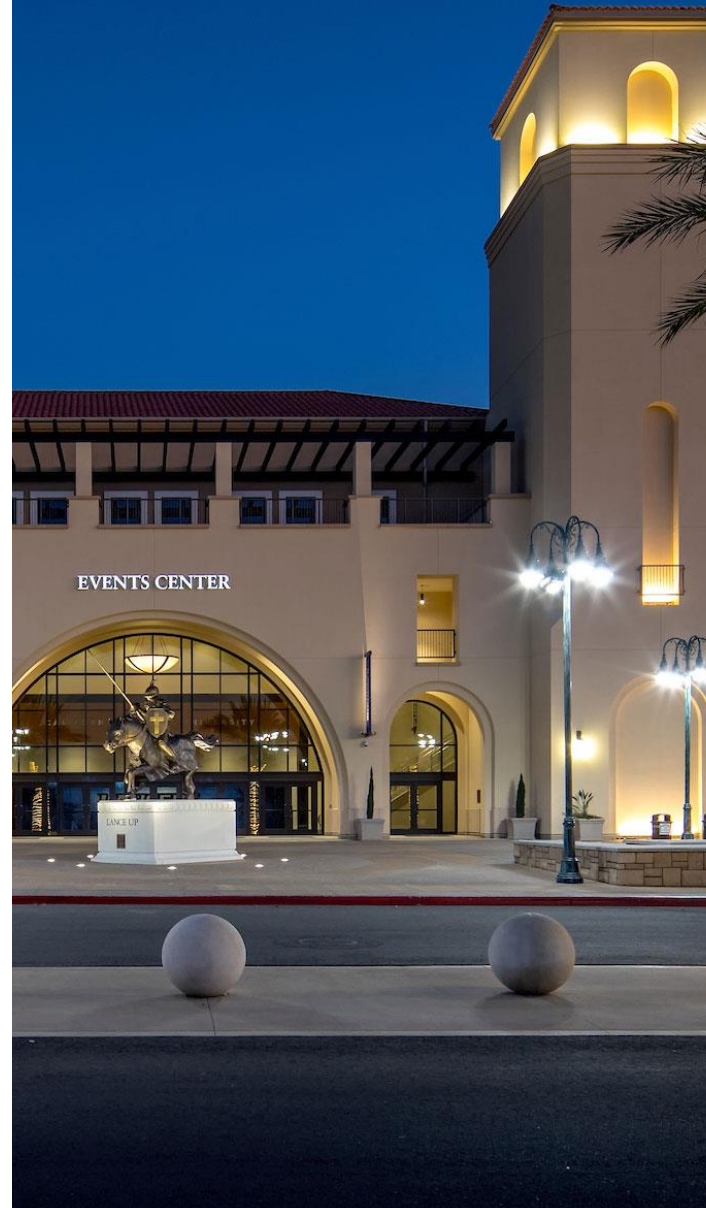




Doctor of Social Work

2024 Doctor of Social Work Candidates

College of Behavioral & Social Sciences
California Baptist University
Riverside, CA
www.calbaptist.edu/DSW



Message from the Director

Dear Colleague,

The Doctor of Social Work program at California Baptist University is excited to share with you the 2024 candidates for graduation. Each of these candidates is passionate about developing solutions to address our world's most pressing social problems. They are also deeply committed to serving the most vulnerable and oppressed in society. As scholar-practitioners, they possess the leadership acumen, research skills, and practice competence to lead our profession forward.



Our graduates have developed social innovations to tackle the Grand Challenges for Social Work; and their innovative projects address issues such as housing insecurity, substance abuse, veteran mental health, educational disparities, and end of life care. They have spent the last several years engaging with community members and stakeholders to develop these innovations in partnership with the communities that are most impacted. Through their perseverance and dedication to their educational goals, these graduates have exemplified Christlike character and integrity that will set them apart from their counterparts.

All of these candidates are expected to receive their Doctor of Social Work degree in the summer or fall of 2024. We are excited about their future and pray that God will use them to bring hope and healing to a broken world. If you are interested in learning more about their work, please contact them directly. For more information about the DSW program please connect with us at www.calbaptist.edu/DSW.

Sincerely,
Krystal Hays, PhD, LCSW
DSW Program Director
California Baptist University

“Leading Community Change around the Globe”

List of Graduates

Natasha Alsobrook

Audrey Mae Hernandez

Christian Astorga

Michael Houlihan

Tarrisyna Bartley

Daniel Lawrence

Emilio R. Bermejo

Stacey Lawson

Zee Bolden

Shamica Lewis

Kasey Phillips Brown

Edonna McBride

Muriel Casamayor

Kenesha Beatrice Mitchell

Vilma Marleny Cruz

Vivian Mitchell

Martha I. Daggett

Laura Sainz Pfladderer

Luckson Chabata Dube

Juan Sandoval

Chiana Ghant

Patrice D. Scott

Theresa A. Gonzales

Jacob Robert Sermeno

Charles Hansen

Thomasina Mosley Sisay

Froylana Heredia-Miller



Natasha Alsobrook, DSW-C, MSW

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Project Title: Grateful and Grieving

Interests: Ambiguous Loss, PTSD, Families of Combat Veterans

Natasha's research focuses on ambiguous loss in veteran spouses, with an emphasis on combat veteran spouses. Her passion is advocating for veterans and their families while ensuring that they have access to programs and resources that promote their mental health. She focuses on reducing suicide rates and helping veteran families thrive. In addition to her research, Natasha is actively involved in clinical practice as a clinical social worker. She works with veterans and their families to address a wide range of mental health needs, including therapy and support for veterans with severe mental illness and post-traumatic stress disorder. During her doctoral studies at California Baptist University, Natasha created a peer-based innovation titled "Grateful and Grieving," specifically designed to meet the needs of combat veteran spouses experiencing ambiguous loss. She is committed to bridging the gap between research and practice and has collaborated with several community organizations that serve veterans to help shape the project. Her goals are to scale her innovation while continuing in clinical practice.



Christian Astorga, DSW-C, AMFT

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Project Title: Trauma in Latino Immigrants: The Stories That Raise the Generation

Interests: Mental health, immigration, children and adolescents, Latino issues

Christian holds a bachelor's degree from California State University, Fullerton, and two master's degrees from National University in La Jolla, CA (a master's in counseling psychology and a Master of Management). He will complete a Doctor of Social Work degree from California Baptist University in 2024. Christian is registered with the Board of Behavioral Sciences as an Associate Marriage and Family Therapist (AMFT). As a Hispanic man, Christian understands that sharing about your mental health is not always easy. He has worked with diverse young people to improve their mental and emotional wellbeing for over a decade. Currently, Christian works in clinical practice and specializes in working with children, teens, and young adults. He uses a Gestalt/Psychodynamic orientation and works with clients on addressing the trauma that has impacted their lives. Christian strives to make the therapeutic environment safe but enticing. He wants his community to look forward to improving their outcomes and reaching their health goals. His innovation addresses mental health stigma and disparities among Latino immigrants. Christian's professional goal includes being fully licensed as a Marriage and Family Therapist and developing clinical leadership programs based on his interests.



Tarrisyna Bartley, DSW-C, MSW, LCSW

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Project Title: Empowering My Community: Health Fair and Symposium on Culturally Tailored Diabetes Education for African Americans

Interests: African Americans, Health Equity, Implicit Bias, Stigma

Tarrisyna Bartley is a licensed clinical social worker. She graduated from California State University, Long Beach, with a bachelor's in applied clinical psychology, a minor in Black Studies, and a master's in social work. Ms. Bartley has held various roles as a social work manager, medical social worker, mental health therapist, and contract social worker for adoptions, group homes, home health, and hospice. Currently she works as a home health social worker, serving adults and children. During her tenure as a social work manager in a hospital setting, she witnessed many injustices in treating African American patients. The mandate was to discharge patients promptly, but many were not provided with or linked to needed community resources. She prided herself on instilling in her staff the importance of a safe discharge and connecting patients to appropriate community resources. During this time, she became passionate about making a substantial impact in health care delivery for African Americans. She applied for the Doctor of Social Work Program at California Baptist University, where she began her initial research on implicit bias encountered by African Americans in the healthcare system. Her personal and professional observation of the lack of diabetes education in healthcare inspired the innovation Empowering My Community: Health Fair and Symposium on Culturally Tailored Diabetes Education for African Americans. Ms. Bartley will utilize her consulting business, Social Work Practitioners Place, as a platform to partner with Black Churches to advance Empowering My Community to educate and empower the congregation and the community with information to promote better health outcomes.



Emilio R. Bermejo, DSW-C, MSW

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Project Title: God's Grand Design to Meeting the Grand Challenges of Smart Decarceration

Interests: Biblical justice; restorative justice; smart decarceration

Emilio R. Bermejo, MSW is an assistant professor at California Baptist University (CBU), in Riverside, CA. He has over 25 years of professional social work experience ranging from direct practice to system reform initiatives focused on serving children and families affected by child maltreatment and substance use disorders. Emilio also currently serves as a financial grants management consultant for a U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs project supporting victims of crime in the U.S. Territories. He served as an Aftercare Fellow for International Justice Mission (2008-2009), where he designed a job-readiness program for survivors of sex trafficking in Cebu, Philippines. Emilio is completing his doctorate degree in social work at CBU, which focuses on biblical justice as a pathway to smart decarceration. He designed a conceptual framework that integrated social work practice and the biblical grand narrative to address the Grand Challenge of smart decarceration. He also launched a community of practice (CoP), inviting social workers, church leaders, and community providers who are passionate about biblical justice and restoring the damage incurred by mass incarceration in their communities. CoP members participated in meaningful monthly dialogue with fellow members while sharing knowledge, insights, and resources.



Zee Bolden, DSW-C, MSW, ACSW

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www.radiant-roots-retreat.com | www.linkedin.com/in/radiantrootsretreat/

Project Title: Radiant Roots Retreat: Promoting Ethnic-Racial Identity Development Among African American Adolescents

Interests: Ethnic-Racial Identity awareness, Youth development

Zee Bolden is a highly accomplished professional with a Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Studies and Special Education, a Master of Social Work, and soon a Doctor of Social Work degree from California Baptist University. She also holds a Bible diploma from Faith Bible Institute. Her extensive awareness of marginalized and underserved populations has led to her area of research interest and innovation in ethnic-racial identity for African American adolescents. As the CEO of Radiant Roots Retreat, she is pioneering and revolutionizing the approach to combat the need for sufficient knowledge of ethnic-racial identity, positive self-esteem, and strategies to combat bullying and discrimination. Her 4-day, 3-night summer camp for African American teens is a groundbreaking testament to her innovative thinking. In addition to her academic achievements, Zee is a mental health clinician specializing in play therapy with 0-8-year-olds. She applies her innovative expertise in various settings, working with individuals, families, and groups of any age. Zee's professional goals include receiving her clinical licensure, continuing to work within her area of focus and expertise, and expanding the promotion of evidence-based practices for African American adolescents through her innovative non-denominational Christian faith-based summer camp.



Kasey Phillips Brown, DSW-C, MSW, LCSW

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Project Title: Missing Black Woman Disparity Symposium: A Community Approach to Eradicating Missing Black Woman Disparity

Interests: Missing Black Women Disparity, Trauma, ADHD

Kasey has been providing mental health services for over 30 years. She is the founder and executive director of the Nan Washington Global Wellness Foundation and the Missing Black Woman Disparity Symposium. She coined the term Missing Black Woman Disparity to describe the lack of awareness of missing Black women. Her innovation was the creation of a symposium that brought experts and community members together to increase awareness of missing black women, discuss solutions, and offer resources. Kasey earned both her B.A. in Mass Communication and Master of Social Work from Clark Atlanta University. Kasey has been certified as a sexual assault crisis volunteer, a Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy clinician, and an Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EDMR) Certified Therapist. Kasey is a clinical supervisor who provides individual and group clinical supervision to associate social workers and associate marriage and family therapists at two Department of Mental Health Agencies. Kasey was a part-time lecturer for the School of Social Work at Cal State Long Beach and now runs a private practice, New Perspectives, in Gardena, CA. Kasey is a certified health coach who assists parents of children who have been diagnosed with ADHD and wrote the highly regarded book "We Just Said No! Treating ADHD Without Medication." She facilitates corporate training, business enhancements, college lectures, and career consulting. Kasey's goal is to continue to decrease the Missing Black Women's Disparity via symposiums on a local, national, and global level.



Muriel Casamayor, DSW-C, MA, LMFT

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Project Title: Health Care Access and Utilization among Undocumented Latinx Living with HIV

Interests: Undocumented community, healthcare, HIV awareness, HIV Testing, Latinx and HIV positive

Casamayor (She/her/Ella) is an accomplished professional with a Master of Arts in Marriage and Family Therapy from Hope International University and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from California State University of Los Angeles. Her research focuses on the experiences of undocumented individuals living with HIV as they navigate the healthcare system and access resources. Throughout her career, Muriel has held various roles, including Founder of Insight Family Counseling and Wellness Services and MC Insightify Consulting Services. Notably, she offers supervision to undocumented therapists and consulting services to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) clinicians seeking to establish private practices, thereby enhancing diversity and inclusivity in mental health services. These endeavors reflect Muriel's dedication to providing tailored and accessible mental health care to marginalized communities while empowering fellow clinicians. Muriel has spearheaded innovative programs to address the mental health needs of undocumented college students, showcasing her commitment to inclusivity in higher education and combating mental health disparities. Additionally, she is currently focused on destigmatizing HIV and increasing awareness and testing by developing educational workshops in Spanish for the undocumented community. Her future aspirations include furthering HIV awareness efforts, eradicating stigma, and assisting organizations in creating mental health programs to uplift marginalized communities.



Vilma Marleny Cruz, DSW-C, MSW, LCSW, PPSC/CWA

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Project Title: Healing Family Generations: Faith-Based Biblical Parenting Support

Interests: Parent, Child, and Family Welfare and Biblical Parenting

Vilma Cruz is passionate about fulfilling God's mission to serve the oppressed and marginalized, particularly children, parents, and families. As a licensed clinical social worker, Vilma focuses on supporting all dimensions of parental, child, and family well-being and flourishing. She holds a Master of Social Work and a Pupil Personnel Services Credential with specializations in School Social Work and Child Welfare and Attendance. Vilma currently works as a school-based social worker, providing essential support to parents, children, and families. Formerly, Vilma worked as a child and family therapist in community mental health. Vilma has utilized her clinical experience to inform her research inquiries that center around identifying the underlying causes of parental stress, poor child development and outcomes, family dysfunction, and other challenges afflicting parents, children, and families. Vilma's current project includes developing a social innovation, "Healing Family Generations: Faith-Based Biblical Parenting Support," which addresses ineffective parenting practices. Vilma's long-term goals include using a community-based research model to develop effective parenting interventions in collaboration with community-based agencies, including Christian churches and child welfare organizations. She aspires to implement comprehensive programs at micro, mezzo, and macro levels to engage and support families. Additionally, Vilma aims to educate and train new and experienced social workers to provide culturally relevant services in community settings. Ultimately, she plans to launch her social impact business, Healing Family Generations.



Martha I. Daggett, DSW-C, MS, LMFT

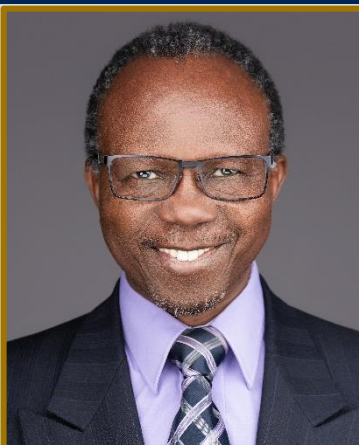
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Project Title: Making Sense of the Pain: Healing from Trauma

Interests: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), trauma

Martha is originally from the Dominican Republic and holds a degree in Counseling Psychology. She is currently pursuing her doctorate in Social Work from California Baptist University. She provides individual and family therapy, as well as classroom observations and interventions for mental and behavioral health concerns. Martha is trained in crisis intervention and EMDR, a cutting-edge therapy technique used to overcome trauma. She is also skilled in Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) and Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT), and she provides trauma training and workshops. The focus of Martha's research includes the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on adolescent brain development. She has extensive knowledge and a deep passion for addressing trauma and ACEs, striving to educate people on the impact of trauma and toxic stress on the brain and body. Martha has successfully implemented numerous interventions that have significantly improved the well-being of her clients. She is a member of the California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (CAMFT) and holds certifications in trauma-focused therapies. Recognized for her empathetic approach and strong communication skills, Martha is excited to continue this journey and welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with a team of professionals to increase public awareness about the emotional and physical health impacts of ACEs.



Luckson Chabata Dube, DSW-C, MS, MA

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Project Title: Foster Youth Empowerment for Trucking

Interests: Foster Youth, Readiness for Employment, Commercial Driver's License (CDL)

Luckson Chabata Dube completed a Bachelor of Arts in Theology at Andrews University, MI (Affiliate campus in Zimbabwe). He graduated with a Master of Arts in Human Development at National University, CA, and proceeded to do a Master of Science in Counseling Psychology at California Baptist University, CA. Luckson worked as a pastor and Dean of Boys at a high school in Zimbabwe. He has also worked as a social worker in Riverside County – Department of Public Social Services (Family Reunification Unit). Luckson later moved on to the trucking industry after obtaining a CDL. He became an owner-operator and has over ten years of experience in this industry. He continues to run his trucking business. The combination of social work and trucking has informed Luckson's innovation, which focuses on assisting foster youth to obtain commercial driver's licenses before they are emancipated from the care system. Luckson sees the potential for developing a program that can be life-changing among the foster youth. Luckson envisions foster youth with employment readiness skills that equip them to be gainfully employed and contribute to society's economic growth. Furthermore, when young people are gainfully employed, they are likely not to be homeless, get involved with the justice system, and abuse substances. Luckson's professional goal is to expand his innovation to reach emancipating foster youth throughout the region.



Chiana Ghant, DSW-C, MSW, MA, LMSW, ASW

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Project Title: Are Black Males College Ready?

Interests: Advancing Education Equity, Marginalized Populations, and Social Justice

Ms. Ghant began her career as a social worker with the Department of Veterans Affairs, serving as an Inpatient Medical Social Worker. During this time, she has advocated for health equity for African American veterans and trained master's level social workers in their educational development. This experience solidified a deep-rooted passion for teaching in higher education, leading her to join California State University, San Bernardino, as a part-time faculty member in the School of Social Work. As an educator, Ms. Ghant actively promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion through her equity-minded classroom approach. Ms. Ghant's commitment to education equity and social justice is translated into her research on exploring college readiness among Black males. She is passionate about addressing the alarming decline in college enrollment rates, disengagement from college preparatory programs, and academic underachievement among Black males, which are critical social issues rooted in systemic barriers and racial stereotypes. These challenges highlight the limited access to educational opportunities and the impact of institutional racism. As a result, Ms. Ghant developed EmpowerED, a comprehensive recruitment program designed to help college preparatory programs increase the number of Black male participants. Ms. Ghant successfully partnered with Loyola Marymount University's Upward Bound program to alter policies and unsuccessful recruitment strategies for Black male students. These focus areas all align with Ms. Ghant's professional goals to uplift marginalized communities and attain a full-time faculty appointment.



Theresa A. Gonzales, DSW-C, MSW, ASW

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Project Title: Pathway to Empowerment: Mentorship Program for Pregnant and Parenting Former Foster Youth

Interests: Child Welfare

Theresa A. Gonzales holds a Bachelor of Science in Organizational Leadership from Azusa Pacific University and a Master of Social Work from California Baptist University. Gonzales advocates for comprehensive interventions to prevent child maltreatment and promote well-being across generations. Her research focuses on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) among pregnant and parenting former foster youth, aiming to mitigate the intergenerational cycle and transmission of maltreatment. The goal of this research is to reduce or alleviate the perpetuation of maltreatment across generations within this demographic. Specializing in clinical therapy, Gonzales provides tailored support to foster youth through trauma-informed care, community advocacy, and individual support. Drawing from various professional roles, including Child Welfare and Attendance Truancy Officer, Parent Project Instructor, and Life Coach specializing in probation and foster youth, in response to this commitment, Gonzales spearheaded the "Pathway to Empowerment Mentorship Program," a socially innovative initiative for pregnant and parenting former foster youth. The program aims to foster empowerment, enhance parenting skills, and prevent child maltreatment within this vulnerable demographic. Her goal is to drive generational healing and mitigate child maltreatment and family violence.



Charles Hansen, DSW-C, MBA

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Project Title: Building a Brighter Future: Community Symposium Against the Preschool-to-Prison Pipeline

Interests: Equitable Education; Dismantling the Preschool-to-Prison Pipeline

Charles Hansen is a distinguished non-profit executive leader with over two decades of experience driving organizational growth through strategic planning and transformative leadership. His illustrious career includes pivotal roles as the Executive Director of the Metro Youth YMCA in Detroit, Michigan, the CEO of the YMCA in Grand Island, Nebraska, and the Executive Director of the Salvation Army and Boys and Girls Club in Dallas, Texas. Charles' scholarly interests focus

on dismantling the preschool-to-prison pipeline, primarily examining the role implicit bias plays in perpetuating it. His Comprehensive Project delves into strategies for disrupting this pipeline by fostering equitable and inclusive educational environments that counteract implicit bias and exclusionary discipline practices. His innovation, Building a Brighter Future: Community Symposium Against the Preschool-to-Prison Pipeline, is a transformative, free symposium that addresses the root causes of this issue. By empowering the San Mateo County community of children, families, and educators, the symposium aims to achieve equity and inclusivity, ultimately breaking the cycle of the preschool-to-prison pipeline. Charles specializes in program management for community, recreational, and youth services, with a track record marked by remarkable fundraising results and participant and program growth. His leadership emphasizes ethical service and an authentic commitment to personal and professional excellence. Charles' professional goals include dismantling systemic inequities and driving transformative family enrichment programs that empower communities to thrive.



Froylana Heredia-Miller, DSW-C, MSW, LCSW

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Project Title: A Capacity Advancement Project: An Approach to Building Capacity and Supporting Organizational Effectiveness Using Social Work Practicums

Interests: Social Work Field Education, Organizational Effectiveness

Froylana Heredia-Miller is an Associate Professor and the Director of MSW Field Education at California Baptist University. She is a member of several boards and councils and has served as a faculty member and as the Director of Field Education for both Loma Linda University and Azusa Pacific University.

Her career experiences encompass the coordination of mental health stipend programs, coordination of graduate social work dual-degree programs in criminal justice and gerontology, program directorship for domestic violence treatment programs, medical social work, international social work practice, community behavioral health, and graduate field education. Froylana has traveled to several countries to train and provide clinical support to individuals and communities impacted by traumatic events. Froylana's current research focus includes the areas of capacity advancement and organizational effectiveness of community-based social service providers. Her research and practice focus on the provision of technical assistance and training to community partner agencies to increase their capacity to provide effective social work services to their clients through intern training programs. Consultative guidance and support are administered to assist agencies in strengthening their organizational infrastructure. This involves collaborating on policy development and aiding in the establishment of essential frameworks to optimize service delivery mechanisms.



Audrey Mae Hernandez, DSW-C, MSW, ASW

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Project Title: Path to Inafa' Maolek: Modern-day Colonialism's Impact on Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (NHPI) College Students

Interests: Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (NHPI) and Higher Education

Audrey Mae (she/her) brings a dynamic blend of passion, expertise, and lived experience as a dedicated professional within the nonprofit, higher education, and mental health space. She earned her AS and BS in Health Science from Azusa Pacific University. Furthermore, she earned her Master of Social Work degree from California Baptist University, receiving the Outstanding Graduate

Student Award in 2022. With a research focus on Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (NHPI) communities and higher education, Audrey Mae has spent over 13 years in higher education administration, advocating for culturally-centric student support services, equitable access, and increasing college completion rates for NHPI students. Currently, she serves as the Program Director for Island Grad, a nonprofit organization creating visibility for NHPI students through community, culture, and celebration. Additionally, she is an Associate Clinical Social Worker providing therapy services designed to meet the specific needs of the AA&NHPI and LGBTQ+ community. Furthermore, she is the Founder & CEO of Pasifika Success Collective LLC, a consulting company focusing on strategic planning for nonprofit organizations uplifting the NHPI community. The Island Grad mobile app is an innovation born from the outpouring of stakeholder feedback to stay connected and feel a sense of belonging after graduating. This app offers a culturally immersive experience to increase connectivity and a sense of belonging for Island Grad alumni. Audrey Mae's professional goals are to continue advance the well-being and success of NHPI individuals in higher education and beyond.



Michael Houlihan, DSW-C, MSW, ACSW

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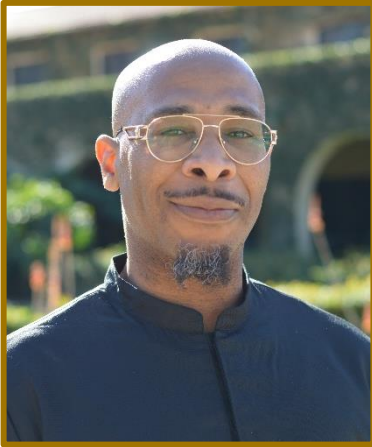
www.linkedin.com/in/michael-houlihan-dsw-c-msw-asw-79a64b1a9/

Project Title: Keys to Aging Out of Foster Care: An innovative project to incorporate driver's education and training in Independent Living Programs for former Foster Youth within Riverside County

Interests: Child Welfare, Transitional Services for Foster Youth

Michael is an Eagle Scout with over a decade of personal and professional experience working with at-risk youth with mental health and behavioral difficulties. Michael is a native of the Inland Empire, graduating with a double major A.A. in Sociology and Social Behavioral Studies from Riverside

Community College in June 2014 and a double major B.A. in Developmental Psychology and Sociology of Crime from California State University, Fullerton, in June 2017. In May 2021, Michael then earned a Master of Social Work degree from California Baptist University. Michael has a passion for working with Foster Youth; he has held many positions in the social service and mental health fields, including working with both residential and non-residential populations. Michael has worked as a Clinician providing school-based mental health therapy within the San Bernardino Unified School District and now facilitates Child and Family Team Meetings for San Bernardino County Department of Children and Family Services. His personal and professional experience allows him to gain a unique perspective when working with his clients, seeing the totality of their lives and the barriers that may hinder their true potential. His professional emphasis continues to focus on expanding transitional services for Foster Youth as they exit out of care and shift into adulthood.



Daniel Lawrence, DSW-C, MA

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Project Title: Freedom Freshman

Interests: College graduation for Black men

Daniel Lawrence holds both a BA in Psychology with an emphasis on Cultural Studies and an MA in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from California State University, Northridge. Daniel's research explores educational equity, particularly the collegiate experiences and outcomes for Black men. His key focus areas include mentorship and college graduation rates for Black men. Daniel spent seven years as a K-12 educator. He went on to be the Assistant Director for Multicultural and International Student Services. During

his tenure at California Lutheran University, he co-founded the Black Male Initiative, which included a mentorship and summer bridge program to support first-year Black male students in navigating and utilizing university resources effectively. Daniel is a social worker, helping individuals with housing insecurities secure safe living spaces while promoting access to essential mental and medical health services. He founded Freedom Freshman LLC, a mentorship program to increase college graduation rates among Black men. This program is designed to enhance their overall feeling of support, help them navigate on-campus resources, and provide them with vocational guidance. Daniel plans to use his experiences as a first-generation college student with learning disabilities from a low-income background to inspire and mentor others. Daniel Lawrence is a driven educator and social worker whose work is focused on addressing immediate disparities and initiating long-term improvements in how educational and social support systems accommodate and uplift Black men and other marginalized groups.



Stacey Lawson, DSW-C, MSW, LCSW

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Project Title: Deepening Self-Development: A Collaborative Model Incorporating Nature-Based and Peer-Led Learning in Social Work Education for Latiné Undergraduate Youth

Interests: Mental health, Higher education, and Minority College Youth

Stacey Lawson has a decade-long background in mental health, including child welfare and higher education. Lawson currently holds the position of Program Director for the Department of Social Work at Whittier College. Her educational background includes a Master of Social Work from California State University, Los Angeles, and a Bachelor of Science in Human Services

from California State University, Fullerton. She is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with specialized training in Nature-Informed Therapy (NIT). Her research is particularly focused on addressing stigmas and inequalities affecting Latiné minority college youth. Lawson integrates evidence-based interventions to support students and faculty alike. Her doctoral research includes developing an experiential upper-division social work elective course that deepens self-development through nature-based and peer-led learning approaches created to address the mental health concerns of racial/ethnic minority college students. This course focuses on deepening self-development as bicultural social workers, knowledge of Latiné cultures, and teaching social work majors as clinicians through culturally adapted nature-based and evidence-based micro and macro perspectives. Lawson's professional goals include curriculum development and implementation and further research on educational initiatives for minority students.



Shamica Lewis, DSW-C, MSW, LMSW, U/S

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www.linkedin.com/in/shamica-lewis-dsw-c-lmsw-msw-u-s-5962ba20a/

Project Title: Barriers to Hospice Care for African Americans

Interests: Aging Care, Hospice, End-of-Life, Palliative Care, Geriatrics, Education, Social Support

Ms. Shamica Lewis has committed the past nine years of her career to walking with families and clients throughout their end-of-life journey. Shamica provides education on the stages of grief and loss and gives support through the final transition process. She is a Licensed Master's Social Worker and current Doctor of Social Work - Candidate with research focused on closing

the barriers to hospice care for African Americans in the community. Ms. Shamica Lewis is a professional who provides guidance and support to hospice organizations, healthcare providers, and individuals seeking to understand and implement end-of-life care services. She knows the regulations, best practices, and strategies for delivering quality hospice care. Shamica can offer services such as training, program development, clinical guidance, policy review, accreditation preparation, and support with compliance and documentation. Shamica's goal is to ensure that hospice organizations and their staff are equipped to provide compassionate and effective care to patients and their families during the end-of-life journey.



Edonna McBride, DSW-C, MPA

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Project Title: Cultivate Life: Empowering Tomorrow- Advanced Care Planning for African Americans

Interests: Advanced care planning, African Americans, Church-based interventions

Edonna is a dedicated researcher and advocate specializing in the field of Advance Care Planning (ACP) with a particular focus on increasing the completion and utilization rates of ACP among African Americans. Her work is driven by a deep passion for end-of-life planning, informed by both personal experiences and a clear recognition of the urgent need to educate and

empower the African American community about healthcare autonomy. Her expertise spans various areas within social services, including community outreach, patient advocacy, and public health education. These experiences have provided her with unique insights into the systemic issues that contribute to healthcare disparities and have fueled her commitment to effecting meaningful change. Edonna's research aims to dismantle the stigma surrounding end-of-life planning in the African American community by providing culturally sensitive education and resources. She collaborates with community organizations and healthcare providers to develop strategies that promote ACP awareness and accessibility. Through workshops, seminars, and outreach programs, she works tirelessly to ensure that African Americans are informed, prepared, and empowered to make decisions that reflect their values and wishes. Edonna's professional mission is clear: to transform the landscape of healthcare decision-making for African Americans by promoting the importance of Advance Care Planning and ensuring that every individual has the tools and support needed to make informed, autonomous healthcare choices.



Kenesha Beatrice Mitchell, DSW-C, AMFT, APCC

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Project Title: Best Practice for Helping Military Widows Experiencing Grief and Isolation

Interests: litary Widows and Mental Health and Grief

Kenesha Mitchell brings 12 years of experience to her roles in public safety and mental health. She holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from California State University, San Bernardino, and a master's in counseling psychology from California Baptist University. Ms. Mitchell has dedicated her career to supporting individuals grappling with trauma and grief. Initially working as an emergency dispatcher, she now serves as a mental health clinician, specializing in trauma and grief counseling. Ms. Mitchell's research is focused on establishing best practices for supporting military widows dealing with grief and loss caused by the unexpected passing of their spouse. Her objective is to equip mental health clinicians with the tools to provide effective support to military widows experiencing such grief through her consultancy, Bridging the Gap. Mental health professionals will receive comprehensive training via her manual and facilitator's guide, titled "Supporting Military Widows: A Clinician's Guide." Ms. Mitchell's personal journey as a military widow, having lost her husband in 2016, underscores her commitment. She encountered challenges in finding therapists who could fully comprehend the depth of her trauma, which inspired her to address the training gaps among clinicians working with military widows. Ms. Mitchell's professional ambitions are centered around developing a training series specifically tailored for clinicians to specialize in assisting military widows with their unique grief experiences. Furthermore, Ms. Mitchell is actively engaged in collaborating with Survivor Outreach Coordinators across various military installations to enhance awareness of mental health issues. She is also committed to improving training in grief and loss to ensure mental health professionals are well-equipped to handle these delicate situations.



Vivian Mitchell, DSW-C, MSW, ACSW

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Project Title: An African American Workshop: "It Still Takes A Village"

Interests: Mental Health Disparities, Justice, Severe/Persistent Mental Illness

Vivian is a doctoral candidate at California Baptist University, holding a master's degree in social work from the University of Southern California and a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Indiana Wesleyan University. Her research focuses on uncovering disparities in mental health care for African Americans. She has had the pleasure of experiencing a twenty-seven-year career as a Law Enforcement Officer and now enjoys working as a psychiatric social worker. She has created a culturally attuned workshop curriculum to support the mental health recovery journey of African American mental health consumers and their loving families. She serves individuals, families, educational groups, and organizations. Her overarching goal is to leverage evidence-based techniques, personalized strategies, and compassionate support to empower clients to unlock their full potential and learn to live more fulfilling, balanced lives. Vivian's professional goal is to become a professor at an institution of higher education.



Laura Sainz Pfladderer, DSW-C, MSW, LCSW, MAC, BCD

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Project Title: Commander's Course – Honest Conversations to Combat Mental Health for Military Service Members

Interests: Military Mental Health/Social Work, Mental Health Policy, Families and Children, Trauma evidenced-based Interventions

Laura Pfladderer's focus of research is mental health stigma with an emphasis on the effects of stigma on military mental health. Laura has been serving as a military LCSW for over a decade. She is currently a Lieutenant Colonel serving as the Chief of Behavioral Health at March Air Reserve Base and the Mental Health Consultant leading the Air National Guard's Clinical Social Workers and Psychologists. Laura's educational background includes a Bachelor of Psychology from the University of California at San Diego and a Master of Social Work from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Laura's passion for caring for those who serve our country continues to ignite her desire to improve policies and programs to combat mental health stigma and encourage service members to engage in the mental health prevention and treatment they deserve. In addition to contributing to policy writing of mental health programs in the military, she creates educational evidence-based presentations and training and provides prevention and treatment to ensure service members are mentally fit to deploy at a moment's notice. In addition, she also supervises and provides consultation to Directors of Psychological Health and Commanders throughout the Air National Guard. Laura's unfaltering dedication to the Lord and our Nation propels her to continue researching, advocating, educating, and treating our service members and surrounding communities to combat Mental Health Stigma.



Juan Sandoval, DSW-C, MDiv

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Project Title: Spirit-Led S-LED/Guiados por el Espiritu

Interests: Substance Use, Hispanic families

Rev. Juan Sandoval is passionate about mental health interventions as his congregation is in high demand of psychoeducation and spiritual support. Rev. Sandoval is a Roman Catholic priest working and ministering for the Diocese of San Bernardino. Currently, Rev. Sandoval is serving at Christopher Catholic Parish in Moreno Valley. He also served for a year at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church in Indio and St Peter and St Paul Catholic Church in Alta Loma for four years. He holds a Master of Divinity and a Master of Arts from St John's Seminary in Camarillo, CA. He was ordained as a priest on May 20, 2017. As many cannabis dispensaries started to open in the area of Moreno Valley, Rev. Sandoval focused his research on the effects of substance use among Hispanic families. He launched a program to support Hispanic families struggling with substance use: Spirit-Led (S-LED)/Guiados por el Espíritu. His ministry encompasses support and supervision of the pastoral care and well-being of the faithful, especially the Hispanic community. His professional expertise includes spiritual support, preaching, teaching, pastoral counseling, family support, grief support, spiritual direction, leadership support, celebration of sacraments, etc. As a facilitator offering resources to marginalized individuals and families, Rev. Sandoval has the goal to expand his program Spirit-Led (S-LED)/Guiados por el Espíritu to other churches and congregations.



Patrice D. Scott, DSW-C, MA, LMFT, PPSC

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Project Title: Harmony and Hope event: Empowering BIPOC Adolescents and Families through Music, Mental Health, and Faith

Interests: Mental health disparities in BIPOC communities, BIPOC adolescents, school-based mental health programs, culturally tailored interventions

Patrice Scott, a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist with 15 years of experience, is dedicated to serving diverse populations, including at-risk youth and students from various backgrounds. As an African American therapist, she prioritizes addressing mental health disparities within Black, Indigenous, and

People of Color (BIPOC) communities. In 2016, Ms. Scott launched a school-based mental health program in Azusa, California, aiming to embed therapists in every district school. This initiative provided vital support to students and families by assembling a comprehensive team of therapists, case managers, parent partners, and therapeutic behavioral specialists (TBS). As part of her commitment to innovation, Ms. Scott established the "Harmony and Hope event: Empowering BIPOC Adolescents and Families through Music, Mental Health, and Faith." This initiative integrated faith-based practices, music, and mental health education to engage BIPOC adolescents, families, and educators. The event aimed to foster resilience and well-being among BIPOC adolescents, showcasing Ms. Scott's dedication to addressing mental health disparities within these communities. Her passion for supporting underserved populations led her to establish Bella Vee Wellness, promoting mental health awareness and empowerment among BIPOC individuals. Through Bella Vee Wellness, Ms. Scott plans to provide holistic wellness solutions tailored for BIPOC individuals, including training programs for educators and support staff to enhance their ability to address mental health needs in educational settings.



Jacob Robert Sermeno, DSW-C, LCSW

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Project Title: Down the Road Care: A Discharge Expansion Program

Interests: Severely Mentally Ill, Recidivism, Jails and corrections, Older Adult Care

Jacob's research focuses on reducing the recidivism rates of persons held in jails with Severe Mental Illness (SMI). Jacob is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with ten years of experience working with individuals with chronic mental health concerns, cognitive deficits, and aging concerns. Jacob began his professional career with a bachelor's in social work serving seniors as a city-based senior center case manager. With a Master's in Social Work, he specialized in end-of-life care, working in nursing homes and working within hospice care. After being recruited by Canyon Ridge Hospital to develop and sustain their Geriatric Psychiatric program, he gained additional experience working with clients of all ages experiencing chronic mental health concerns. Currently, he works in the field of corrections as a Clinical Supervisor with a passion for individuals with severe mental health concerns as well as the aging population, working within the jail's specialty SMI housing units. Jacob started working with corrections in 2020 and has worked to develop San Bernardino County jail's mental health treatment and discharge planning program to provide individuals with SMI greater access to resources when returning to the community. His goal is to pursue a career in education to guide others on how to apply evidence-based practices when interacting with SMI, cognitive impairments, or elderly individuals. He also strives to assist clients on their path towards higher functioning and fulfillment of their goals.



Thomasina Mosley Sisay, DSW-C, MA, LMFT

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Project Title: Increasing Services and Supports for Single Mothers: A Call to Action

Interests: Children and Families

Thomasina (Tina) has worked in Child Welfare for over 25 years. She is an administrator for the Department of Children and Family Services in Los Angeles County. Over her tenure with the department, she was a line supervisor and a frontline social worker. In addition to holding a Marriage and Family Therapist license, Thomasina (Tina) has a Master's degree in Clinical Psychology and a Bachelor's Degree in Communication from Azusa Pacific University. Thomasina is passionate about preventing child abuse and neglect before they start. She believes families need more preventative services rather than lengthy investigations and mandates from child welfare agencies. In her current role as an administrator, Thomasina leads a team of supervisors and social workers, and she encourages her staff to put the needs of the families ahead of every decision made. Thomasina's (Tina's) research focuses on the mental health of single mothers and how the church can support these often vulnerable families. Thomasina's innovation is rooted in the prevention of child abuse and neglect for single-mother households. She has designed a six-week parenting coaching program to be housed in churches. The coaching program is grounded in the evidenced-based Protective Factors framework. In the future, Thomasina plans to consult large welfare and non-profit agencies in prevention work.



Doctor of Social Work