

2023

Doctor of Social Work Graduates

California Baptist University
Riverside, CA
www.calbaptist.edu/DSW



Doctor of Social Work

Message from the Director

Dear Colleague,

The Doctor of Social Work program at California Baptist University is excited to share with you the graduates of the class of 2023. Each of these graduates 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 Social Work Grand Challenges; and their innovative projects address issues such as homelessness, mental illness, immigration, incarceration, and child abuse. 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 graduates are expected to receive their Doctor of Social Work degree in August 2023. 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

Rosie Cook-Askins

Alicia Millard

Morgan Jean Craig Belknap

Yakiciwey Mitchell

Keri Gomez

Hope Palacio

Jacqueline Gonzales

Jaime Oswaldo Pineda

Monika Ortega Gonzalez

Talyah Polee

Regina D. Goree

Hongmei Qu

Rebecca A. Irwin

Rocio Garcia Reyes

Benny G. Jauregui

Beatriz Rodriguez

Renita Lewis

Kuini Tuaau

Jacquelyn R. McDonald

Juan Villa

Jerri Middleton

Selena Villa

Taide Mier-Vera

Mikaela Zuniga



Rosie Cook-Askins, DSW-C, MSW, ASW

rosie.cookaskins@calbaptist.edu

Project Title: The Christ-Centered Mental Health Training and Development Handbook

Interests: Mental Health within African American Faith-Based Communities

Rosie Cook-Askins, is a pre-licensed, Supervising Social Services Practitioner at Children and Family Services in the County of San Bernardino. She supervises a team of case-carrying social workers who protect at-risk children, preserve, and strengthen their families, and develop alternative family settings if reunification is impossible. As a social worker, she has over 16 years of work experience in government settings in the Transitional Assistance Department as an Eligibility Worker I/II and Employment Services Specialist, providing resources to low-income families in diverse communities and job training for parents who received government funding to obtain employment. She worked in the Department of Behavioral Health providing mental health services for youth in the juvenile justice system. Furthermore, she is a licensed Evangelist Missionary and Evangelism President in the Church of God in Christ, and her mission is to empower people to achieve their next level of excellence through God's love and social work innovation. Her scholarly pursuits include publishing her research, authoring books, training, and speaking at conferences to raise awareness about mental health and reducing stigma. Additionally, because teaching is her passion, her goal is to teach as a social work professor at the undergraduate and graduate levels. As an entrepreneur, she intends to expand her consultancy business as a mental health strategist and aspires to work as a clinical therapist in private practice.



Morgan Jean Craig Belknap, DSW-C, LMFT

www.HealingNotHealed.com

Project Title: Backing The Blue: A Mental Health and Wellness Retreat

Interests: The Mental Health of Law Enforcement Officers

Morgan Jean Craig Belknap has a heart for trauma. She is a survivor of the Las Vegas Route 91 Mass Shooting which led her life to follow a journey where healing trauma is her passion. Following the shooting, she embarked on her own healing journey and realized how many other people in the world deal with trauma. She knew God's plan for her was to help others with their healing journey. She went on to complete a Bachelor's in Psychology, then a Master's in Counseling Psychology, and now, a Doctorate in Social Work.

After seeing the individuals that ran towards the chaos during the night of the shooting, she knew that first responders would always have a special place in her heart. Her research is focused on interventions to improve the mental health of law enforcement officers.

She focuses her practice on encouraging, supporting, and challenging clients to climb the mountain and then to go on and own their stories of how they climbed that mountain. She is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist with thousands of client hours. She has facilitated groups for other survivors of Route 91. She is in the early stages of launching her own branded business, Healing Not Healed. Healing Not Healed is a reminder for individuals that healing is not a box to check or an appointment to make, it is a lifelong journey that can be beautiful and flourishing with God's grace.



Keri Gomez, DSW-C, LCSW, RPT-S
drkerigomezlcsw@gmail.com

Project Title: Training Model to Improve Management of Behaviors in Preschool Autistic Students

Interests: Children, Autism, Education

Keri's research focus includes the area of autism, preschool-aged children and education. She has worked within the mental health field for eighteen years and continues to provide direct practice to children. Her passion is advocating for children and fostering a safe and supportive environment where children can develop and thrive. Currently, she works at Desert Mountain Children's Center (DMCC) with San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools. She has worked there since September 2009. While at DMCC, she has been trained as a PEERS practitioner working with teens with autism and their families. She has been able to provide multiple trainings on autism, including therapeutic interventions to local and area school districts. Her primary role as supervisor of a transdisciplinary team is similar to her role as a clinician; and she strives to support the staff of DMCC so they can develop their clinical skills and thrive in the workplace. Her goal is to continue working within her area of focus and expand the promotion of evidenced-based practices for children with disabilities through her innovative training model. As a field supervisor for graduate student interns, a future goal is to pursue a career in teaching, to support and educate future clinicians on this very important population.



Jacqueline Renee Gonzales, DSW-C, MSW
jgonzales1308@yahoo.com

Project Title: My Voice, My Story

Interests: Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems

Ms. Gonzales completed both her Master of Social Work (MSW) and Doctor of Social Work (DSW) degrees at California Baptist University (CBU). She has a passion for promoting the well-being of children and families. Ms. Gonzales's professional experiences include child welfare social work, forensic social work, individual and group psychotherapy, community outreach, international social work (Malawi, Africa), and much more. She has excelled in culturally diverse, multi-disciplinary, and fast-paced environments. Ms. Gonzales is able to manage multiple tasks simultaneously, as well as working well in teams and independently. In addition, she has experience in public speaking. Ms. Gonzales was selected to present at the American Society of Criminology Conference of 2014, 2016, and 2017. During her time at CBU, Ms. Gonzales's project was a pilot documentary that broadcasted the voices of individuals that were involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, known as the dual-status population. She plans to continue working with the dual-status population by sharing their experiences, hoping to innovate and/or develop programs, policies, or laws to better serve this marginalized population.



Monika Ortega Gonzalez, DSW-C, AMFT

Monika.Gonzalez@calbaptist.edu

Project Title: Platicas Entre Comadres con Pan y Cafecito

Interests: Mental Health for Undocumented Latino Immigrants

Monika Ortega Gonzalez has earned a Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology (Marriage and Family Therapy), and a Bachelor's in Sociology. She is a Mental Health Therapist for Black, Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) - children, youth, families, individuals, and couples. While she takes pride in serving this community, her most challenging but rewarding work has been providing mental health services to undocumented Latino immigrants.

Monika Ortega Gonzalez attributes her professional and personal experiences as the inspiration behind her project. During her doctoral journey at California Baptist University, she created a workshop to help promote mental health awareness, explore the effects of stigma, and demystify the needs of undocumented Latino immigrants. This workshop allowed her to engage the community and capture the interest of reputable organizations such as Catholic Charities of San Bernardino/Riverside and Santa Ana.

Monika Ortega Gonzalez believes God has created everyone with an intention and a purpose, and hers is to continue to serve, advocate, and support BIPOC and immigrant communities.



Regina D. Goree, DSW-C, MSW

ReginaD.Goree@calbaptist.edu

Project Title: What Does the Research Say about Anti-Racist Policies, Practices, and Key Concepts?

Interests: Anti-Racism and Equity

Since receiving her MSW several years ago, Regina Goree returned to pursue a doctorate in social work. She is a minister and the mother of two adult children. She is passionate about systems and creating equitable spaces in her sphere of influence. Intrigued by the anti-racist narrative and encouraged by the declarations of some large California counties declaring racism a health crisis, she is inspired to explore anti-racist policies and practices and to create an innovative strategy to promote equity. She is uniquely qualified to lead, guide, build, advise, and strategically inform the implementation of complex operational initiatives across systems and within large jurisdictions. Her experience includes special assignments at the Los Angeles County Executive Office. She has led or co-led Child Welfare implementation, Eliminating Racial Disparity and Disproportionality (ERDD). She is a sitting member of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Executive Anti-Racial Initiative. She appreciates that the anti-racist narrative promotes action and allows her to look through that lens as the current Administrator of the LA County Operated Shelter. As such, she strategically crafted the design for the operation, introduced an orientation to on-board staff anchoring reflection as an anti-racist strategy, and currently collaborates with partners with lived experience to mentor youth with significant trauma. These experiences qualify her as an executive leader and expert in the field.



Rebecca A. Irwin, DSW-C, MSW

Rebecca.Irwin@calbaptist.edu

Project Title: San Bernardino County Public Defender's Office Mental Health Diversion Program

Interests: Forensic Social Work

Rebecca Irwin graduated with her Master of Social Work degree with an emphasis in forensics and has conducted extensive research on the implementation, effectiveness, and benefits of mental health diversion programs. Rebecca has presented on issues such as stigma associated with mental illness, loss and grief, and the effects of community service on mood and interpersonal orientation. Rebecca is currently a Supervising Social Service Practitioner for the San Bernardino County Public Defender's Office. She has worked for the Public Defender's Office for ten years and has had the pleasure of supervising the Social Service Practitioner Unit. During her employment with the San Bernardino County Public Defender's Office, she has had the opportunity to create numerous truancy programs throughout San Bernardino County. She created the C.U.T.E (Children United Through Empowerment) program, which provides support to children of incarcerated parents. Rebecca is also a certified mitigation specialist and has conducted over 250 mitigation reports, and has facilitated trainings addressing brain development, sex trafficking, and mitigation best practices. Additionally, Rebecca has written numerous memorandums of agreement with various agencies for the purpose of developing a successful social work internship program at the San Bernardino Public Defender's Office.



Benny G. Jauregui, DSW-C, MPA

benny.jauregui@calbaptist.edu

Project Title: Social Determinants of Health Assessment and Connection Tool (SDOH-ACT)

Interests: Social Determinants of Health

Ben Jauregui is the Manager of the Behavioral Health and Care Management Support Services Team at Inland Empire Health Plan. His multidisciplinary team includes Social Workers, Nurses, Community and Housing Navigators, Behavioral Health Specialists, and County Liaisons.

Ben's interest in social justice led him to unite and mobilize several organizations including the Inland Empire Disabilities Collaborative and the Inland Empire Aging and Disability Coalition. He was also appointed to serve on several councils, boards, and commissions. He was appointed by California Governor Schwarzenegger and Governor Brown to serve on the California State Independent Living Council. He was appointed by Mayor Loveridge of the City of Riverside to the Model Deaf Community. Riverside County Board of Supervisor Tavaglione appointed him to serve on the In-Home Support Services Advisory Committee; and Ben was most recently appointed by San Bernardino County Board of Supervisor Hagman to the Senior Affairs Commission. His interest and research are focused on Social Determinants of Health, Health Equity, Ending Homelessness, Age-Friendly Health Systems, and Reframing Aging. His professional experience includes advocating for social justice with older adults and people with disabilities, program development, integration of medical and behavioral health services, homeless services, community engagement, and coalition building.



Renita Denise Lewis, DSW-C

lewisree@gmail.com

Project Title: Reducing Overrepresentation of Black Families in Child Welfare: A Look at the Front Door of Child Protective Services

Interests: Child Welfare

Renita Lewis brings 26 years of dedicated experience to positively impacting the lives of children and families in child welfare. Currently serving in the role of a Deputy Director within Child Protective Services, Renita leads multiple teams in ensuring the safety and well-being of children and families. Her career has been focused on identifying and addressing racial disproportionality and disparities in child welfare, specifically toward children and families of color. Throughout her career, Renita has actively participated in implementation efforts that prioritize family support and integration of Black children and families emphasizing the importance of maintaining family unity rather than resorting to family separation. As part of her doctoral studies, she has conducted research on racial inequities at the front door of child welfare, specifically examining the intake and referral process. Renita endeavors to promote promising practices that strengthen families and foster community partnerships that establish ongoing engagement. With an unwavering commitment to social justice and equity, Renita strives to drive change through strong advocacy, policy reform, and practice improvements. She is dedicated to infusing a racial equity lens into a child welfare system that required adjustment to better serve African American children and families.



Jacquelyn R. McDonald, DSW-C, AMFT, APCC

Jacquelyn.McDonald@calbaptist.edu

Project Title: Was Dad Invited Campaign

Interests: Father Inclusion and Families

Jacquelyn earned a master's degree in counseling psychology and professional clinical counseling in 2020 from California Baptist University. With a focus on meeting mental health needs while in an educational setting, Jacquelyn has worked with children and families in school-based settings within the Inland Empire. She works with both general education and special education populations while also facilitating parent empowerment groups and connecting families to useful resources. The focus of her current academic research and projects is on raising father inclusion and parental equity awareness through various social systems. This is done by training staff to be more father-inclusive, emphasizing the value of co-parenting, educating people about disabilities, and recognizing how mental health issues can affect families. Jacquelyn uses a family systems perspective to evaluate community, mental health providers, and educators, realizing that children's health and lifespan depend on the functioning of their families. Her current professional objectives include continuing to work on her non-profit family resource and referral center (Fathers Invited), developing social-emotional learning resources for families, speaking at family conferences on the value of whole family care, and teaching in higher education. All families should prosper and experience the richness of life for which they were intended, according to Jacquelyn's vision.



Jerri Middleton, DSW-C, MSW, LCSW

Jerri@MiddletonLCSW.com <https://embarkpsychotherapy.clientsecure.me/>

Project Title: Transdisciplinary Symposium: Trauma-Informed Support for Survivors of Sexual Violence

Interests: Sexual Trauma, Trauma-Informed Principles, Transdisciplinary Approaches

Jerri Middleton has been practicing social work for 15 years and is passionate about serving with a trauma-informed lens while also empowering organizations to utilize this framework. Jerri Middleton is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker for the state of California and the state of Alabama and currently works in private practice serving survivors of sexual violence in individual and group psychotherapy services. She graduated with a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) from Texas Tech University, and a Master of Social Work (MSW) from the University of Alabama. Jerri has experience working in various settings in the field of social work including a psychiatric and substance use hospital setting, child welfare, short-term treatment residential centers for children and teens, community social work for West Alabama, family services with Head Start/Early Head Start, and clinical social work at a college counseling center. Jerri Middleton is an Assistant Professor at California Baptist University in the Division of Social Work teaching in both the undergraduate (BSW) and graduate (MSW) programs. Her research focus is on trauma-informed transdisciplinary support for survivors of sexual violence. Jerri Middleton is a wife, mother of two, and avid lover of the outdoors.



Taide Mier-Vera, DSW-C, LCSW, PPSC

taide.mierv@outlook.com

Project Title: Sanando el Corazón

Interests: Hispanic Immigrants and Mental Health

Taide Mier-Vera is currently a Doctoral Candidate for the Doctor of Social Work Program at California Baptist University. Her research focuses on identifying barriers and factors that contribute to improving the mental health of the undocumented Hispanic community. Mrs. Mier-Vera is a psychiatric social worker with a Pupil Personnel Services Credential. She is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker committed to enhancing human well-being in disadvantaged communities in Los Angeles County, focusing on helping individuals improve their mental health. She was selected as an Interprofessional Minority Fellow with the American Psychological Association.

Upon graduation, Mrs. Mier-Vera plans to continue working with the Hispanic community. The goal is to provide education and interventions in both English and Spanish that will improve the community's mental health. Moreover, Mrs. Mier-Vera plans to use the skills and knowledge learned through the DSW to become a servant leader in the community.



Alicia Millard, DSW-C, MSW, LCSW

alicia_millardlcsw@outlook.com and
<https://olivecaretherapeuticservices.com>

Project Title: COMPASS

Interests: Mental Health, Substance Use, Trauma, Homelessness, Veterans

Mrs. Alicia Millard holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of California, Riverside, and a master's in social work from San Diego State University. She has worked in the social work field for over 20 years in many agencies and with different populations with a primary focus on mental health. Mrs. Millard is a licensed clinical social worker in California. She is an entrepreneur/business owner and a private mental health practitioner. Also, Mrs. Millard works full-time as a senior social worker with the Department of Veterans Health Administration in the Loma Linda, CA, homeless program. She is also a clinical supervisor and adjunct professor at UMASS Global. Her scholarly interests include substance use and mental health interventions for veterans experiencing homelessness. Her innovative project was to develop a screening tool to assess readiness during the initial stages of engaging with clients to identify risks, strengths of the client, and barriers to learning. Mrs. Millard's professional goals are to continue exploring new and innovative ways to work with veterans experiencing homelessness and provide education and consultation in evidence-based interventions for those experiencing mental health and substance use. Additionally, she desires to open and operate a non-profit agency that provides housing, services, resources, and a haven for those at home experiencing mental health challenges.



Yakiciwey E. Washington Mitchell, DSW-C, MSW

NationBuilder@EdifyingNations.com
EdifyingNations.com

Project Title: Implementing Race Equity Strategy Standards to Address the Overrepresentation of African Americans in Child Welfare

Interests: African American Overrepresentation in Child Welfare and Race Equity

Yakiciwey Mitchell develops and implements community-based social service programs through public/private partnerships. After 20 years as a child welfare administrator, Yakiciwey founded Edifying Nations Consulting, Inc. to transform child and family service systems. Mitchell has a strong belief in God and is passionate about improving outcomes for vulnerable children and families. She is committed to developing and promoting community and public/private partnerships to improve systems. Her mission is to build people up and help them to thrive. She received her Bachelor's degree in political science from UC Santa Barbara, a Master's degree in social welfare from UCLA, and is a Doctor of Social Work Candidate at California Baptist University. Her research is focused on using race equity to eliminate African American disproportionality in the child welfare system. She is an Assistant Professor in the CBU College of Behavioral and Social Sciences Division of Social Work.



Hope H. Palacio, DSW-C, MSW, MA, ASW

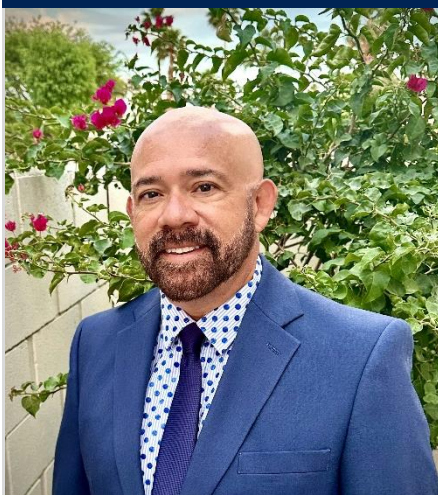
Hpalacio@hopeality.com

Hopeality.com

Project Title: Social Work Infusion Enhancement in Policing

Interests: Social Work Policing, Social Justice

Hope Palacio is the CEO of Hope-Ality Consulting, a researcher, facilitator, presenter, and social work professional. Hope’s research explores the impact of arrest and physical use of force against minorities when social workers are provided to those 911 calls that do not necessitate a police response. As a former California Law Enforcement Officer, Hope believes her dual lens perspective, coupled with her diverse experience in child protection, juvenile delinquency court, federally integrated drug court, and medical social work, provides the expertise needed to consult with police departments who are embedding social workers within their departments. Hope’s particular interest is working with marginalized populations and communities to aid individuals and families when navigating judicial systems and accessing mental health services, medical services, and other community resources. As a Christian Social Worker, Hope aims to utilize this same model to assist churches in creating social service ministries so they, too, can help communities navigate systems and to do so while sharing the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As a professional consultant, Hope collaborates with grassroots organizations and governmental leaders to create social justice change through community engagement and social innovation. Hope has presented at town halls, governmental and community meetings, and at the Hawaii International Summit. Hope believes in the Hope-Ality Effect, which simply means, “Intentionality makes Hope a Reality.”



Jaime Oswaldo Pineda, DSW-C, MSW

jopineda619@icloud.com

Project Title: Doin' My 30: Building Resilience for Body & Soul

Interests: Child Welfare

Jaime Pineda has worked in the child welfare field for the past 25 years and through his work has seen the struggles this population of social workers endure on a daily basis. This inspired his desire to work on staff development and his interest in helping staff and organizations with job satisfaction and improved performance. Both of these contribute to decreasing stress and burnout, as well as improving retention rates within child welfare agencies.



Talyah Polee, DSW-C, LMFT
talyahpolee@gmail.com

Project Title: 1555 Internal Racial Trauma Screening Tool

Interests: Racial Trauma

Talyah’s research is grounded in racial trauma among African Americans, with a focus on internalized racial trauma. Additionally, Talyah is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist who specializes in complex PTSD. Her professional clinical experience is rooted in various modalities of psychotherapy, including schema therapy, somatic therapy, and cognitive behavioral therapy. Talyah has served adults of color who are navigating intergenerational trauma, and attachment injuries in relationships. With her professional experience and extensive research in racial trauma, Talyah has developed an internal racial trauma screening tool to assist clinicians in providing resources for clients of color who experience internal racial trauma. In the future, Talyah plans to develop trainings for clinicians to broaden clinical lenses that will aid in identifying racial trauma within the treatment process.



Hongmei Qu, DSW-C, ASW, PPSC
hongmei.qu@calbaptist.edu
hongmeiqudsw.com

Project Title: Transforming Parent-Child Relationships: Culturally Adapted Transactional Analysis Curriculum for Positive Parenting Training for Chinese-Speaking Providers and Caregivers In San Francisco Chinatown

Interests: Social Inequalities in Mental Health; Chinese Immigrants; Neuroscience

As a social science researcher, Chinese-speaking behavioral clinician, author, and founder of Six Pandas Book LLC, her professional background and scholarly interests are driven by an unyielding passion for making a difference. Born in China in the 1970s, she is fluent in English, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Sichuanese, enabling her to connect with diverse populations. Her journey began with years of experience in community social work, women and children welfare, and community mental health services in China. She obtained three AAs, a BA in Asian Studies from UC Berkeley, and an MSW from San Jose State University. Her research interests span several important areas, including social inequalities in mental health, Chinese immigrants' access to mental health services, the intersection of neuroscience and mental health, community-based participatory research, social work grand challenges in the global context, and the impact of war and military experiences on mental health. Driven by a profound dedication to social work and armed with a diverse background, comprehensive education, and a tireless spirit, she is determined to leave a lasting impact on the field and the lives of those she serves.



Rocio Garcia Reyes, DSW-C, AMFT

safeharborcci@gmail.com

<https://safeharborcci.org/>

Project Title: Implementing CBU MFT trainees' program into the Safe Harbor Catholic Institute serving the Dioceses of San Bernardino

Interests: Catholic Hispanic Immigrant Mental Health

Rocio G. Reyes is an active parishioner and mental health professional with experience treating illnesses such as depression, anxiety, addiction, and suicide among the community members of the Catholic church. She has been a leader in the formal religious community for more than 30 years in different areas of San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and Riverside Counties at Catholic religious centers. Rocio has devoted her life to studying counseling psychology and received an associate degree in behavioral sciences from Norco and Riverside Community College, as well as her bachelor's degree from the University of Riverside (UCR), and a master's in counseling psychology from California Baptist University. Ms. Reyes founded a non-profit organization dedicated to tending the needs of the Catholic community and Hispanic immigrants. In 2017, guided by a personal spiritual director, Rocio took the challenge to create this non-profit organization based on Catholic values, named, Safe Harbor Catholic Counseling Institute. As President, she is currently working on developing this organization's structure by collaborating with the San Bernardino Diocese, the Los Angeles Diocese, and the Orange County Diocese. Safe Harbor and Rocio's mission statement is to alleviate suffering with mental health professional resources that can combine faith and psychological approaches.



Beatriz Rodriguez, DSW-C, MS, AMFT, APCC

b23rodriguez@gmail.com

Project Title: Colibri

Interests: Recruitment of Social Service Practitioners; Retention in the Children Services Division

For five years, Beatriz Rodriguez served as an investigating social service practitioner for the Department of Social Services, Children Services Division, serving at-risk families and assessing for risk and safety of children. She transitioned to the Department of Mental Health to serve as a clinical therapist. As a clinical therapist, Mrs. Rodriguez serves people with serious mental health diagnoses who have undergone repeated hospitalizations and are at risk of becoming unsheltered. Her objective as a clinical therapist is to educate the Latino community about the importance of seeking early mental health treatment for serious mental illness.

Mrs. Rodriguez holds a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and two Master's degrees, one in Professional Clinical Counseling and another in Marriage and Family Therapy. Her doctoral work focused on social service practitioner recruitment and retention within the Children Services Division. As a result, she developed a mentoring workshop, Colibri, a peer mentoring workshop for senior social services practitioners who want to mentor new employees. Her personal attributes include excellent communication abilities, as well as a strong work ethic, a positive outlook, and dependability. She welcomes the chance to grow and is ready to learn.



Kuini Tuaau, DSW-C, MSW

tuaau_kuini@breakthesilencekidz.com

www.breakthesilencekidz.com

Project Title: AUA NE'I PONA I VAO, A IA LIAINA I ALA: A Samoan Translated Training on Breaking the Silence Against Child Sexual Abuse

Interests: Child Welfare

Kuini Tuaau's research focuses on child sexual abuse in American Samoa. Her focus is primarily on how to break the silence around the social problem and increase disclosure of the abuse when it occurs. Her study will provide insight into this unsettling occurrence's prevalence, causes, and consequences to develop effective prevention and intervention techniques. Her interest in this profession derives from a great desire to safeguard and promote the well-being of children. She hopes to better understand the several elements that lead to child sexual abuse in American Samoa, such as cultural attitudes regarding gender and sexuality, social and economic inequality, and a lack of education and knowledge about the issue. This involves initiatives to raise awareness and education about the issue, enhance child protection systems, and offer survivors and their families adequate treatment and support. Her goal is, eventually, to return to American Samoa and help create solutions to prevent child sexual abuse. Her research is motivated by a strong commitment to social justice and a conviction in the potential of information to affect positive change in American Samoa. Her long-term goal is to work with all islands of the Pacific to bring awareness to the social problem and help create preventative solutions.



Juan Villa, DSW-C, MSW

juanl.villa@calbaptist.edu

Project Title: SOL Association: A Visionary Project in Support of the Educational Equity and Excellence of Newcomers in America

Interests: Migrant Studies, Educational Equity, Continuous Quality Improvement, Program Development

Juan Villa has worked in the field of health and human services since 2017. His educational background includes a Bachelor of Social Work and a Master of Social Work from California State University, Long Beach. Mr. Villa has worked in a variety of settings—including but not limited to K-12 educational institutions, forensic mental health, integrated health, inpatient psychiatric care, and hospital emergency care. The focus of his research includes the development of a non-profit organization that can help improve the educational landscape of newcomers enrolled in the American educational system. Mr. Villa's intimate knowledge, personal observations, skills, and practice with newcomers in the educational system reveal extensive awareness of the marginalized and underserved group of children. Mr. Villa is a researcher, scholar, and social work practitioner with the vision of advancing the equity, excellence, and community integration of newcomers across the nation. Mr. Villa's professional goals include program development and implementation, further research on migrant studies, and serving as a lecturer for the College of Health and Human Services at recruiting Universities.



Selena Villa, DSW-C, LCSW

Selena.bueno@calbaptist.edu

Individualempowerment.ts@gmail.com

Project Title: R.I.S.E. Mental Health Training for Elementary School Teachers

Interests: Childhood Mental Illness

Selena Villa is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in the state of California. She owns Individual Empowerment Therapy Services, a tele-based private practice that serves adults, veterans, and couples. She has also developed a mental health training curriculum, R.I.S.E. Mental Health Training, for elementary school teachers to empower them through education and skill building. Selena has over five years of experience working with children, families, and adults. She began her career as a community-based mental health therapist working in the prevention/early intervention and crisis stabilization programs, where she was able to work with children, teens, and families. She has worked at Loma Linda University Hospital as a medical social worker, providing services to adults with neuro-cognitive delays and their families. In addition, she offered field supervision to B.S.W. and M.S.W. students. She has also worked for a tele-based therapy company providing services to adults with moderate to severe mental illnesses. Currently, she works for a tele-based therapy company providing services to children and their families. Her expertise includes anxiety, depression, grief, stress, crisis management, prevention/early intervention, and trauma. She incorporates various therapeutic modalities, including C.B.T. and D.B.T. She has a heart and passion for helping others and advocates for prevention/early intervention mental health services, as she believes that the earlier one receives help, the better one's life outcome.



Mikaela Zuniga, DSW-C, LMFT

zunigamikaela@gmail.com

Project Title: Improving Provider Knowledge at Windsor CSU

Interests: Severe and Persistent Mental Illness

Mikaela Zuniga is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. In 2017, Mikaela earned her master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy with an emphasis in Latino Family Studies. During her time in school, Mikaela worked full time for a community mental health agency providing full-service partnership services as a service coordinator. Upon completion of her master's degree, Mikaela was promoted to a clinician position. After three years of experience supporting and serving individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and severe and persistent mental illness, and obtaining licensure, she was promoted to a Program Manager working side by side with the County of San Bernardino to enroll 243 participants into Full-Service Partnership services. With her knowledge and expertise of the Psychosocial Recovery Model, Harm Reduction, Housing First, and the multidisciplinary work of the Assertive Community Treatment Model, Mikaela challenged herself to work at a Crisis Stabilization Unit as a Licensed Team Lead. After one year, Mikaela was promoted to Clinical Director. Mikaela's passions and scholarly interests include identifying and breaking down barriers to access mental health care for those who experience severe mental health challenges. Her life's purpose is to teach others that mental illness does not mean an end of life, it means living life with a new purpose. Mikaela created a training manual to improve provider knowledge at crisis stabilization units and is working with an agency to pilot this innovation.



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