from Northwest AHEC
NC Licensed Clinical Social Workers may use contact hours from Northwest AHEC for license renewal.
- Up to 11.25 hours (Category A) continuing education for NC psychologists.
- Up to 11.25 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.



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.

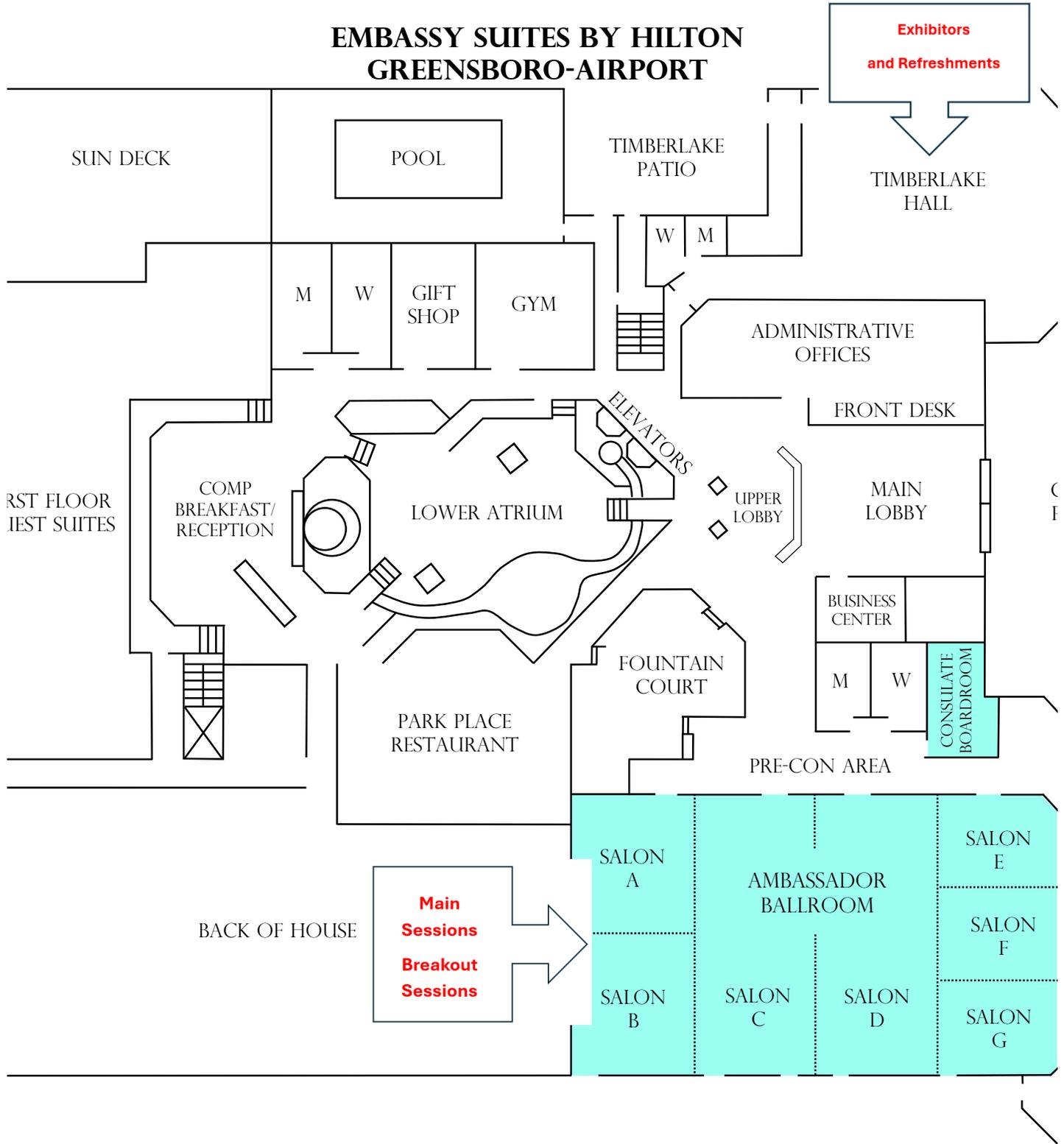
Handouts and Presentations

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 17th Annual NC "One Community in Recovery" Conference.
- Click on "Access Course Materials."

Wifi: Hilton Honors Meeting, password ESHconference

Hotel Map



Embassy Suites by Hilton Greensboro Airport
 204 Centreport Dr, Greensboro, NC 27409

Thank You to Our Supporters & Exhibitors!

Recovery Partner



Recovery Allies



Thank You to Our Supporters & Exhibitors!

Exhibitors

Addiction Recovery Care Association

Easterseals PORT Health

Fellowship Hall

I Fit Out

Narcotics Anonymous

New Season

NC AHEC Library

NCATOD

NC Association of Public Health Community Plans

NC Certified Peer Support Specialist Program

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

Operation Gateway

Transcend ED

TROSA

Ventus Rex

Be sure to visit our supporters and exhibitors in Timberlake Hall.

Wednesday, March 4, 2026

Noon

Registration and Box Lunch

1 pm

Pre-Conference Workshop: Emotional CPR (eCPR)

Emotional CPR (eCPR) is a public health education program that can be used to support individuals through emotional crisis, build community, and promote organizational change. eCPR is a trauma-informed, person-centered approach designed to help individuals develop empathic relationships with others and the world they interact with. Developed by people with lived experience of mental health challenges, eCPR teaches the essential skills of Connecting, Empowering, and Revitalizing.

Faculty

W. Reid Smithdeal, MSW, LCSW

Reid is the Behavioral Health Assistant Director at Cherokee Indian Hospital, where he coordinates clinical services and serves on the Leadership Team, providing oversight and support to programs. He believes that services should be focused on “human need” rather than medical necessity and that “the system” often gets in the way of people recovering. Additionally, Reid believes that the only reason we are here is to be in relationships and that the only reason for relationships is to heal. These beliefs guide his advocacy efforts around systematic change. Reid Smithdeal received an AAS in Human Services Technology from Central Piedmont Community College, 2001; BSW from Appalachian State University, 2004; and MSW from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007.

Briana Strickland, CPSS

Briana is a queer creative, care-worker, and community organizer rooted in healing, artistic expression, and collective liberation. She brings lived experience and deep compassion to her work as a peer supporter, harm reductionist, and advocate for disability justice, Mad Pride, LGBTQIA+ communities, and unhoused neighbors. Since 2020, Briana has supported anti-carcer mental health initiatives, including the NC Warmline and peer respites, offering community-based alternatives to hospitalization and involuntary commitment. A survivor of systemic and interpersonal violence, they grounds their advocacy in animist frameworks, centering dignity, belonging, and transformative care. Briana is an artist, grief tender, death doula, trauma-informed yoga teacher (200 RYT), eCPR trainer-facilitator, and peer support specialist with Greensboro’s Alternative Response Team, as well as the co-founder of a community artistic center dedicated to art, wellness, and social justice.

Jeff Walker, CPSS

Jeff Walker, in long-term recovery, avoids drugs/alcohol. As a formerly incarcerated individual, he leverages his experiences to help others as Programs Director at Recovery Revolution, overseeing 7 programs. A certified peer support specialist and recovery coach, he facilitates various trainings and will soon be a forensic peer support trainer. He supports incarcerated individuals and re-entry services. Actively involved in numerous peer initiatives, Jeff is a father, dog-lover, and outdoorsman. He champions connection and lived experience, often encouraging others to “Live your best life,” a testament to his own recovery.

4:15 pm

Adjourn

6:30 pm

Ice Cream Social + Story & Music Jam Extravaganza!

Join us for an uplifting evening inspired by the energy of Poetry Slams! Participants are invited to share brief stories of wellness and empowerment—spoken or musical—each limited to three and a half minutes to ensure a lively, inclusive lineup. Ice cream will be served at 6:30 pm, and the Story & Music Jam will begin at 6:45 pm. Come enjoy a treat and take part in this special event as a performer or an audience member.

Thursday, March 5, 2026

8:30 am **Coffee and refreshments with the exhibitors in Timerblake Hall - across from the lobby.**

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 **Keynote Address: Rethinking Psychiatry: What History Tells Us About the Possibility of Robust Recovery - Robert Whitaker**

In 1980, American psychiatry adopted a disease model for categorizing and treating mental disorders when it published the third edition of its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. Mental disorders were understood to be “chronic disorders,” with recovery conceptualized as effectively managing the symptoms. However, a review of the research literature, past and present, reveals that with holistic, supportive care, mental disorders—including psychotic disorders—often run an episodic course, meaning that people may experience a period of difficulty and then fully recover. The talk will include a look at outcomes from modern programs that seek to “assist nature” in helping people heal in this way.



Robert Whitaker is the author of five books, three of which tell of the history of psychiatry. In 2010, his *Anatomy of an Epidemic: Magic Bullets, Psychiatric Drugs, and the Astonishing Rise of Mental Illness* won the U.S. Investigative Reporters and Editors book award for best investigative journalism. Prior to writing books, he worked as a science reporter at the Albany Times Union newspaper in New York for a number of years. He is the founder of madinamerica.com, a website that features research news and blogs by an international group of writers interested in “rethinking psychiatry.”

10:45 am **Break - Please enjoy refreshments with the exhibitors in Timberlake Hall - across from the lobby**

11:05 am **Breakout Sessions**

Room AB **Peers Partnering for Excellence: An Alliance and Support for Peer Support Specialists – Brandi Greer, Leigh Gantt, Alyson Galetta, Matt Hare, Karen Russell, Alica Allen**

Peers Partnering for Excellence (PPE) is a regional network of Peer Support Specialist that spans several counties, working collaboratively to improve community health through a unique model of peer leadership. Rather than just representing organizations or specific population groups, PPE focuses on empowering individual community members who have lived experience to co-lead community health improvements. The core purpose of PPE is collaboration, unity, and collective action among peer support providers and stakeholders. This alliance advocates for the recognition and integrations of peer support into all health systems and services. PPE works to raise awareness of the effectiveness and value of peer support by promoting policy change and advocating for the rights and needs of individuals with lived experience. Our presentation will consist of multiple presenters and a Canva presentation to share the details of how we have integrated these practices into our community and built a strong system of support for our local peer network and peers from surrounding counties.

Thursday, March 5, 2026

- Room C** **Navigating Change: The Future of Peer Support in North Carolina** – *Bernice Adjabeng, Ann Marie Webb*
This session will examine the evolving landscape of peer support in North Carolina, highlighting recent and upcoming changes, emerging opportunities, and strategies to strengthen the role of Peer Support Specialists. Participants will gain insight into new policies and collaborative approaches that are shaping the future of peer support services across the state.
- Room D** **Permission to be Messy: Unlearning and Healing in the In-Between** – *Jordan Scott*
The overdose crisis has left a legacy of pain, forcing many to carry heavy burdens of stigma, internalized shame, and unresolved grief. These harmful narratives are isolating and act as barriers to healing. This workshop creates a non-judgmental space to begin setting those burdens down, not with force, but through radical self-compassion.
Join us in exploring how "unlearning" can be a powerful act of recovery. Through radical self-compassion, you will be invited to identify and take a step toward releasing a burden of shame or guilt. Our goal is not to re-live trauma but to make the decision to lean into the "messy middle". This session offers a moment of peace, helping you set down what is not yours to carry and take a step toward reclaiming your story with kindness and strength.
- Room EFG** **Navigating the Tides of a Long-Term Eating Disorder** – *Johanna Scoglio*
I have lived with an eating disorder for over 25 years. What began as a ripple became a consistent, persistent, and destructive current. I spent years underwater, learning to survive in darkness and silence, believing "recovery" was an elusive, singular definition of reaching the shore. Yet, through my journey, I've learned that healing isn't a destination, a finish line, an escape from struggle, or leaving the water entirely. Instead, it's learning to stay afloat when the current is strong and the tides change. My presentation is a combination of education on an often misunderstood, stereotyped, and stigmatized mental illness, while providing a new approach for healing and "recovery" rooted in harm reduction principles, mind-body connection (yoga and aqua exposure), and peer support.
- 12:20 pm **Lunch provided in the Atrium**
- 1:30 pm **Breakout Sessions**
- Room AB** **The Many Languages of Recovery** – *Bodi Bodenhamer*
This workshop will explore the personal languages of recovery, the dichotomy between traditional, clinical, and alternative vocabularies, and moving beyond that into organic forms of what is called "person centered language." In peer support, words are extremely important. As survivors we are sensitive to the damage some language can do, and the power of other languages to uplift and empower us. We use language to disrupt, create, and connect, but also to explore pathways of recovery and decide who we are.
- Room C** **Bridging the Gap: Community Safety's Role in Crisis and Recovery** – *Erin Williams, Jessica Littleton*
This presentation will provide an overview of the City of Greensboro's Community Safety Department and associated programs (Behavioral Health Response Team, LEAD, Violence Prevention, GSO HOME (Homeless Outreach Mobile Engagement)). It will also focus specifically on our new peer-led overdose response initiative. Community Safety is partnering with Cone to provide hospital follow-up to engage with individuals in Moses Cone ED and Wesley Long, who recently overdosed or who are dealing with chronic addiction issues. Our PSS is then able to follow individuals from the hospital to the community to provide holistic follow-up support.

Thursday, March 5, 2026

Room D **Equity in Action: Advancing Health and Wellness through Justice and Inclusion** – *Alicia Montgomery*

This session explores how social justice and racial equity are essential to health, wellness, and recovery. Participants will examine how systemic biases and inequities show up in healthcare and recovery spaces, and how these barriers impact access, trust, and outcomes. Through interactive discussions and practical strategies, attendees will learn how to foster inclusive cultures, challenge bias, and embed equity-driven practices that support long-term wellness for all.

Room EFG **Care Navigation: A Peer-led Alternative Response to Housing Insecurity** – *Maxx Dempsey, Shienacey Pair, Rebecca Neville*

The Care Navigation Team is one part of the wider Raleigh CARES alternative response program. CARES is a program designed by the city with community input and is designed to lead to less police involvement in cases that do not warrant police intervention. Care Navigation is a peer-led program and focuses on maintaining a relationship of mutuality and authenticity with all our Neighbors we assist. We work primarily on housing-focused goals while providing other resource connection when requested. In this panel we will explore the Care Navigation Team model, and what it's like to work with those experiencing homelessness within a system with a quickly changing narratives around the unhoused community. We will also talk about the benefits and challenges of doing peer work from within a local governmental structure.

2:45 pm **Break - Please enjoy refreshments with the exhibitors in Timberlake Hall - across from the lobby**

3 pm **Breakout Sessions**

Room AB **The Impact of Substance Use Disorder in Pregnancy: A Call to Action** – *Sherma Morton*

Substance use disorder (SUD) during pregnancy presents significant challenges to maternal, neonatal, and community health. Pregnant individuals living with SUD face increased risks of complications such as preterm birth, neonatal abstinence syndrome, maternal morbidity, and developmental concerns for infants. At the same time, fear of punitive policies—including mandated reporting, loss of custody, and criminalization—creates barriers to seeking essential prenatal and addiction care.

This presentation will explore the scope of SUD in pregnancy, highlight the disparities across racial, ethnic, and age groups, and examine the financial and social costs to families and healthcare systems. Participants will also learn about evidence-based, compassionate approaches, including medication-assisted treatment (MAT), integrated care models, and collaboration among obstetricians, addiction specialists, and community providers.

By reframing SUD in pregnancy as a public health issue rather than a criminal one, we can reduce stigma, remove barriers to care, and ensure that every person has access to the treatment and support they deserve. Attendees will leave with a deeper understanding of both the challenges and the opportunities to create more equitable and effective systems of care.

Room C **Speaking Up When Incapacitated: The Value of Psychiatric Advanced Directives** – *Jacob Schonberg*

Research shows that even when supporting someone in a mental health crisis, options for support can be limited. Placement can be a challenge, for both voluntary and involuntary admissions, and there is the ever-present harm wrought by involuntary commitment. The process of losing your decision-making authority in your own treatment can be challenging and harmful.

There are ways to try and help address these situations? To reduce the impact of extreme mental states, tools are available to support individuals in maintaining their agency. Psychiatric advance directives are a person-centered means of giving back some agency to people experiencing a crisis, allowing those individuals

to express their needs and preferences in advance in a document with legal standing. In this presentation, the background and legal basis of psychiatric advance directives will be provided, as well as an overview of how to develop and implement such a document. By exploring the ways that these advance directives can impact treatment, outcomes, and recovery, attendees will be better equipped to help expand the use of psychiatric advance directives in the greater community, thus improving outcomes for community members.

Room D

Reality, Readiness, and Right! – Alice Horton

Reality, Readiness and Right is a dynamic and practical presentation that takes participants inside the day-to-day realities of individuals experiencing homelessness. Drawing on experience and years of work in the field, this session will challenge assumptions, deepen understanding, and equip attendees with actionable tools to respond with compassion, clarity and effectiveness.

Room EFG

Meeting People Where They Are: PORT Team's Work in the Community and Jail – Gayle Beese

Our Post-Overdose Response Team (PORT) serves individuals at risk of overdose or who have recently experienced one. We meet people where they are—through home visits, hospital referrals, community outreach, and even in places often overlooked, such as homeless camps or known houses where drug use occurs. Our peers, who know the community deeply, build trust and connection by engaging people directly and linking them to treatment. Beyond making the initial connection, our team stays involved—checking in if someone falls out of care to remind them, they are valued and supported.

Our PORT team also works inside the jail one day a week, where peers meet with clients and maintain consistent contact. We provide medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD) during incarceration and offer peer support to help individuals stay engaged in treatment. When someone is released, a peer can transport them directly from jail to treatment, recognizing the heightened overdose risk following release.

This presentation will highlight our community-based PORT model, including MOUD in the jails, strategies for cross-sector collaboration, and lessons learned in sustaining engagement. Participants will leave with practical approaches for building or strengthening PORT programs in their own communities.

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.

Thursday 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:

- **Ulysses Banks - Eastern Region**
- **Jemm Eubanks - Central Region**
- **Brandi Greer - Western 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: Emily Hall

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 hearts 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 6, 2026

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

8:30 am **Coffee and refreshments with the exhibitors in Timerblake Hall - across from the lobby**

9 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 and Chief Executive Officer of Recovery Revolution, 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. Recovery Revolution has created a recovery eco-system made up of unique programs: Phases Transitional Housing, Wilkes Harm Reduction Collective, R3 Recovery Community Center, Project HOW (Healing Our Workforce), Fresh Start Farm, Wilkes Fresh Mobile Market, Revolution Thrift Store, Wilkes Crisis Intervention Team, Post Overdose Response Team, Hope Warriors, Wilkes Quick Response Team (Peers integrated into the local hospital), the Mobile Recovery Health Unit, and the new Cameron Ridge Treatment.

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 a lover of the arts, 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.



10:15 am **Break - Please enjoy refreshments with the exhibitors in Timberlake Hall - across from the lobby**

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10:30 am

Breakout Sessions

Room AB

Strengthening Recovery Capital in Underserved Communities: Addressing Systematic Service Gaps through Collaboration – *Marti Webb, Janise Hurley*

Underserved communities across North Carolina face systemic gaps that hinder recovery and reintegration. This presentation highlights how RHA Health Services and DC Connect, in partnership with community stakeholders, have joined forces to expand recovery capital in Davidson County through cross-sector collaboration. By leveraging relationships with transitional housing providers, Oxford Houses, healthcare organizations, the sheriff's department, food pantries, and the faith community, the coalition is building sustainable pathways that strengthen recovery supports.

The session explores how collaboration addresses core social determinants of health including housing stability, reliable transportation, access to sustainable employment and more, while also reducing recidivism and supporting individuals with substance use and mental health disorders. Through real-world examples such as medication-assisted treatment services in the jail, pre-release engagement, expedited clinical assessments, and the Transitional Housing Coalition, participants will learn how recovery capital can be developed even in regions with limited infrastructure.

Attendees will gain practical strategies for mobilizing partnerships, bridging systemic service gaps, and fostering resilient, recovery-oriented systems of care that can be replicated in other rural and underserved communities.

Room C

Vaya Health Justice Re-entry: Housing, Recovery, and Equity in Practice – *Susan Buchanan, Jasmine Moore*

Each year, more than 18,000 people are released from correctional facilities in North Carolina, and far too many return to communities without stable housing, healthcare, or employment. Formerly incarcerated individuals—particularly people of color—face systemic barriers that contribute to high recidivism rates and community instability. This presentation will explore North Carolina's evolving justice reentry landscape, including the impacts of Governor's Executive Order on Reentry 2030 and the Disability Rights NC lawsuit challenging prolonged detention of individuals with mental illness.

Drawing from field experience as a Peer Support Specialist with the Vaya Health Justice Reentry Team, we will highlight the practical challenges and successes of supporting individuals in transition. Key topics include housing access, relapse prevention, collaboration with probation and community partners, and the role of peer support in advancing equity. Participants will learn about innovative approaches, strategies for addressing systemic barriers, and the importance of centering dignity, inclusion, and self-determination in reentry practice.

Room D

Strengthening Peer Support: NC CPSS Workgroup Updates and Achievements – *NC CPSS Workgroup Members*

This session will highlight the purpose of the Workgroup, the experiences and insights of its members, and the accomplishments that demonstrate their contributions to advancing peer support efforts in North Carolina. Participants will learn about recent achievements and engage in discussions to help shape the Workgroup's next priorities.

Room EFG

Supporting Veterans in Recovery: Resilience, Post-traumatic Growth, and Reintegration – *Garret Biss*

Veterans face elevated risks of substance use, trauma, and suicide—often intensified by loss of identity, disconnection, and challenges reintegrating into civilian life. These factors are compounded for those with co-occurring mental health conditions or criminal justice involvement. Yet traditional approaches often overlook the unique cultural and psychological needs of this population.

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This session introduces strengths-based, non-clinical tools to better support veterans in their recovery journey. Participants will explore strategies that foster emotional regulation, peer connection, and meaning-making, helping veterans reclaim their sense of purpose and identity beyond their military experience. Drawing from lived experience, evidence-based and evidence-informed practices, and recovery research, this session equips attendees with actionable tools that can enhance programming across peer services, treatment, and community reintegration. While applicable to all veterans, many of the tools and insights shared are especially relevant for justice-involved veterans navigating complex recovery and reentry challenges.

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!**

**Please mark your calendars for
March 10-12, 2027
for the 18th Annual NC "One Community in Recovery" Conference
Embassy Suites by Hilton Greensboro Airport
204 Centreport Dr, Greensboro, NC 27409**

Meet the Presenters

Bernice Adjabeng, DMgt., MA, MSW is the Director of the North Carolina Certified Peer Support Specialist (NCCPSS) Program, where she oversees certification, training, and partner engagement and evaluation. She joined the UNC–Chapel Hill School of Social Work in 2014. Dr. Adjabeng holds a Doctor of Management from Webster University and dual master's degrees in social work and Nonprofit Management from Washington University in St. Louis.

With over 20 years of experience, she has worked extensively in direct practice, community development, evaluation, leadership, and organizational management, applying a strong interdisciplinary approach rooted in both practice and research. In addition to her administrative leadership, Dr. Adjabeng has taught courses in nonprofit leadership, program evaluation, and organizational practice as an adjunct faculty member at UNC–Chapel Hill, Elon University, and North Carolina Central University.

Dr. Adjabeng's work supports the development of a skilled peer support workforce and promotes recovery-oriented systems of care across North Carolina.

Gayle Beese is a Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor Supervisor, Licensed Clinical Addiction Specialist, and Certified Clinical Supervisor with over 15 years of experience in behavioral health. She currently serves as a Program Director with Coastal Horizons, overseeing outpatient therapy, SAIOP, medication management, and opioid treatment services. Gayle also leads the agency's Post-Overdose Response Team (PORT), which provides community- and jail-based outreach, hospital referrals, peer support, and medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD). Under her direction, the PORT team has expanded to conduct home visits, engage clients in high-risk community settings, and support continuity of care through incarceration and reentry, creating a model that strengthens recovery pathways across systems.

In addition to her leadership role, Gayle is an adjunct professor at UNC Pembroke, where she teaches field placement and serves as a university supervisor for counseling students pursuing licensure in clinical mental health counseling and addictions. Her work is grounded in trauma-informed care, clinical supervision, and building sustainable practices that prevent burnout.

Garret Biss is a retired Marine Corps pilot, addiction recovery coach, and TEDx speaker who specializes in mental health, resilience, and veteran recovery. After navigating his own post-service struggles with anxiety, depression, and substance use, Garret developed a strength-based approach to healing that emphasizes self-worth, identity, and meaning.

He is the founder of Diamond Mind, LLC, which delivers non-clinical training programs and recovery coaching for veterans and high-risk populations. In 2017, Garret co-founded a NAAR Type S recovery residence in Eastern North Carolina, where he served as program director and developed a trauma-informed, positive psychology-based curriculum to support long-term recovery. He also designs and facilitates programming specifically tailored to justice-involved veterans, helping systems-involved individuals overcome trauma, rebuild identity, and achieve sustainable recovery.

Garret has presented nationally for organizations including NAADAC, NASPA, NBCCF, and NAMI, offering powerful insights drawn from both lived experience and evidence-informed practices. Through speaking, training, and community leadership, Garret empowers veterans and recovery professionals alike to transform adversity into growth and purpose.

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 Alternatives to IVC trainings across NC, for mental health clinicians, K-12 public school staff, and peer support specialists. They have also contributed to research regarding digital peer support, social cognition, and peer decision coaching, and provided support for community inclusion to coordinated specialty care clinics across the US. 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 inherent strength, resilience, and healing where other, traditional modalities and avenues of treatment fail.

Meet the Presenters

Susan Buchanan is a Peer Support Specialist in the field of addiction recovery and mental health support, known for her dedication and impactful work. With a personal journey of recovery that spans over 8 years, Susan's lived experience has been a cornerstone of her approach in assisting others on their paths to wellness. Her career as a Peer Support Specialist, which began in 2018 and transitioned into active fieldwork in 2019. Susan stepped into her role as an "In Reach Specialist" for TCL in 2019. Susan has 6.5 years of experience working with an LME/MCO and in January of 2025 stepped into her new Role as Forensic Peer Support Specialist for the Justice Re-Entry Program.

In recognition of her significant contributions to the community and her effectiveness in using her own recovery story to inspire and aid others, Susan was honored with the Recovery Champion Award in 2023. This accolade is a testament to her hard work, dedication, and the positive impact she has made in the lives of many individuals seeking recovery and resilience in the face of substance use and mental health challenges.

Susan Buchanan's role as a Peer Support Specialist involves more than just sharing her story; it encompasses the fostering of a supportive and understanding environment where individuals feel seen, heard, and encouraged to pursue their recovery goals. Her approach is characterized by empathy, resilience, and a deep understanding of the complexities of addiction and recovery, making her an invaluable resource to those she supports. Through her work, Susan continues to advocate for the importance of peer support and the power of shared experiences in the recovery process.

Susan graduated from Mars Hill University with a bachelor's degree in social work with studies in criminal justice. She is a mom of three wonderful children. In her spare time, she enjoys hiking, taking her kids to the pool, and playing with her German shepherd Lily! Susan is also an advocate for a local Domestic Violence Shelter in her community.

Maxx Dempsey has been working as a peer supporter since 2021. They are currently the supervisor for the City of Raleigh's Care Navigation Team, part of Raleigh's Alternative Response Program called Raleigh CARES. Previously they have done peer work at Encompass, a First Episode Psychosis clinic in Raleigh, NC, and also at SouthLight Healthcare, where they served as the PSS for an ACT Team. Previous to their current position Maxx managed the PSS program at SouthLight Healthcare, which covers 6 counties in North Carolina.

Leigh Gantt is a dedicated Member Engagement Specialist and proud co-chair of the Peers Partnering for Excellence group. With over nine years of experience in the substance use field and 14 years of sustained recovery, Leigh brings both professional expertise and lived experience to her work.

Inspired by her own journey, Leigh entered the field in 2016 with a passion for helping others discover how to live fulfilling lives free from substances. She has served in a variety of roles, including working in Recovery Courts, developing Story Maps for Burke County, supporting a Drug-Free Community Grant, and teaching prevention programs in local schools.

Beyond her professional roles, Leigh has been an active voice in numerous community groups, initiatives, and coalitions focused on substance use awareness, prevention, and recovery support. Her work reflects her commitment to advocacy, collaboration, and empowering others to find hope and healing.

Brandi Greer is the Deputy Director of the Burke County Opioid Response Department in North Carolina, where she leads the implementation, oversight, and evaluation of opioid settlement-funded initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for individuals impacted by substance use. Brandi brings both professional expertise and lived experience to her work—she is in long-term recovery following 15 years in active addiction.

Her journey in the field of substance use recovery began in 2011 when she became a Peer Support Specialist. She went on to earn her certification as a Drug and Alcohol Counselor in 2019, solidifying her dedication to helping others navigate recovery. Brandi has since held key leadership positions, including Program Coordinator for Burke County's Drug-Free Communities program and Executive Director of Burke Recovery, a non-profit treatment center serving the local community.

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Today, she oversees a wide range of recovery-focused programs and partnerships, including the PORT (Post Overdose Response Team) program, serves as the grant administrator for the Burke County Adult Recovery Court, and chairs the Peers Partnering for Excellence Alliance. A passionate advocate and collaborator, Brandi is deeply involved in shaping systems that support recovery and wellness throughout her community.

Alice Horton, BS is a nonprofit leader with over 20 years of experience as an advocate and educator with a proven record of designing and implementing programs that meet the needs of vulnerable populations. With years of direct work in prevention and recovery services, Alice brings professional expertise and common sense to the conversation. Alice's work has touched many and shaped her community strategies for addressing homelessness with dignity and effectiveness.

Alice has a degree from Appalachian State University in Communication. She is the winner of a Teal Award for her work with victims of violence and the Executive Director of Burke United Christian Ministries.

Janise Hurly is the Executive Director of DC Connect and a frontline leader in community-based recovery support. She has been instrumental in developing DC Connect into a vital resource hub and building strong partnerships across Davidson County. Janise initiated collaboration with the sheriff's department to implement and sustain the county detention center's medication-assisted treatment (MAT) program, ensuring continuity of care for justice-involved individuals. Her leadership reflects a commitment to bridging service gaps, fostering recovery capital, and strengthening community resiliency through cross-sector collaboration.

Jessica Littleton is a Certified Peer Support Specialist with over 10 years of experience assisting individuals in their own recovery journey. Drawing on her own personal experience with substance use, she offers empathetic support and guidance. She is passionate about creating a safe, non-judgmental space where folks feel empowered to take charge of their own personal well-being. Jessica is currently a PSS with the City of Greensboro's Community Safety Department.

Alicia D. Montgomery, LCAS, CSI is a licensed clinical professional with over 13 years of experience in behavioral health, specializing in substance use and co-occurring disorders. She currently serves as the Substance Abuse Intensive Outpatient Program (SAIOP) Coordinator at Coastal Horizons Center, Inc., where she oversees clinical operations, supervises interns, and ensures high-quality care for diverse populations.

In addition to her clinical leadership, Mrs. Montgomery is an Instructor at Cape Fear Community College, where she teaches in the Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor (CADC) program, preparing the next generation of addiction professionals. Her work reflects a strong commitment to education, mentorship, and workforce development in the behavioral health field.

Throughout her career, she has provided direct clinical services in outpatient therapy, community-based programs, and crisis intervention, with expertise in motivational interviewing, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and trauma-informed care. She is a Licensed Clinical Addiction Specialist and Certified Supervisor Intern, with a passion for advancing equitable access to treatment and reducing stigma around mental health and substance use.

Mrs. Montgomery earned her Master of Science in Addiction Counseling from Grand Canyon University and her Bachelor of Science in Psychology with a minor in Social Work from Fayetteville State University. She is also deeply involved in professional and community organizations, including the National Association for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors, Addiction Professionals of North Carolina, and the NAACP.

A dedicated leader, educator, and advocate, Alicia D. Montgomery embodies a career rooted in service, equity, and empowerment — helping individuals, families, and communities build pathways to recovery and resilience.

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Sherma Morton, MD, MBA, FACOG is an obstetrician/gynecologist and the National Medical Director at Eleanor Health, where she leads efforts to expand compassionate, evidence-based care for individuals with substance use disorders. She is affiliated with Iredell Health System and Atrium Health Cabarrus and earned her medical degree from the University of Florida College of Medicine. With over 13 years of clinical experience in general obstetrics, gynecology, and addiction medicine, Dr. Morton is recognized for her patient-focused approach, leadership in healthcare management, and dedication to improving outcomes for women and families.

Rebecca Neville has dedicated her career to serving others through compassion, care, and peer support. She began her work as a Personal Care Assistant (PCA), where she developed hands-on experience providing daily living support and advocating for the needs of individuals. She later expanded her skills as a Health Technician in group homes, working closely with diverse populations to promote wellness, safety, and independence. For the past six years, Rebecca has served as a Certified Peer Support Specialist, using her lived experience and training to guide, mentor, and empower individuals on their own recovery journeys. She is passionate about fostering hope, resilience, and self-determination while building strong, supportive connections in the community.

Shienacey Pair is a Senior Care Navigation Analyst at the City of Raleigh, specializing in care coordination to our most vulnerable neighbors. She is passionate about client advocacy and whole-person centered care. She has aided in program development-achieving significant improvements in client outcomes. She holds a bachelor's degree in social work from Campbell University and is motivated by the social injustices that many of our vulnerable populations face.

Karen Russell is a passionate advocate for individuals in recovery, dedicating her career to guiding and supporting them on their journey to wellness. With over a decade of experience in the field of addiction recovery, Karen has cultivated a deep understanding of the challenges and triumphs that accompany the path to recovery.

As the Director of the H.O.P.E center (Helping Others Preserve Everyday), a new recovery center, Karen oversees a comprehensive range of services designed to empower individuals as they rebuild their lives. Her leadership is characterized by compassion, empathy, and a steadfast commitment to fostering a supportive and inclusive community.

Karen's approach is rooted in evidence-based practices and holistic modalities, recognizing that recovery is a multifaceted process that encompasses physical, emotional, and spiritual healing. She works tirelessly to ensure that each individual receives personalized care tailored to their unique needs and circumstances.

With a background in hospice, peer support and human services, Karen is deeply invested in the well-being of her clients, providing them with the tools and resources they need to navigate the challenges of recovery with resilience and determination. Her unwavering dedication to serving others has earned her the respect and admiration of colleagues and clients alike, making her a trusted leader in the field of recovery.

Outside of her professional endeavors, Karen is an avid advocate for mental health awareness and substance abuse prevention, volunteering her time to support community initiatives and educate the public about the importance of seeking help and support. She believes that everyone deserves the opportunity to heal and thrive, and she remains committed to empowering individuals to reclaim their lives and embrace a future filled with hope and possibility.

Jacob Schonberg After beginning mental health work at a crisis facility in 2008, I spent 2010-2024 working as a peer specialist on high fidelity ACT teams in North Carolina. I have been presenting on peer support and wellness management and recovery services as they relate to ACT since 2014. I have spent the last 2 years at the UNC Institute for Best Practices as a consultant and trainer, developing and providing peer related trainings for community providers and providing consultation and support to community-based peers, as well as a variety of other technical support and consultation. I have a bachelor's in psychology and am currently in graduate school for social work, and my most recent efforts have been around psychiatric advance directives

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(PADs) and the employment peer mentor position in IPS. I am also a trained PAD facilitator, having participated as a provider in some of the research completed at Duke on implementation and effectiveness of PADs for people with SMI diagnoses.

Johanna Scoglio is a lifelong educator with an MBA and an MEd, transitioning into the field of mental health. She is the author of the newly released debut memoir, *When the Water Still Holds Me: Letters Through the Tides of a Long-Term Eating Disorder*, which weaves together her lived experience with an eating disorder and her vision for healing through harm reduction, mind-body practices, and peer support. She has completed two-thirds of a Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program and is the founder of A Dragonfly's Dream, a nonprofit peer-support model for individuals navigating long-term eating disorders grounded in a harm reduction, mind-body-spirit approach. She is Intentional Peer Support-certified and a Certified Yoga Instructor (CYT-200). She also volunteers with The Alliance, where she leads planning for a Recovery Rally, and has served as a mentor with the Eating Disorders Foundation and a helpline volunteer with ANAD.

Jordan Scott is a seasoned community organizer and leader with over a decade of experience in the peer support movement. At the heart of Jordan's work is a deep belief in the power of storytelling and authentic community engagement. As the founder of The Spark Collective LLC, Jordan specializes in developing peer-led programs and coaching individuals and organizations in public narrative to effectively challenge harmful systems. Jordan is the Program Director at RecoveryLink, which drives innovative technology designed to help peer support programs grow and thrive, and as the Advocacy Coordinator with the PA Harm Reduction Network, Jordan helped shape impactful drug policy, including broadly legalizing drug checking in Pennsylvania in 2022. They continue to drive change on a national level as a board member for the National Coalition to Liberate Methadone, remaining fiercely dedicated to building a world where all people have equitable access to wellness. Informed by their experience as a disabled drug user, Jordan's work is grounded in the principles of disability justice and peer liberation.

Ann Marie Webb is originally from Ocean City, Maryland. She graduated from West Virginia University with a Bachelor's Degree (BS) in Psychology in 2010. Ann Marie started work as a QMHP in Virginia working primarily with children who had been removed from their homes. During that time, she also worked with adults with mental health diagnoses and/or TBIs. Ann Marie then went to work for the Department of Juvenile Justice in Virginia, where she worked for eleven years. Due to her background, her caseload was normally staffed with mental health and substance use cases. She worked closely with agencies to ensure kids received all available services to include residential, outpatient, and substance use programs. She was her unit's Family Assessment and Planning Team seat for Child Services Act funding. She is Crisis Intervention and Mental Health and First Aid Juvenile & Adult Trained. As well as, EPICS (Effective Practices in Community Supervision) trained, which is a relapse prevention program developed by the University of Cincinnati. During her time at Virginia DJJ, Ann Marie received 11 awards for excellent contributions. She worked diligently with Law Enforcement and Community Supports to build an intensive outpatient family involved substance use program, create effective training on youth in the community, and more. She began working for the North Carolina Department of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services as a Community Engagement Specialist in November 2022. Ann Marie then became the Peer Support Program Manager for DMHDDSUS in July 2023.

Marti Webb, MSW, LCSW-A, CADC, is a behavioral health clinician, addiction specialist, and community collaborator dedicated to strengthening recovery capital in underserved communities. She has served in multiple roles with RHA Health Services, including Intensive Outpatient Program Team Lead and Community Liaison, where she built cross-sector coalitions, expanded recovery supports, and developed innovative, whole-person initiatives. Currently Program Director for the new Facility-Based Crisis center in Winston-Salem, Marti partners with justice, housing, faith, and healthcare stakeholders to close systemic service gaps and create sustainable pathways for recovery. A former nurse with more than 20 years of experience, she brings a whole-person lens to her work and contributes to research on aging, behavioral health, and justice involvement. Marti also designs and delivers trainings on Motivational Interviewing and implicit bias for first responders, public health

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professionals, and aging services providers. Her work is recognized for advancing transitional housing initiatives, enhancing reentry supports, and driving solution-focused, collaborative change in recovery systems of care.

Erin Williams has a Master's Degree in Applied Clinical Psychology and is a Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor Supervisor (LMHCS). She has worked in the mental health field for the last 15 years and has held positions in a variety of settings. She has been with the City of Greensboro since the start of the Behavioral Health Response Team in 2020 and is currently the Department's Division Manager.

Notes

