

# PAPRS NEWSLETTER

PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION OF PSYCHIATRIC REHABILITATION SERVICES

## 2024 BOARD MEETINGS

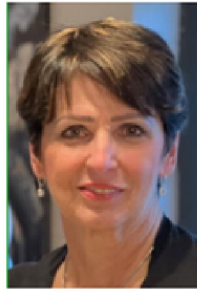
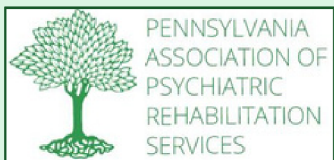
- ◆ JANUARY 25-26  
(IN-PERSON)
- ◆ MARCH 21-22  
(VIRTUAL)
- ◆ JUNE 13-14  
(IN-PERSON)
- ◆ SEPTEMBER 19-20  
(VIRTUAL)
- ◆ NOVEMBER 7-8  
(IN-PERSON)

## OPEN MEMBERSHIP MEETING:

FRIDAY, APRIL 12, 2024  
(DURING PAPRS CONFERENCE)



STAY UP-TO-DATE WITH  
PAPRS ON SOCIAL MEDIA!



## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

BY: DENISE ASTANEH

It has been almost 6 months since I began my journey with PAPRS. It continues to be a work in progress, becoming familiar with all the daily ins and outs. It has been nothing but a pleasure to receive the support and help from board members, current and past employees, and members. As we move forward

together it is my goal to continue to provide quality education and support to those involved with providing psychiatric rehabilitation services. I continue to network daily to expand our mission to all. I am currently working to educate our local, state, federal legislators, public and our health care systems exactly what Psychiatric Rehabilitation is and the power it holds to promote recovery for all individuals.

In August we hired a part-time Educational Manager. Together she and I are working on improving the educational programs we currently offer and to develop new up to date course offerings. Within the near future we will be hiring an Operations Assistant. Together we will restructure our website to include what our members are looking for and to maximize the software platforms we currently subscribe to.

Though we are financially stable, this month I made some outreaches to agencies and individuals I have met over the years. So far, we have one generous donation from the Quakertown area which wishes to remain anonymous. We will be posting our PAPRS CPRP pins for sale again and possibly some other fundraising ventures.

Our 2024 Board elections just ended, and we are looking forward to working with the individuals who have graciously committed to joining the board. We will be adding at least seven members since we are losing two members as their terms have ended and several others due to various reasons. I am looking forward to good weather in January for our first meeting so we can meet in person.

The Conference Committee is working hard planning our 2024 Conference. Please, reach out to me or the committee if you have any questions concerning the conference or if you can submit a presentation at the conference.

In November we changed our mailing address. Our new address is 62 Dallas Shopping Center #176, Dallas, PA 18612. Our main phone number remains the same, (717) 655-7662. As always, do not hesitate to reach out to me with any suggestions, concerns, questions or just to say hi!

Happy Holidays, and a Healthy New Year to All.

## PAPRS STAFF

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

- Denise Astaneh  
denise.astaneh@papr.org

### EDUCATION MANAGER

- Rochelle Reimert  
rochelle.reimert@papr.org

### OPERATIONS ASSISTANT

- Aaron Burkhardt  
aaron.burkhardt@papr.org

## PAPRS LEADERSHIP

### PRESIDENT

- Kim MacDonald-Wilson

### PRESIDENT- ELECT

- To be determined

### SECRETARY

- Brittani Smerkar

### TREASURER

- Ellwyn Andres (*INTERIM*)

### IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

- Ellwyn Andres

## BOARD MEMBERS

Amanda Burke  
Marcie Cole  
Collette D'Angelo  
Skyler Deitrick  
Gwen DeYoung  
Virginia Dikeman  
Pam Nabried-Abdullah  
Julie Sanders  
Holly Knoll  
Sara Dobson  
Debra Weisgerber  
Caitlin Needham

## ADVISORY MEMBERS

Jen McLaughlin  
Susan Poznar  
Maureen Walsh  
Donna Duffy Bell  
Amy DeMay  
Eileen Joseph  
Rita Kraus  
Lu Mauro

# ANNOUNCING OUR NEW OPERATIONS ASSISTANT: AARON BURKHARDT!



Aaron Burkhardt has been a part of the PAPRS board of Directors since January 2020, where she took on the role of chair for the conference committee. During her time volunteering for the PAPRS board, she helped coordinate contracts with keynote speakers, ASL interpreters, and workshop presenters for the annual conferences. In Aaron's day job she is a Program Director at The Challenge Center/Hand in Hand mental Health services, LLC in Venango County PA.

She started at the Challenge Center in 2013 as a prs worker and has worked her way up through the psych rehab program throughout the years. She is dedicated in teaching about psych rehab and the core values of hope and person-centered recovery. In 2023, The Challenge Center won Program of the Year award across the state of Pennsylvania for all the hard work her team has done with the individuals they serve. She will continue to work at the Challenge Center while serving part time as the Operations Assistant for PAPRS. Aaron looks forward to growing her career and connections in the psych rehab field across the state.

## WELCOME, NEWLY ELECTED BOARD MEMBERS!

This year, PAPRS is pleased to welcome 10 newly elected members on the Board of Directors for the Class of 2026, all of whom are joining the Board for the first time! The following people will begin a three-year term of service on January 1, 2024:

### *Class of 2026*

- Karen Yob
- Laurie Combs
- Kimberly Wilson-Roberson
- Katelyn Ivanac
- Corinne Schnee
- Janelle Eberhardt
- Allyson Simpson
- Laura Gardner
- Nancy Micocci

*Thank you!*

A special **THANK YOU** to our current members who have completed their term, and will be transitioning off of the PAPRS Board on December 31, 2023. Your dedication to PAPRS over the last few years is greatly appreciated!

AMANDA BURKE

MARCIE COLE

GWEN DEYOUNG

# GET TO KNOW: GINNY DIKEMAN

BY: DEBI WEISGERBER



Ginny has been a Board Member with PAPRS since 2003 when there were approx. 30 members and assisted in bringing Psychiatric Rehabilitation to Northeastern Pennsylvania. She is a Licensed Psychologist currently working at the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Department in Pennsylvania.

Ginny has advocated for those that live with Mental Health Disorders and Intellectual Disabilities since she was young.

She recalled when she was in the 6th Grade, her catechism class went to St. Joe's to teach the children with intellectual disabilities their prayers. At that time she knew this was something she wanted to do. She wanted to help people in the community.

While in school, Ginny began her career as a direct care staff in a group home then working up to being a supervisor. Although she took Pre-Med in college, she decided to follow the path of Psychology. She worked as a therapist at Catholic Social Services. She then began working at Children's Service Center and Children & Youth, where she was the Psychologist for the Parenting Center. She was offered a position as a Psychologist in New York State and enjoyed her time there.

## **Ginny has served her community in numerous ways including:**

- Trainer for Crisis Intervention Teams and Cultural Competence
- Responding to disasters such as: Katrina, 9/11 in Washington and New York, and local disasters such as the recent chocolate factory explosion in West Reading.

Although Ginny works with all ages, her passion is children between birth and six years old. "They are the most interesting because this is the time they are developing and changing". She feels it's important to "speak up for those that can't."

When asked about a little known fact about herself, she informed me she used to play in a band during college called, "Haystacks". She plays guitar and used to offer lessons to children.

## Reminder

**On December 31, 2023, telehealth waivers that have been in effect since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic will officially expire. Per OMHSAS:**

"Effective on January 1, 2024, providers are expected to capture consent to treatment, service verifications, and approval of treatment plans in a manner that creates an auditable file and is in accordance with the timelines expected within regulation...It remains imperative for all providers delivering Medical Assistance Program funded behavioral health services to have policies in place to capture consent in a way that creates an auditable trail. There are multiple ways that providers of telehealth can meet this requirement, including messages typed into the chat box of an audiovisual platform, email, text messaging, United States Postal Service mail, and documentation of verbal consent".



# 2024 CONTINUING EDUCATION

## ORIENTATION TO PSYCHIATRIC REHABILITATION

➤ January 3 & 4, 2024  
9 AM - 12PM

## PSYCH REHAB SERVICES DOCUMENTATION

➤ February 13, 14, 20, 21, 2024  
9 AM - 12PM

## PRS PRINCIPLES, VALUES, & PRACTICE DOMAINS: PREP FOR THE CPRP EXAM

➤ March 26 & 27, 2024  
9 AM - 12PM

## ETHICS & BOUNDARIES IN RECOVERY ORIENTED SERVICES

➤ January 16 & 17, 2024  
9 AM - 12PM

## ENGAGEMENT SKILLS IN PSYCH REHAB SERVICES

➤ March 5 & 6, 2024  
9 AM - 12PM

## CREATING WELCOMING SERVICES FOR LGBTQIA+ INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

➤ June 3 & 4, 2024  
9 AM - 12PM

## USING THE PSYCH REHAB PROCESS IN SUPERVISION

➤ February 1, 2024  
9 AM - 12PM

## SKILLS IN PSYCHIATRIC REHABILITATION

➤ March 19, 2024  
9 AM - 12PM

**TO REGISTER FOR A SESSION OR BROWSE ADDITIONAL DATES:**

[Course Calendar](#)

## REACH'S FALL GRADUATION

BY: SARA DOBSON

The REACH (Intensive Psychiatric Rehabilitation) Program at St. Luke's Penn Foundation held its Fall 2023 graduation celebration on November 13, 2023. The program celebrated 12 graduates who completed the two-year program, recognizing the growth and successes of each participant's journey toward goal achievement. Some of the successes included returning to work, getting and sustaining independent living, developing wellness routines, expanding cooking skills, building financial wellness, and improving home organization. Participants celebrated each other over donuts, coffee, and a fall-themed affirmation activity.



Jen McLaughlin, Ellwyn Andres, and Denise Astoneh represented PAPRS in Harrisburg.

## MARCH ON HARRISBURG

On Wednesday, September 27th, 2023, mental health leaders, programs, consumers, and advocates from all over Pennsylvania participated in a "March on Harrisburg," held at the Capitol Complex. The goal of the March was to advocate for increased funding for mental health initiatives throughout the state of Pennsylvania. The event began at 10:30 AM, and included multiple speakers on the Capitol steps, including Rep. Mike Schlossberg (*Lehigh County*). Participants marched in unison around the Capitol building, and had opportunities to fill out comment cards, which were then handed out to legislators. Many participants met with their local legislator individually, and had the opportunity to tour the Capitol.





## PENNSYLVANIA AND THE CLUBHOUSE MODEL

BY: SARAH HURST, PCC PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR OF TEMPO CLUBHOUSE (LANCASTER, PA)

There are three forms of Psychiatric Rehabilitation services approved under the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse (OMHSAS) regulations; Site-based, Mobile, and Clubhouse Model. The Clubhouse Model is built on an approach developed 75 years ago by Fountain House in New York City. This model incorporates, among other things, social practice design, experiential learning through use of a work-ordered day structure, and opportunities for paid employment for members of the Clubhouse. A Clubhouse's primary goal is to create an intentional community where members of the club take an active and equal role to staff in the operation, governance, and provision of the Clubhouse services.

For many years, a point of pride for Pennsylvania was that we had more Clubhouses than any other state! Unfortunately, over the last two decades, as other states have continued to expand the number of Clubhouses, Pennsylvania has seen a decline in the number of Clubhouses. While the reasons have varied, the pattern indicates a lack of understanding about the Clubhouse Model, funding structures that do not support the operation of this service, and regulatory requirements that inhibit the stability and growth of these programs.



Senator John Fetterman's regional director visits CSG's Tempo Clubhouse (Lancaster, PA)



Clubhouse International USA Conference Salt Lake City, Utah - October 2023

The Clubhouse model is internationally recognized and utilized with over 300 Clubhouses worldwide in 33 countries. Pennsylvania has had a long history of being a forerunner in the development and expansion of the Clubhouse model. In 1993, the first four Clubhouses in PA began working to support each other in implementing the standards of this model; by 2003 they had developed 26 Clubhouse locations. The Pennsylvania Clubhouse Coalition was formed as a non-profit to continue to support the growth and training of Clubhouse programs.

The new leadership of the PA Clubhouse Coalition has initiated strategies to strengthen, stabilize, and expand the use of the Clubhouse model within Pennsylvania. This involves advocating for changes to our Psychiatric Rehabilitation regulations and funding structures. The PCC has initiated an advocacy strategy to create a better environment for the growth of Clubhouses in PA and PAPRS is an essential partner in these efforts. We hope to have a more collaborative and coordinated approach that will improve services and outcomes for all psychiatric rehabilitation programs.

Currently, the PCC is working with OMHSAS and legislators on the state and federal level, as well as, connecting with Clubhouses and coalitions from other states to find solutions to the various barriers that inhibit the work and full effectiveness of our programs. We believe that with coordinated efforts, we can make a meaningful difference in the lives of members, improve staff retention, and provide communities with a needed, valuable service.

We would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with any other psychiatric rehabilitation programs in the state who are interested in joining our efforts or who are interested in learning more about the Clubhouse Model. Please feel free to reach out to a Clubhouse near you or to our leadership team by emailing myself, Sarah Hurst at [hursts@csgonline.org](mailto:hursts@csgonline.org).



# PA Clubhouses

## WESTERN PA CLUBHOUSES

- The Journey Center
- Union Station Clubhouse
- West Place Clubhouse
- Sally and Howard Levin Clubhouse

## CENTRAL PA CLUBHOUSES

- Commerce Park Clubhouse
- Lexington Clubhouse
- Oasis House
- Opportunity Centre Clubhouse
- Square One Clubhouse
- Tempo Clubhouse
- Workabilities

## EASTERN PA CLUBHOUSES

- The Greenhouse Center
- Mosaic House
- Hidden River Clubhouse
- Clubhouse of Lehigh County
- Cornerstone Clubhouse
- Hope Springs
- Open Door Clubhouse
- Stepping Stones Clubhouse
- Wellspring Clubhouse

The Pennsylvania Clubhouse Coalition (PCC) was founded in October 1993 by four Clubhouse programs. Today, the Coalition consists of 20+ Clubhouse programs serving many PA counties. The mission of the Pennsylvania Clubhouse Coalition is to promote and strengthen the evidence-based Clubhouse model, empowering individuals with mental illness to live, learn and work within their community with dignity and freedom from stigma. Stay up-to-date with PCC on [Facebook!](#)

For more information on the Clubhouse Model: <https://clubhouse-intl.org/>



# 2024 PAPRS CONFERENCE

## IMPORTANT DATES

- 12/31/23** DEADLINE TO SUBMIT PRESENTER APPLICATION
- 1/1/24** POSTER CONTEST & SCHOLARSHIP SUBMISSIONS BEGIN
- 1/19/24** DEADLINE TO SUBMIT SERVICE AWARD NOMINATIONS
- 2/28/24** DEADLINE TO SUBMIT SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS
- 3/31/24** DEADLINE TO SUBMIT POSTER CONTEST ENTRIES
- 4/11/24** 2024 PAPRS CONFERENCE BEGINS
- 4/12/24** ANNUAL OPEN MEMBERSHIP MEETING
- 4/19/24** 2024 PAPRS CONFERENCE CONCLUDES

## PSYCHIATRIC REHABILITATION: BASICS AND BEYOND!

APRIL 11TH & 12TH, 18TH AND 19TH

PAPRS invites nominations of individuals and Psychiatric Rehabilitation agencies or programs which have distinguished themselves in their commitment to the principles of Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

Awards are given in the four categories listed below. Award winners will be honored at the PAPRS Annual conference on April 19, 2024, during the Closing Ceremony of the Virtual Conference from 3:00 pm to 4:30 pm.

[SERVICE AWARD NOMINATION LINK](#)

## DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD NOMINATIONS!

### DISTINGUISHED CAREER

This award is to honor an individual who, throughout their career, has effectively promoted the development and implementation of psychiatric rehabilitation services in Pennsylvania. Nominations are open to members of PAPRS/PRA who are credentialed in Psychiatric Rehabilitation and have no less than 10 years' experience in psychiatric rehabilitation.



### DISTINGUISHED PRACTITIONER

This award is to honor an individual who has demonstrated a commitment to the principles and ethics of psychiatric rehabilitation in their work with persons in recovery. Nominations are open to mental health direct care and/or supervisory staff who are either an individual member or work for an organizational member of PAPRS/PRA.



### DISTINGUISHED ADVOCATE

This award is to honor an individual who has advocated for the inclusion of psychiatric rehabilitation services in their organization, county, region, and/or the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Nomination for this award is open to mental health staff, persons in recovery, family members and public administrators.



### OUTSTANDING PROGRAM

This award is to honor an agency or program within an agency, which operates psychiatric rehabilitation that effectively meet the needs of persons in recovery. Nominations for this award are open to Psychiatric Rehabilitation agencies or programs that have been in operation for no less than 3 years and are organizational members of PAPRS/PRA.







2023 Young Adult Poster Contest Winner:  
Caylin Young, Meadville, PA

# 2024 POSTER CONTEST

## R.E.S.P.E.C.T. POSTER CONTEST

The RESPECT Poster Contest began in 2014 as part of the PAPRS in-person conference. Winners receive a cash prize. RESPECT stands for Resolve to Eliminate Stigma: Practice Empathy, Compassion & Truth. To view previous winners, [CLICK HERE!](#)

Artists may begin submitting posters through our website January 2024. One poster per artist. The last day to enter a poster is March 29, 2024 at 4:30 pm – no exceptions.

**Categories:** Young Adult (26 and younger); Adult (27 and older)

**Submission:** Entries can be submitted at [WWW.PAPRS.ORG](http://WWW.PAPRS.ORG), by clicking on the Annual Conference tab at the top of the page. Please have all your information ready, and a digital copy of your poster saved in .jpg or .tif format before you begin the form.

*\*Program staff will be able to enter posters on behalf of all artists using a separate entry form for each.*

## SPONSORSHIPS

PAPRS will again be offering sponsorship opportunities for the 2024 PAPRS Conference, with four different options available. Sponsorship commitment includes a spot in our virtual Exhibitor Hall during the conference. Pledges will begin at [WWW.PAPRS.ORG](http://WWW.PAPRS.ORG) beginning January 1, 2024, under the Annual Conference tab at the top of the page.

## SCHOLARSHIPS

PAPRS will begin accepting scholarship applications for the 2024 conference on our website beginning January 1, 2024. The last day to apply is February 28, 2024 – no exceptions.

**Scholarship Application:** Applications can be submitted at [WWW.PAPRS.ORG](http://WWW.PAPRS.ORG), by clicking the Annual Conference tab at the top of the page.

## CALL FOR PRESENTERS!

Each year, the PAPRS Conference provides a statewide forum for people committed to psychiatric rehabilitation and recovery to come together, celebrate, share ideas, exchange knowledge, develop new models and approaches, and envision ways to create a responsive and empowering mental health system.

The richness of this conference emerges from the breadth of workshops we offer, which come from YOU, the participants! Submitting a workshop proposal gives you the chance to both benefit and contribute to this vital, yearly event. Proposals are encouraged from across the field: people in recovery, family members, providers, advocates, administrators, researchers, executive directors, and government officials. PAPRS especially invites first time submitters to send proposals for consideration.

Interested Presenters should first gather all the information and documents needed to complete the application for a workshop presentation. Documents to upload at the time of application include the list of *Academic References* and the *Posttest*. These documents may be in either Word or PDF format. *Note that you will be unable to submit the form without the upload of these two documents.*

**Deadline:** December 31, 2023

[WORKSHOP APPLICATION](#)

## WORKSHOP TOPIC IDEAS

- › ENGAGEMENT SKILLS
- › RELATIONSHIP BUILDING
- › BOUNDARIES AND ETHICS
- › MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING
- › TRAUMA INFORMED CARE
- › PRACTITIONER SKILLS
- › YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS
- › CRISIS INTERVENTION
- › CO-OCCURRING DISORDERS
- › DUAL DIAGNOSIS
- › LGBTQIA+, GENDER IDENTITY, AND TRANSGENDER SERVICES
- › SOCIAL JUSTICE, RACISM, THE BLACK EXPERIENCE, & DIVERSITY
- › CULTURAL COMPETENCE
- › MANAGING RECOVERY-ORIENTED PROGRAMS
- › EXEMPLARY OR EMERGING PRACTICES
- › SUICIDE PREVENTION
- › VALUE BASED PURCHASING
- › PR IN RESIDENTIAL SERVICES
- › HEALTH, WELLNESS, RECOVERY
- › TELEHEALTH SERVICES
- › CHILD AND FAMILY RESILIENCY

# 2024 CONFERENCE KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Gina Calhoun

Gina is an Advanced Level Wellness Facilitator that provides training and technical assistance with the Copeland Center. She is a wife, sister, friend, fitness enthusiast, and a person with mental health challenges.

She has over 30 years of experience in mental health services, first as a participant and now as a peer professional. When Gina is not promoting wellness and recovery, she enjoys adult gymnastics and spending time with her large dynamic family.

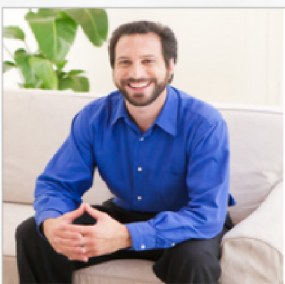
Gina won the Timothy J. Coakley National Behavioral Health Leadership Award. This award honors peer and family leaders in the behavioral health field whose work is characterized by the highest degree of integrity and a passion for creative approaches to improving the lives of persons living with mental health challenges, especially in the public sector.

Michael Nelson is a Certified Peer Specialist (in PA) and an Advanced Level WRAP Facilitator. Over the years, Michael has trained many in the greater Philadelphia area and Montgomery County. Upholding a trauma-informed perspective, he also has valuable experience working with the justice system populations, Michael also received The Lifetime Achievement and Legacy Award from the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disabilities Professional Development Support Network Meeting. Michael was also honored with the privilege to enhance the operational work of IDEYAS Training Academy of PA. and addition he conducts I.P.S. (Intentional Peer Support) training within the R.H.D. staff community. Michael takes pride in supporting- and bridging- peers into active community roles.

Presently, he works at Creating Increased Connections, RHD, and conducts contract work for the Copeland Center, Michael facilitates community-based peer support groups and workshops on various recovery topics. Michael's mantra simply states, the only way I can be my best only happens if I can support your quest of striving to be your best, with the hope we can all be our best together.



Michael Nelson



Matthew Federici

Matthew is the CEO for the Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery. Matthew specializes in policy development, trainings and strategic planning in health systems to promote recovery, the advancement of the peer support workforce and community inclusion practices. Most notable Matthew has worked with systems in the implementation of the evidence-based practice of co-facilitated Wellness Recovery Action Plan® and partners with Temple University's Collaborative on Community Inclusion to strengthen the peer support workforce, enhance recovery, community participation outcomes and increase employment outcomes of individual service recipients within the behavioral health system.

Matthew is an internationally recognized speaker, trainer and consultant on WRAP, community inclusion, peer support and supported employment. He came to the Copeland Center in 2010 from the Institute for Recovery & Community Integration where he served as Program Director to create systems transformation through the implementation of a certified peer specialist workforce program. In addition to his role as CEO of the Copeland Center, Matthew developed and oversees the Doors to Wellbeing Program, a National Consumer Training and Technical Assistance Center that focuses on national implementation of evidence-based peer support practices.

Matthew has written many articles on the power of peer support, WRAP, and community integration. Two recent articles include "The Healing WRAP," which appeared in the National Council for Behavioral Health Care publication on trauma-informed care, and "The Importance of Fidelity in Peer-Based Programs: The Case of the Wellness Recovery Action Plan," in Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal.





Milton Dennis

Milton Dennis is a speaker, podcast host of “Surviving Loss: Our Journey of Hope,” author, and advocate on the East Coast. As a survivor of loss by suicide, Milton himself has overcome mental health challenges, as well as experienced those close to him going through their own. He devotes his life to continuing to learn how to be the best mental health awareness advocate he can be by helping others, and himself, with proven results. He is certified through multiple mental health advocate and educator certifications including Resilience Certified through TRACOM, Family Group Facilitator certified by the National Alliance on Mental Illness and an active group community member of Pulse Task Force.

Empowered by resilience training, Milton also believes the training can be a great tool for all business sectors as it promotes personal wellbeing, increases productivity and minimizes attrition helping businesses retain quality personnel.

Sarah Buffie, MSW, LSW, serves as the visionary founding director of Soul Bird Consulting, propelled by the profound conviction that nothing heals quite like supportive relationships. Specializing in Trauma-Responsive Care, Sarah actively seeks to dismantle existing paradigms by fostering empathy and understanding of the intricate effects of trauma. Drawing upon two decades of experience in human services and community building, she channels a deep-seated passion for felt-safety and belonging into her work.

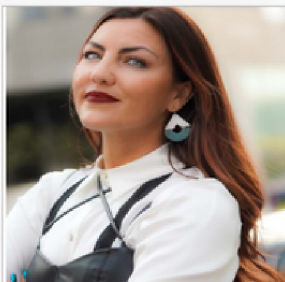
Sarah holds a Master’s in Social Work and her academic journey was marked by a self-directed focus on Polyvagal Theory, Positive Psychology, and Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness practices, solidifying her commitment to innovative and holistic healing approaches.

In her latest chapter, Sarah delves deeper into body-based practices, completing the first cohort of the Polyvagal Certificate Course through the Polyvagal Institute. She is now a certified Laughter Yoga Instructor and a SAH Method practitioner (Somatic Activated Healing). These modalities enable her to show up as a more fully integrated self. Grounded in the belief that healing requires feeling, she champions a trauma-informed approach, guiding others out of their heads and into their bodies.

Sarah sees this lineage as a gift to those she serves daily—families, educators, and human service professionals seeking solace, and communities craving play, practice, and regulation. Join her on this transformative path, where felt-safety, belonging, regulation, and rootedness in our common humanity intertwine to create a world where pouring from a full cup is not just a possibility but a collective reality.



Sarah Buffie



Dr. Julia Garcia

Dr. Julia is a preeminent voice for the next generation. She helps schools, universities, and organizations build a culture where students are genuinely seen and valued.

As a doctor of psychology and TEDx Speaker, Dr. J (as she is known to students) helps audiences get honest with how they feel and move forward together. Dr.J is unparalleled in her ability to connect with audiences across any demographic through her spoken word poetry and highly engaging approach. Specializing in campus culture, diversity, and mental health, Dr. Julia reminds us all to keep showing up for ourselves and each other.

Dr. Julia has over a decade of experience working with hundreds of campuses, conferences, universities, and non-profit organizations, bringing interactive experiences that shape culture and improve outcomes for all students.