

## **WELCOME**

Welcome to the 2024 TN NADD conference hosted by the TN-NADD Board, the Inn at Opryland, and the UT-Knoxville virtual team. Our theme this year is The Pursuit of Happiness: Finding My Place in This World. Building validation is critical to finding one's place and includes discovering emotional wellbeing, building interpersonal relationships, striving for personal development and securing self-determination. But how does one even begin to find these things, especially if there are intellectual or developmental challenges co-occurring with mental health challenges. Can these persons contribute to their communities and have a sense of belonging vs. solely being supported by others? The answer is yes; but often there are assumptions and stereotypes made. Dr. Thomas Pomeranz points out "you can't give it if you don't have it". Join us today and discover ways to assist persons with IDD to find happiness and validation in this world. By connecting and contributing to other persons and their community of choice throughout the lifespan, persons find happiness. We will discover creating a pipeline between individuals, resources, and existing systems is critical to an inclusive culture. The impact of inclusion and a caregiver's performance effects one's response to healthcare treatment from birth to aging. We will learn about strengthening the individual caregiver and, infrastructure and capacity of systems to integrate physical and mental healthcare to promote prevention of issues and overall health in persons with IDD. Getting the most out of resources and identifying the gaps is a primary goal for finding "my place in this world". We will learn optimism and options create opportunities for improving happiness and closing gaps. Our panel will address questions related to finding this place and the pursuit of happiness.

## **TARGET AUDIENCE**

This event is relevant for clinical professionals (psychologists, social workers, case managers, certified developmental disability nurses, certified family support specialists, behavior analysts, etc.), residential providers, educators, caregivers, families, and persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

## **CONTINUING EDUCATION UNITS**

This program was approved by the National Association of Social Workers – Tennessee Chapter (Provider Number: NASWTN 2023 – 0132) for 6 continuing education units. The National Association of Social Workers Tennessee Chapter is committed to conducting all activities in conformity with the National Association of Social Workers and the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles for Psychologists and maintains responsibility for this program and its contents. In this conference, there are a total of 12 possible trainings available; however, the maximum number of trainings any single participant can attend is 6 due to the overlapping schedule for breakout sessions. In order to receive 1 hour of CE credit for any training, the virtual participant must log in on time, remain logged in throughout the training, and complete the post-training evaluation afterwards. Technical challenges that prevent continuous access will be handled on a case-by-case basis with the emphasis being placed on ensuring that the participant was able to satisfy the learning objectives. The in-person participant must also check-in on time, and remain present throughout the training, and complete the post-training evaluation afterwards. Partial credit for any individual training is not available. For the whole conference, the maximum number of CE credits available for any single participant is 6. Therefore, participants may earn as little as 1 hour of CE credit and as much as 6 hours of credit. The same policy applies to the remaining professional disciplines regarding logging in and out of sessions virtually.

Psychologists: As stated within the rules and regulations of the Tennessee Board of Examiners in Psychology (1180 -01-.08(2)(B)) this program provides up to 6 hours of falling under the category of formal activities which are psychological in nature, provide documentation of attendance, and have a preassigned number of CE credits sponsored by a recognized and relevant state professional credentialing body. CE certificates will be provided by TN-NADD on behalf of NASWTN. CEUs are also available through DDNA, case management, certified family support specialists, and behavior analysts. \*Total CEUs for behavior analysts through the BACB are one (1).

## **PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

Participants are asked to be aware of the need for privacy and confidentiality throughout the program. If the program becomes stressful, participants are encouraged to process these feelings during discussion periods. If there are any immediate issues of concern, please let a TN-NADD Board member on site know so your concern can be addressed.

## **SPECIAL ACCOMODATIONS**

TN-NADD and the Inn at Opryland are happy to accommodate special needs requests. We ask that you contact us using the information below at least one week prior to the event to ensure sufficient time to make any necessary arrangements. The Inn at Opryland is a fully compatible ADA venue. Please ask an Inn at Opryland staff member or a TN-NADD Board member if there is an immediate need onsite during the day of the conference.

## **FEEDBACK**

Your Feedback is critical to us. We want to hear from you regarding how we did. By providing feedback you help us know what worked and what changes are needed for future conferences. Please take a minute to complete the conference evaluation and completing the conference survey.

## **OVERALL LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. Demonstrate an understanding of how to integrate transdisciplinary practices to close gaps in emotional well-being for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their caregivers
2. Identify ways to create a pipeline for developing an inclusive culture by using available resources
3. Apply the techniques learned to assemble ways to improve the capacity of systems and individuals and close gaps in care throughout the lifespan

## **8:00AM – 8:10AM**

### **Welcome**

John Weston, President of TN-NADD

**8:10AM – 8:20AM**

**Opening Statement**

Brad Turner, Commissioner for the Tennessee Department of Disability and Aging

**8:30AM – 9:30AM**

**100: Keynote Address**

The Pursuit of Happiness: When Writing Your Life Story Don't Allow Anyone Else To Hold The Pen! –

Dr. Tom Pomeranz, EdD. President and CEO of Universal Lifestyles

Instructional Level: Intermediate

The speaker will share with participants the critical importance in building a circle of supports establishing the foundation for a quality of life. He discusses what it means to have a “a happy life.” A “happy life” results by assuring all individuals are encouraged to give and do for others- an enviable life. A life that includes the presence of friends, family and staff who promote options, support opportunities and demonstrate optimism; the three O's necessary to attain a happy life. The session emphasizes supporting people in realizing a happy life is not merely a matter of thinking outside the box – we may have to blow up the box. The premise for a quality of life is the realization of happiness. Happiness can be attained when families, friends and support staff play a role in nurturing the individual in transitioning through their significant life events. Dr. Pomeranz explores the Core Quality of Life domains. In actualizing these domains, the individual has the opportunity to participate in and contribute to their communities, as well as the ability and opportunity to exercise control over the services, supports and other assistance that they need and desire.

Learning Objectives:

1. Define a “happy life” for individuals with IDD
2. Be able to state the four Core Quality of Life Domains
3. Explain why giving and doing for others as part of community inclusion promotes happiness

**9:30AM – 9:40AM**

**Break**

**9:40AM – 10:40AM**

**Breakout Sessions**

**101: Finding Happiness Through Recreation & Leisure Opportunities -**

Ryan Beckett, MA

Instructional Level: Introductory

People of all abilities have a need to engage in healthy recreation and leisure opportunities daily. Recreation & leisure opportunities are an important part of life and provide an outlet to help regulate emotions, improve self-esteem, gain independence, decrease depression, improve social skills, reach goals as well as many other benefits. Sometimes, finding the resources or opportunities for recreation and leisure opportunities can be challenging, especially for people with co-occurring disorders. In this session, we will identify the various benefits of recreation and leisure for people with co-occurring

disorders as well as identify resources within various communities, and how to adapt activities as needed.

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify at least 3 benefits of recreation or leisure opportunities.
2. Identify 2-3 resources in their community that can help them or their loved ones engage in recreational or leisure opportunities.
3. Identify 3 barriers to recreation or leisure opportunities and ways to adapt to or overcome those barriers.

### **201: Elevating Healthy Aging Within Public Health**

Dr. Ralph Alvarado

Instructional Level: Intermediate

This session will prioritize the role of public health agencies to strengthen our capacity to enhance the equitable health and wellbeing of older adults and promote healthy aging across the life course. Dr. Alvarado will review the ‘Why’ to the importance of elevating healthy aging as a core function of our work: aging population has escalated, high cost with limited resources, Tennessee health rankings, wide distribution and determinants of chronic disease leading to health disparities among older Tennesseans, and health habits and the environments we inhabit across our lives. Public health is a critical force in promoting disease prevention and health promotion across the life course so all Tennesseans have the full health potential to age well in their community of choice.

Learning Objectives:

1. Learn to adopt public health frameworks to advance healthy aging.
2. Operationalize healthy aging via four strategies (Tennessee State Health Plan, TDH 4-Year Strategic Plan, Community Health Improvement/Assessments and Plans, and TN Healthcare Resiliency Program)
3. Identify how to invest in infrastructure through policies and systems change.
4. Identify four specific partnerships and initiatives within Tennessee to address healthy aging

### **301: Loss of a Sibling with a Disability: An Unrecognized Form of Grief**

Susan Neely-Barnes, PhD MSW

Instructional Level: Intermediate

The sibling relationship is the longest lasting family tie (Marshall & Winokeur, 2017), and there is a substantial IDD literature on siblings (Burbridge & Mines, 2014; Coyle et al., 2014; Davys et al., 2016). Yet, little attention has been given to siblings when a death is experienced. Siblings have been called the forgotten grievers who are often excluded from the grief literature (Funk et al., 2018). This qualitative study interviewed 45 adults who lost their brother or sister with a disability to death. The presentation will focus on themes related to caregiving, grief, coping, and informal and formal support.

Learning Objectives:

1. Discuss the unique challenges that siblings of people with severe disabilities face around grief.

2. Understand the implications of loss for people who have been caregivers for their brother or sister with a disability.
3. Be introduced to some best practices for helping siblings navigate loss.

**11:00AM – 12:00PM**

**Breakout Sessions**

**102: Care and Compassion for Dementia in Individuals with Developmental Disabilities**

David Taylor BSN, RN, CDDN and Zachary Edmiston EMSN, RN

Instructional Level: Introductory

Dementia is the loss of cognitive functioning and behavioral abilities that is severe enough to interfere with activities of daily living. There are multiple forms of dementia including Lewy body dementia, vascular dementia, and Alzheimer's disease, the most common type of dementia. According to NADD, the biopsychosocial approach is a whole person approach to support addressing all potential areas that may impact a person's response to treatments. Although there is currently no cure for Alzheimer's disease, there are many benefits in receiving an accurate and early diagnosis.

Learning Objectives:

1. Delineate what is Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) vs Mental Illness (MI) vs. Dual Diagnosis (DD)
2. Learn the factors that increase risk for cognitive changes in people living with developmental disabilities as they age.
3. List common changes that warrant screening someone living with a developmental disability for dementia
4. Describe strategies for aging well.

**202: Be Kind To Yourself! Life Enhancing Strategies For Happiness**

Dr. Thomas Pomeranz, EdD

Instructional Level: Intermediate

Holding a position of responsibility for enhancing the health, well-being and happiness of others must start by treating oneself in a similar manner. In this how-to presentation Dr. Pomeranz emphasizes the message "you can't give it if you don't have it". He explains self-care is any activity we do deliberately to promote our emotional, physical, and mental health. Through this sharing of short stories and the detailing of examples, participants will develop a strong sense of motivation and personal insight allowing them to take better control of their self-care and realize happiness.

Learning Objectives:

1. Learn to develop strategies to minimize procrastination
2. Navigate how one's own dreams inspire and motivate others
3. Be able to compare one's strengths and abilities to promotes overall well-being

**302: Overcome Barriers and Finding Your Place in this World**

Molly Anderson

Instructional Level: Introductory

This presentation will address assumptions made about persons with disabilities and include entertaining stories about overcoming this stereotype and finding your place in this world as a person with a disability. The goal of this presentation is for self-advocates and parents to identify their goals and plan for achieving them.

Learning Objectives:

1. Learn key factors to overcome barriers from examples in the disability community about finding your place in the world
2. Identify some current factors contributing to your pursuit of happiness
3. Identify your goals for the future by overcoming common barriers

**12:00PM – 1:15PM**

**Lunch**

**12:45PM – 1:15PM**

**TN-NADD Annual Membership Meeting**

**1:15PM – 2:15PM**

**103: Plenary Address**

A Transdisciplinary Approach to Healthcare

Meera Gandhi MHS, PA-C, Clinical Director Kramer-Davis Tennessee

Instructional Level: Intermediate

Embracing Abilities. Elevating Health. A new approach to healthcare for patients with IDD has arrived in the Nashville area. Founded by a physician and dentist, Dr. Matthew Holder and Dr. Henry Hood of the renowned Lee Specialty Clinic, this transdisciplinary model puts people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) at the center of their healthcare. Designed for adults and adolescents with IDD over the age of 13, Kramer Davis Health provides a revolutionary option in healthcare — inclusive, compassionate, specialized care for the whole person.

Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the value and benefits for a new model for healthcare for patients with IDD.
2. Define transdisciplinary and understand how the clinic operates under this concept.
3. Identify the best ways to refer patients to Kramer Davis Health.

**2:15PM – 2:35PM**

**Break**

**2:35PM – 3:35PM**

**Breakout Sessions**

**104: Unlocking Communication Beyond Words: Empowering Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities to Share Their Service Experiences**

Sandra Cea MS, BCBA, LBA and Carlos Gonzalez, MS. BCBA, LBA

Instructional Level: Intermediate

Working with individuals with intellectual disabilities who have limited verbal skills and exhibit idiosyncratic communication styles presents significant challenges in person-centered service delivery. Understanding and addressing these challenges from the individuals' perspective is crucial for providing effective support and promoting their well-being and the pursuit of their happiness. This presentation explores the importance of recognizing the unique communication needs of such individuals within person-centered care frameworks. It emphasizes the significance of tailoring supports to individual communication styles and preferences to ensure meaningful engagement and inclusion.

This presentation introduces the GIFT (Gestures, Interaction, Face Expression) tracker, an innovative tool designed to measure caregiver performance when working with individuals who have limited verbal skills, by closely observing and interpreting the person supported non-verbal cues such as gestures, interactions, and facial expressions. This approach is particularly beneficial for engaging with individuals who have limited verbal skills and idiosyncratic communication styles. The GIFT tracker aims to provide a structured method for evaluating the person's interactions, thereby enhancing the quality of person-centered care for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify at least two reasons why technology to facilitate communication channels with people with limited verbal skills is critical to improve the quality of ABA services.
2. Identify at least two dimensions assessed by the GIFT scale.
3. Identify at least two potential further developments to apply the GIFT scale to assess other needs and promote the pursuit of happiness.

#### **204: Empowering Success: Supporting Individuals Diagnosed with MH and IDD in Higher Education**

Marla Smith, MS, LMHP, LMHC

Instructional Level: Introductory

As more students dually diagnosed with Mental Health (MH) and Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (IDD) are pursuing higher education, families, educators, and support staff must be equipped with the knowledge and tools to foster their success. This training equips participants with strategies to empower and support students, enhancing their achievement. Participants will explore common challenges, learn how to create an inclusive campus environment, and develop comprehensive support systems that engage students, families, and campus resources. By the end, attendees will be prepared to effectively support students with MH and IDD, ensuring their success and well-being in higher education.

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify common challenges faced by students with MH and IDD in higher education settings
2. Create a supportive campus environment that fosters inclusion and belonging for students with MH and IDD
3. Develop a comprehensive support system that promotes independence, collaboration, and growth by engaging students, families, and campus resources

#### **304: Breaking Down Barriers: Facilitating Transdisciplinary Care**

Dr. Renea Bentley, Dr. Anna Settle, Grace McDonald BCBA  
Instructional Level: Introductory

Unique challenges arise when navigating the treatment and resources for those with a diagnosis of Intellectual and/or Developmental Disability. Without a guide, the complexities can become overwhelming. Within this presentation, we seek to offer suggestions on getting the most out of resources and treatment through 3 main areas of discussion: engaging staff/family/caregivers in treatment, transdisciplinary collaboration, and responding to clinical barriers and gaps in care; providing an overview of Applied Behavior Analysis, engagement with BAs, and ABA within the Managed Care sphere; and providing an overview of services covered by Managed Care Organizations. Barriers and possible solutions to receiving Medicaid services will be reviewed.

Learning Objectives:

1. Engage and Equip- Learners will be presented with strategies to engage treatment providers, advocate for transdisciplinary care, navigate the service delivery system, and address treatment barriers and gaps.
2. Learn and Implement-Learners will be introduced to Medicaid covered services, tools, and resources available to address the needs of individuals with I/DD diagnoses and complex mental health needs.
3. Evaluate and Treat-Learners will be given a high-level overview of assessment and treatment resources available for those with dual diagnoses

**3:45PM – 4:45PM**

**105: Panel Discussion**

Overcoming Assumptions, Creating Pipelines, and Filling the Gaps for the Future

Kala Simmons, La'Wanda Jenkins, Pablo Juarez, Alonzo Cheeks

Instructional Level: Introductory

We have learned optimism and options create opportunities for improving happiness. Barriers such as assumptions and stereotypes have made connecting to the community for persons with IDD challenging. But by connecting and contributing to other persons and their community of choice, persons find happiness. We have discovered creating a pipeline between individuals, resources, and existing systems is critical to an inclusive culture. The impact of inclusion and a caregiver's performance effects one's response to healthcare treatment from birth to aging. We have learned strengthening the infrastructure and capacity of systems to integrate physical and mental healthcare to promote prevention of issues and overall health in persons with IDD plays an important part in overall quality of life. Including communication style and preferences are two areas to examine more closely. Our goals for finding "my place in this world" need to include responding to gaps in care. The panel will address questions related to finding this place and the pursuit of happiness.

Learning Objectives:

1. Learn what the most difficult assumptions to overcome are and steps to overcome them.
2. Be able to compare various transdisciplinary practices' effectiveness in connecting to general healthcare resources
3. Identify the primary gaps in current system resources for creating cultural inclusion



## **SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES**

**Dr. Ralph Alvarado** joined Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee's cabinet in January 2023 as the 15th commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Health. He has spent nearly a decade in public service and in 2014 was the first Hispanic member elected to the Kentucky General Assembly where he represented Kentucky's 28th Senate district. During his service in the Kentucky Senate, Dr. Alvarado was Chairman of the Senate Health & Welfare Committee, led the Substance Abuse Recovery Task Force, and was a member of the Medicaid Oversight, Banking & Insurance, and State & Local Government committees. Dr. Alvarado has been a practicing physician for the past 29 years, working in a variety of clinical settings, as a hospitalist, in primary care, and at skilled nursing facilities. Dr. Alvarado has served as medical director for the Medicare health plan operators Stableview Health and Signature Advantage, in Lexington, Ky.; as medical director and finance chairman for Kentucky One Health Medical Group, in Louisville, Ky.; and, as vice-chair for the board of Quality Independent Physicians, also in Louisville. From 2009 to 2011, Dr. Alvarado was chief and medical staff president at St. Joseph's Hospital in Lexington, Ky., and was elected to the hospital's board in 2010, serving until 2012. Dr. Alvarado earned a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, Calif., in 1990, where he went on to receive his Doctorate in Medicine in 1994. Dr. Alvarado completed his medical residency in Internal Medicine and Pediatrics at the University of Kentucky in 1998. Dr. Alvarado and his wife of 30 years, Dawn, have two adult children.

**Molly Anderson** is the Director of Peer Support for Family Voices TN joining the organization in August 2023. She is an Alabama native and moved to Tennessee to earn her Bachelor's degree from Maryville College. She holds a master's degree in Political Management from George Washington University. Ms. Anderson has a nonverbal disability, called apraxia, and utilizes American Sign Language and assistive technologies for communication. Ms. Anderson is a member of the Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Junior League on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging, and the Chattanooga Mayor's Council on Disability. She was a Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute Participant in 2021 – 22, and gave a Tullahoma TEDx Talk in 2022. Ms. Anderson is married with a beautiful two-year-old daughter named Lucy. Ms. Anderson is known to many in the community for her passion and tenacity!

**Ryan Beckett** is currently Program Director at Moccasin Bend Mental Health Institute in Chattanooga TN. He earned his bachelor's degree from Georgia Southern University in Therapeutic Recreation in 2002. He has practiced as a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) since 2002 and just recently earned his Master's degree from Austin Peay State University in Healthcare Administration with a concentration in leadership development in 2020. Mr. Beckett is a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist, a Certified Adaptive Recreation and Sports Specialist level 2, and a Certified Dementia Practitioner. He is married and has two daughters ages seven and 11. As a family, they love to get outdoors and be adventurous as much as possible. Some of his primary interests include hiking, trail running, paddle boarding, rafting, disc golf, going to see live music, and spending as much time as he can with his family.

**Dr. Renea Bentley** is the Executive Director of Behavioral Health at Wellpoint. Dr. Bentley has a Master of Arts in Professional Counseling and a Doctor of Education in Counselor Education & Clinical Supervision. She is a Licensed Professional Counselor – Mental Health Service Provider and is an approved clinical supervisor. Dr. Bentley has 25 years of mental health experience, including substance use and trauma-focused care, with the last 12 years being in managed care. She has had I/DD-related experiences weaved throughout her mental health career. Dr. Bentley brings clinical and business acumen to

developing and executing behavior health strategy and programming, while supporting individuals with mental health, substance use, and I/DD needs.

**Sandra Cea** is a Board-Certified and Licensed Behavior Analyst in Cordova, Tennessee. She has dedicated her professional life to work in mental health for the last 35 years. Mrs. Cea graduated as a psychologist in her beloved native country, Chile, continuing her post graduate studies in Family Therapy. After practicing as a clinical psychologist with high-risk communities and working as a professor in several universities in Chile, she moved to the United States where she obtained her Master's Degree in Behavior Analysis and Therapy at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. She continued her professional career working with children and family systems in Florida for several years. Mrs. Cea made a new home at Behavioral Services of Tennessee (BSTN) where she has been working with dually-diagnosed individuals for the last 23 years. She is currently the Director of Operations at BSTN and finds great fulfillment in close involvement in all aspects of home and community-based supports for individuals in need and for all support personnel. In addition to her work, Mrs. Cea acknowledges her amazing family are her main pillar for finding her place in this world, and that her pursuit of happiness always includes sharing simple things with them, enjoying good music, traveling or improvising a new dish in her kitchen.

**Alonzo Cheeks** embarked on his life journey with determination and resilience. Despite facing rejection due to his past as a felon, he founded "So Fresh So Clean Hospitality" in 2006. He attended LADAC classes, expanding his knowledge and skills, and became a Tennessee Certified Peer Recovery Specialist (CPRS) allowing him to connect with individuals facing similar challenges. His work at TMHCA in 2016 and later in 2019 with the Tennessee Voices' as Care Coordinator on the TN Move Initiative team deepened his understanding of mental health advocacy and community support. He attended Trevecca Nazarene University focusing on psychology. Mr. Cheeks is a TennCare Advisory Board and Bluecare Network Advisory Board member. He is a WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) Two Facilitator and CPRS Supervisor. Mr. Cheeks strives to make a difference. He continues to learn, evolve, and uplift others, knowing that every step contributes to a healthier, brighter tomorrow

**Zach Edmiston** is currently the Psychiatric Hospital Nurse Executive for Memphis Mental Health Institute (MMHI). He began his healthcare career in the Army in 1990 as a medical laboratory technologist. In 1999 he began at Methodist LeBonheur Healthcare North hospital as a phlebotomist. His nursing career began in the Intensive Care Unit at the same hospital, where he also continued his academic education obtaining his Bachelor of Science and Executive Master of Science in Nursing. Leadership from the University of Memphis. Mr. Edmiston's nursing experience includes general ICU, cardiovascular ICU, surgical ICU, occupational health, hospice, and psychiatric nursing. His nursing leadership experience began in 2013. He has since led general ICU/ cardiovascular ICU units, monitor technicians, and acute/subacute/forensic psychiatric nursing departments in Memphis and Nashville, TN. Mr. Edmiston has experience as the Hospital Administrator for MMHI, prior to accepting his current role of Psychiatric Hospital Nurse Executive. He has received the Diseases Attacking the Immune System (Daisy) Award, Celebrate Nursing: Top 100 Nurses and Excellent 11 in Shelby and Fayette counties awards, and 50 Leaders for 50 Years Loewenberg College of Nursing award. Most recently, he has received the Spring 2021 Governor's Excellence in Service Award. Although, Mr. Edmiston has appreciated much success in his nursing career, he is most proud of being a husband and father of two.

**Meera Gandhi** currently serves as the Clinic Director with Kramer Davis, an innovative, trans-disciplinary clinic aiming to improve the quality of health care for individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD). Under Ms. Gandhi's leadership, Kramer Davis focuses on holistic and compassionate care across many specialties encouraging communication across all disciplines. She is an adventurous spirit & passionate clinician impacting vulnerable populations through innovation, medicine and relationships while emphasizing holistic health. Her resourcefulness and desire to drive change have brought her to Special Olympics International, global medical relief missions, and Duke Health where she spent 10 years practicing as a Physician Assistant in the urgent care and ER including during the covid pandemic, witnessing gaps and opportunities in healthcare. Ms. Gandhi approaches her work with authenticity and vulnerability, as she strives to empower and uplift those who need it most.

**Carlos Gonzalez** is founder and president of BSTN Home and Community Support, a position that has given him deep expertise in the unique operational challenges care agencies face in providing home care and promoting person and employee's safety, clinical behavior analysis, risk management and employee training for more than 20 years. He is also president of Healthcare Safety International. Carlos is a Licensed/Board Certified Behavior Analyst with a Master of Science in Behavior Analysis and Therapy from Southern Illinois University. He also earned a Master Trainer Certification for Team STEPP and a Patient Safety Practitioner Certification from the Armstrong Institute for Patient Safety and Quality. Johns Hopkins Medicine. In 2022 Carlos lead BSTN to achieve accreditation and certification by The Joint Commission and received The Gold Seal of Approval®.

**La'Wanda Jenkins** serves as Staff Development Coordinator and Community Liaison at Middle Tennessee Mental Health Institute. La'Wanda earned her Doctorate of Nursing Practice from the University of Alabama Birmingham in 2016. Early in her career, she provided various nursing services to those with significant intellectual and physical disabilities. La'Wanda also earned credentialing as a Clinical Specialist in Adult Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, is currently a Board member for the Nursing Advisory Board at Austin Peay University, and is a Handle With Care trainer. La'Wanda is a renaissance woman, with her involvement in various veterans organization, the Epilepsy Foundation, various PTOs, and being a basketball coach for more than one special needs team. She was named one of Nashville's 100 Leading Women by NashvilleBusiness.Net in 2018. La'Wanda is also the parent of a son with IDD and epilepsy.

**Pablo Juárez** is currently the Co-director of TRIAD, the autism institute at Vanderbilt Kennedy Center as well as VKC's University Center of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. He was born and raised in Austin, Texas where some of his earliest jobs were serving people with disabilities. After graduating from the University of North Texas and completing a few summer internships serving in a traumatic brain injury rehabilitation program, Mr. Juárez moved to Nashville to join a multidisciplinary brain injury rehabilitation team. He then attended Vanderbilt University for a master's degree in special education. Mr. Juárez has focused on expanding services for children with autism significantly throughout Tennessee. He has previously served as a board member for Tennessee Disability Rights, Tennessee Equality Project, and Tennessee Association for Behavior Analysis and served on multiple workgroups through local, state, and national disability-focused organizations. He also currently serves as one of the boards of directors for the Association for University Centers on Disabilities and The Arc of the United States.

**Grace McDonald** has been the Behavioral Health Liaison at Wellpoint since 2020. In her role she collaborates with community providers and clinicians and provides support for internal and external

stakeholders. In 2012 she earned her Master of Arts degree in Clinical Psychology from Middle Tennessee State University. She also holds a Master's degree in Business Administration from Youngstown State. In 2015 Ms. McDonald was Board Certified as a Behavior Analyst and in 2017 she was certified as a Licensed Behavior Analyst. Prior to her work at Wellpoint, she was employed by the Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and Scarb Behavioral Health as a Behavior Analyst. Ms. McDonald serves as a member for the Tennessee Center for Decision Making Support, Tennessee Ambassadors Council, and Standard Operating Procedures Committee.

**Dr. Susan Neely-Barnes** is professor of social work and chair of the School of Social Work at the University of Memphis. She earned her doctorate in Social Welfare in 2005 from the University of Washington, Seattle. She has eleven years of experience directing Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) training grants and has received over \$12 million in grant funding. Dr. Neely-Barnes has served on the human rights committee for the West TN regional office from 2013 – 18 and co-facilitated a sibling of children with developmental disabilities group from 2003 – 07. She is also an accomplished researcher focusing primarily on building the knowledge base in social work around effective supports for people with disabilities and their family members and improving the education and training of social work students. She has authored thirty-seven peer-reviewed publications and five book chapters and given more than fifty juried presentations. Professional memberships include the Council on Social Work Education, the National Association of Social Workers, the Society for Social Work and Research, the American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disability, and the National Association of Deans & Directors of Schools of Social Work.

**Dr. Thomas Pomeranz** is a nationally recognized authority, trainer, clinician and consultant in the field of services for people with disabilities. Over the last fifty (50) years, he has conducted thousands of seminars and programs throughout the United States and Canada. Dr. Pomeranz received his Bachelor and Master of Science Degrees in Special Education and a Doctorate in Mental Health Administration from Indiana University, followed by post-graduate work from the University of Notre Dame in the area of experimental psychology. He is currently President and CEO of Universal LifeStiles. Dr. Pomeranz has held a variety of top-level administrative posts in community-based service organizations and three large state-operated facilities. He has also served as a Policy Fellow and Visiting Lecturer for Minot State University – North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities, a University Center of Excellence. Dr. Pomeranz is the creator of Universal Enhancement, which teaches strategies promoting community participation and supporting people to have a quality life. He has authored numerous articles in various professional publications and *The Principles and Practices of Universal Enhancement*. Dr. Pomeranz co-produced a seven-part staff training DVD series *The Principles and Practices of Building Community with Tierra Del Sol*

**Dr. Anna Settle** is a PSYPACT licensed psychologist who specializes in identification, assessment, and treatment of people with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities. Currently, she is the Behavior Supports Director with Wellpoint, Tennessee and directs behavior support services for the TennCare LTSS programs. She oversees management of behavior crisis prevention, intervention, and stabilization, and leads the integration of physical and behavioral health services and supports for those in ECF programs. Dr. Settle specializes in forensic assessment, competency training/restoration, and re-entry into the community for those with an Intellectual and/or Developmental Disability who have engagement with the legal system. She brings over 15 years of experience in private practice, directing community living

and treatment programs, MCO leadership, and also serves as a media consultant on mental health and wellness topics for the community at large.

**Kala Simmons** is a Certified Master Life Coach and Master's Level Social Worker with over 15 years of clinical experience in mental and behavioral healthcare. She received her undergraduate education at Middle Tennessee State University prior to completing her advanced degree at Tennessee State University. Known by her clients and following as "Coach K", her expertise lies in assisting clients to identify barriers to success, collaboratively crafting solutions, and facilitating goal attainment. Ms. Simmons serves as a regular guest speaker and panelist for several Middle Tennessee Colleges, The Franklin County Chapter of the NAACP, and other community organizations. Additionally, she has been featured in publications, such as Bold Journey Magazine, and is a widely requested podcast guest making appearances on shows such as The Visibility Impact Show, The Corporate Detox Podcast, as well as Let's Talk Love and Relationships. Through her personal journey of therapy, coaching, and self-discovery, she now dedicates herself to guiding women towards recognizing their true selves, embracing their Main Character Era, and stepping into their highest potential.

**Marla Smith** has been dedicated to providing training and technical assistance on evidence-based behavioral health topics since the fall of 2016. Her passion lies in coordinating behavioral health training, with a particular focus on individuals diagnosed with serious mental illnesses. Licensed in Nebraska and Iowa, Marla brings nearly 20 years of extensive experience working directly with clients of all ages. Her approach emphasizes the importance of connection, meeting individuals where they are, and employing respectful, trauma-informed communication to support positive change. Marla holds a Master's degree in Youth and Family Services from Bellevue University. Outside of her professional commitments, she cherishes family time and enjoys crafting as a favorite pastime.

**David Taylor** is currently the State Director of Nursing for the Tennessee Department of Aging and Disability (DAD) and works at the Central Office in Nashville. He has worked for DAD for 19 years and came to the Central Office after 14 years at the East Tennessee Regional Office in Knoxville. He is a graduate of the University of North Alabama with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) and has been a Registered Nurse for 39 years. Mr. Taylor is a Certified Developmental Disabilities Nurse (CDDN) and a member of the Developmental Disabilities Nurses Association (DDNA). Mr. Taylor served as a commissioned officer in the US Army Nurse Corps and earned a diploma from the US Army Academy of Health Sciences at Fort Sam Houston, Texas in Perioperative Nursing with a specialty in cardiothoracic surgery. He worked 15 years as an operating room nurse, open heart surgery team member, and operating room manager at Baptist Hospital of East Tennessee, where he met his wife of 30 years, Sharon. They have 3 grown children; Nicholas, Thomas and Lyndsey and enjoy being empty nesters at their home in Lebanon, TN.

