

# CULTURAL COMPETENCE NEWSLETTER



# A PATH WELL CHOSEN

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# ABOUT NATIONAL PREVENTION WEEK

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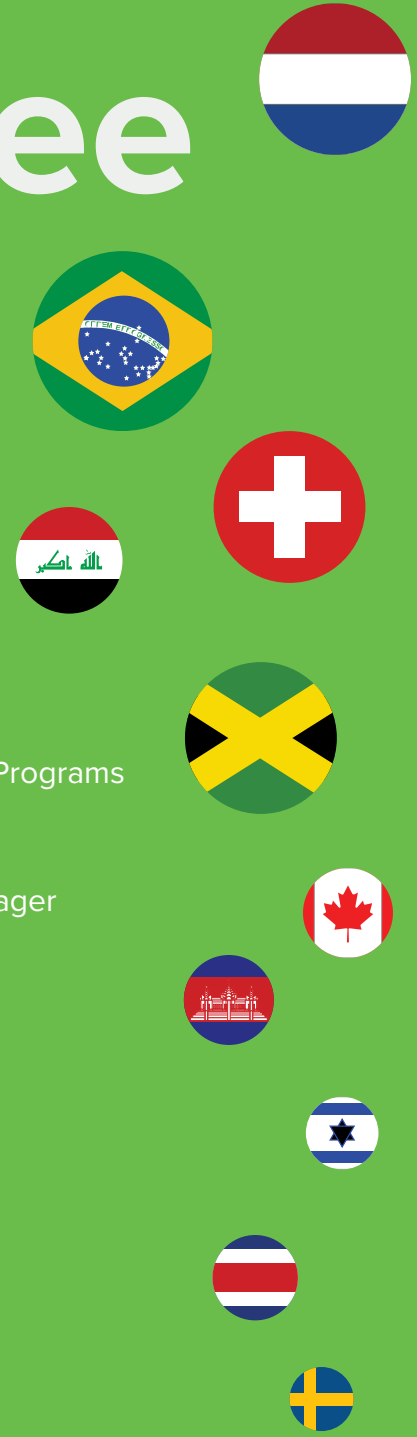
# Cultural

# Competence

# Committee

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- Bonita Thomas**, PAAT Member, Peer Advisory and Advocate Team
- Laura Gabriella Zarate**, Health Agency Secretary



A photograph of a person's legs and feet walking on a large, weathered log in a forest. The person is wearing blue pants and white sneakers. The ground is covered in fallen leaves and ferns. The background is a soft-focus forest scene.

# A PATH WELL CHOSEN

COMPILED BY BETHANY BRAY

**“Regardless of how they get here, however, they all have one thing in common: a deeply felt calling to help others.”**

Professional counselors find their way into the profession in a multitude of ways. Some individuals know it is their calling even in their undergraduate years. Others enter the counseling profession after first having had a career in another field or returning to the workforce after raising children. Still others are inspired to pursue training as counselors at the suggestion of a mentor or after personally encountering the good work of a professional practitioner, either in their own life or in the lives of friends or family members.

Regardless of how they get here, however, they all have one thing in common: a deeply felt calling to help others.

For this month’s cover story, Counseling Today asked American Counseling Association members from across the country to share — in their own words — their personal stories of how and why they entered the profession and the insights they have gained along the way.

Like many of my fellow counselors, I took a rather circuitous route to the field. Prior to becoming a licensed professional counselor (LPC), I spent 21 years as a fighter pilot in the United States Navy and Naval Reserve and 10 years flying for United Airlines. I had a great contract with the airline, enjoyed the lifestyle and loved getting to turn and burn in a Navy jet on the weekends. I never thought I'd want to be anything else but a pilot.

On the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, I took off from Hartford, Connecticut, as the first officer aboard a United 737 [aircraft]. As we flew the departure through beautiful clear skies over Manhattan, I found myself caught in the middle of an event that would change all our lives forever.

I spent most of the next six years on active duty, recalled three times, including one 18-month mobilization in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Shortly after coming home from Iraq, my marriage ended, and I found myself a single father caring for three young kids struggling with the legacy of war and divorce. Caught in the grip of a deep depression, I wasn't much of a father. I definitely wasn't the strong, stable one they needed.

When it finally became obvious we needed help, I reached out for counseling. I saw a counselor doing traditional talk therapy, and my kids started working with a counselor doing equine therapy. For me, it helped to talk with someone, but I could never get over the fact [that] my counselor had no experience with or knowledge of the military. This hang-up was all mine, but it kept me from fully investing in the process, and I eventually quit going.

I probably would never have gone back to counseling, let alone become a counselor myself, had it not been for the experience my kids had with the horses. This unique therapy became a transformational experience for all of us. The kids developed a more realistic understanding of themselves and the world, rather than one overly based on fear and mistrust. The horses acted as catalysts for learning authenticity, respect, empathy and self-confidence.

They showed my kids [that] they didn't need to fear or avoid uncomfortable feelings. Through the bonds they formed with their horses, my kids learned they were valuable and worthy of love. Perhaps most importantly, they learned to accept that they weren't to blame for everything that had happened in the preceding few years, but feeling sad because of it was OK. Those few months proved to be a pivot point for the kids. They are now young adults, each embracing life with all its ups and downs and excited for what the future holds.

Having a front-row seat to my children's amazing transformation transformed me. I became fascinated by how counseling could change lives — and especially how horses seemed the perfect partners in this journey. I left United and never looked back. Over the next few years, I earned my master's in counseling, reentered personal counseling and overcame my depression. Eventually, I met a wonderful woman (a fellow Navy veteran) and married again.

Today, I'm the clinical director at Equest in Dallas. I work with a team of counselors, social workers and equine specialists to provide equine-facilitated counseling to veterans and military families. Every day I'm reminded of just how much counseling can help — and how, for so many folks, horses are the best counselors of all.

**—Jeff Hensley, LPC and clinical director at Equest, a nonprofit equine therapy organization in North Texas**

I initially was drawn to education and taught as an assistant middle school teacher. There I developed an emotional intelligence curriculum but felt limited by the bureaucracy and standards. I got a job working as field staff in a wilderness therapy program, where I got incredible exposure and practice working in a clinical realm in a unique setting. The company I was working for at the time (Evoke Therapy Programs) offered to help me go to graduate school and allowed me to train under therapists. I could not



refuse this wonderful opportunity to get training and work in such an expansive, powerful “office,” and, hence, my path to become a therapist began. I began working in the wilderness and now have moved to helping young adults transition out of wilderness therapy and teaching graduate students at Oregon State University.

Most people “know what to do” but struggle to “do what they know.” Telling someone something is not nearly as helpful as creating the space for the client to have new experiences, even if it is as simple as being in contact with emotion and not responding in their old patterns.

My advice to graduate students and new professionals who are entering the profession? There are more and more counselors. Find a passion or interest and try to carve out a specialty or something that will allow you to stand out.

**—Sean Roberts, LPC, clinical director at Cascade Crest Transitions in Bend, Oregon, and an adjunct instructor at Oregon State University**

As a young mother in my early 30s, my family was plunged into crisis when my two oldest children were victims of a crime. Caring counselors helped every member of our family at the time. Later, in my 40s, when I had the opportunity to return to school, I could think of nothing I wanted to be more than a counselor, like those who had helped my family and me when we were in such distress.

My advice for those entering the profession is to consider a specialty in disabilities. In addition to being a licensed marriage and family therapist (LMFT) and licensed professional clinical counselor (LPCC), I am a certified rehabilitation counselor (CRC), and that has served me well. With the aging of the baby boomers, disabilities are expected to skyrocket. The field needs people who are well-versed in how to provide accommodations, who can advise families struggling with a disabled member or help someone cope with all the changes a newly acquired disability can bring. This can provide a

valuable specialization for your career and make you an important resource within your community.

Within disabilities, I subspecialize in brain injury, autoimmune disorders and hearing loss. My interest in brain injury started with a client who had survived a severe traumatic brain injury. The more I learned, [the more] I realized brain injury is a hidden epidemic in our society. It’s thought [that] 50 percent of homeless people have one.

All counselors need training on the difficulties of mild to moderate brain injury. These may be the clients with severe fatigue, concentration problems, a history of homelessness and multiple employment failures. They struggle to get through their day, often not knowing what is wrong with them and why they can’t be “normal” like their peers. A well-educated, thoughtful counselor who is knowledgeable about the challenges of brain injury can make a world of difference.

Longtime career counselor and chair of the San Francisco State University counseling department, Robert Chope, once told me to always have multiple income streams. He advised people to have a variety of ways in which they make money in the field. For example, in addition to a private practice, he suggested teaching, coaching, writing a book, creating webinars or a continuing education series related to your book or a specialization. This could potentially create several different income streams. If something happened to one, it would be possible to focus on the others for a while if needed and not lose everything. Great advice from a well-known giant in our field.

**—Laura C. Strom, LMFT, LPCC, CRC, a trauma and disabilities specialist with a practice in Santa Rosa, California**

I had a suicide in my family when I was a teenager. Having personal experience dealing with emotional issues at a young age fueled my drive to find a way to help people. I think counseling is a good fit for me because I’m good at helping others break down

issues, and [I] find joy when a client feels normalized with their pain.

My path just to getting licensed is a long one. I believe that I've changed as a person since I started counseling professionally. Every day is a challenge, and [this] has taught me to be more creative.

The biggest lesson I've learned is that all the textbook learning they teach you in graduate school is not at all how it works in real life. Counseling is much more than sitting in a room with a client. It's about working with people in all walks of life, in everyday settings, and looking outside the box.

My advice to new [practitioners] is to know your boundaries and stick to them. ... Also, try everything. We are so often told to stay in parameters of fields or specialties. But I found that having many different types of jobs in different areas has really opened my mind to what I wanted to do and what I never want to do again.

**—Emelia Thygesen, credentialed alcohol and substance abuse counselor and licensed mental health counselor (LMHC) at the Onondaga County Justice Center for the Syracuse City School District in New York and online therapist at [7cups.com](https://www.7cups.com) and [Betterhelp.com](https://www.betterhelp.com)**

I first knew I wanted to work in the psychology/counseling field in high school. I felt I had a calling to work in the field, although I didn't understand the differences in the professions within the field. I took a psychology class in high school, and I was hooked. It came naturally to me, was interesting and I was passionate about it.

I obtained my undergraduate degree in psychology from Florida State University, took a few years off as I had my daughter and then started my master's program at Florida State.

Shortly after graduation, I transitioned to a position at a forensic facility working with adult males who were [found] not guilty by reason of insanity or incompetent to proceed to trial. I was quickly put into a supervisory position over social workers

and social services staff. I remained in the forensic field for four years, then had a premature child who required a lot of special services and needed me to have a flexible schedule. I then started working in community mental health as a therapist. This role was perfect for me to be able to balance the needs of my children and still work full time. It was frustrating, though, because it was fee for service. This meant that if the clients didn't show up, then I didn't get paid, and that could be overwhelming at times.

While working at this agency, I did a number of things to help my career. I became licensed (more than six years after graduating) and completed a certificate program for sex therapy. I realized throughout the course of my work that sexual issues were grossly ignored by most mental health and other health professionals. This became an area that I was passionate about within the counseling field. I started a part-time private practice focusing on sex therapy. I was the first sex therapist in my hometown and one of few in the surrounding areas. I was also the first to work in community mental health. I gained a ton of experience during this time as people came to know about me. Clients would call the agency asking to make an appointment with "that sex lady," a persona that I have now adopted to use for speaking engagements, trainings, etc.

I recently started the Florida Association for Sex Therapy and Education. The goal of this organization is to have an organization specific to sex therapists and educators in Florida, as requirements differ here from the rest of the country. I want to expand awareness of sexual issues and sex education to youth and adults in the community.

I honestly believe my journey was meant to go the way it did. I had opportunities that I passed up (i.e., going to a doctorate program immediately after my bachelor's). I could have gotten licensed sooner, or I could have worked in different jobs, but I truly believe that every experience I have had has helped mold me into who I am today.

The best advice I can give someone is to pay attention to what feels right for you. Listen to your gut. Pay attention to the things that you are passionate about. Find ways to incorporate your passion into your work.

**—Valerie Richards, LMHC, certified sex therapist, owner of Vivas Counseling Services in St. Lucie and Martin counties and founder of the Florida Association for Sex Therapy and Education**

I started undergraduate college with the intent of becoming a commercial pilot, but an elective class on counseling turned my career in a totally new direction. My undergraduate professor introduced me to the field, and even though he retired long ago, he still is a mentor to me. From that point on I knew I wanted to be a counselor, and I've never looked back.

I continued directly from undergraduate to graduate school and my Ph.D. program. I learned to channel my love for children into a specialty of working with sexually and physically abused children, where I've invested the majority of my clinical time over the past 30 years. I chose children because I learned in my very first internship that many problems in later life have their roots in childhood. If those problems had been addressed early on, my clients' lives would have taken very different paths.

My graduate internship supervisor helped me learn to get to know myself — a lesson I desperately needed — and how to manage my frailties and personal issues in a professional context. I have not seen her in 25 years, but her voice is often in my head, and I quote her to my own students, interns and supervisees. Therefore, I'm a die-hard advocate that counselors should also be in counseling.

My career has been exciting because I have not been afraid to try new things and to apply my counseling skills in nontraditional arenas (law enforcement, criminal profiling, business consulting). I was able to recognize open doors that led to many exciting and fascinating turns in my career.

In the field, the hardest lesson for me to learn — one that I regularly try to communicate to my interns and supervisees — is that the real world doesn't always work the way we are taught in sanitized classrooms. Learning to apply ethics and evidence-based theory in a multicultural world that doesn't always play by [the] rules we assume is a tough part of learning the field.

I would encourage new counselors to do three things. First, never stop learning. Continue supervision, participate in professional organizations, read the journals and go beyond basic CEU requirements.

Second, never do anything just for the money. No license, title or position will bring you satisfaction by itself. No one owns me, and I could quit my job today if I wanted. Even when I made very little money, I lived by this principle, and the freedom it brought me is indescribable.

Third, don't be afraid to think outside the box and pursue an area of the field you love. Burnout won't ever happen to me because I am not really working; I'm doing the things I love every day. All of us start with general practice and pay our dues early on, but learn what gives you energy and focus your practice in that direction when the opportunities present themselves.

**—Gregory K. Moffatt, professor of psychology at Point University in Georgia, an LPC and certified counselor supervisor in private practice with offices in the Atlanta area, author, clinical supervisor, public speaker and consultant to businesses, law enforcement and foster care agencies**

I spent more than 20 years in business, real estate and finance. I had become increasingly disinterested in my work and decided to brainstorm ideas for an alternative path. My husband recommended a career counselor who had given a presentation at his employer's [office]. I made the appointment, and in the course of discussions with her around my possible interest in some type of teaching, she asked if I had ever thought about counseling. Our



meeting was on a Friday. By the time the weekend was done, I had begun the process of applying for my master's in counselor education, and I have never regretted my decision. I loved each step of the academic journey as much as the destination of becoming a licensed counselor.

Professional counseling allows me to be authentically me and do what I love: listen, support, collaborate and empower. My specialties are adults in transition and grief/bereavement. Adult life transitions is an area for which I have the greatest affinity. It has been extremely rewarding working with clients to reframe struggles into opportunities and journey with people reclaiming their lives, especially in the second half. Grief and bereavement influence every aspect of life. Nothing prepares you more for living than death. Contemplating terminal illness, death and their anticipatory effects was an emotional thing for me. Through learning and experience, I took it by the hand to walk with it to dispel some of the fear. It is a privilege to share that journey with others.

The career advice I would give others is that peer support and collaboration are invaluable. Private practice can be somewhat isolative. Align yourself with colleagues, and be selective in consultation groups. Meet with people you trust who model professionalism and integrity and understand the client concerns you present.

Also, self-care, self-care, self-care. You don't want to burn out doing what you love.

**—Katherine Perry, LCPC in private practice in Saco, Maine**

I started out thinking that I wanted to be a wilderness therapist. I love camping and hiking, and the impact of nature on treatment outcomes was compelling. I shifted to doing sailing-based therapy through local nonprofits and colleges.

Throughout this journey, I launched a small private practice to pay off student loan debt. Then I started blogging and podcasting about the things

I was learning. Over time, I found that as counselors, we aren't really taught how to grow a practice through business basics and marketing. So, counselors struggle when, in reality, a lot of the principles are really easy.

I was drawn to counseling because I wanted to help angry kids. I was beat up a few times in middle school and really wanted to help hurting families. But then I started looking more at systems and how counselors weren't thriving. I shifted from focusing on the clients to focusing on helping more practices to thrive.

It's interesting how my professional path has changed, but many of the themes of wanting to make an impact stay the same. As a professional counselor, it is important to see how I can expand the ideas of counseling beyond just the typical therapy walls.

I'm really excited about this coming generation of counselors. They are digital natives, so the idea of creating a podcast, blog or e-course to expand what they are doing in therapy is not foreign. My best advice to graduate students and new professionals is to start blogging, talking about their experiences and [giving] advice. That's what we try to do every day at [my blog] Practice of the Practice.

When I think back on my early career, I wish someone would have said, "Counseling theory applies everywhere. You don't have to take the traditional path." For a long time, I felt like a "bad" counselor because I was doing more business consulting with therapists, but in reality, it was strengthening the field and the overall fabric of our society.

**—Joseph R. Sanok, LPC, owner of Mental Wellness Counseling in Traverse City, Michigan, and creator of the Practice of the Practice podcast, which was named one of the top 100 podcasts to listen to by The Huffington Post**

As long as I can remember, I wanted to help people, and I was intrigued by the human mind and how people heal and grow. I've seen and read about so many people who have experienced so much

trauma, struggle and pain and made it through those experiences stronger, happier and successful. I wanted to be a part of that experience, the journey and the will of the human spirit.

What drew me to study counseling specifically (over social work and psychology) was a certification program in complementary medicine and wellness. During my first year in college, I struggled with anxiety and panic attacks. I discovered breathing techniques and meditation, which really saved me. I wanted to teach others the tools that can also save them from stressful situations. This experience led me to become a registered yoga teacher, allowing me to teach meditation and breathing practices to my clients.

Interestingly, I started out in a holistic counseling center as an intern. I moved on to work with children after that, then I worked with inmates in the county jail with a focus on substance abuse. And now, 17 years into my career, I am in a private practice using my yoga teacher training and coaching skills to provide a holistic growth and wellness approach to counseling. I am now exactly where I want to be.

My advice to new professionals would be to go for your dreams, do what you love and keep that passion alive. Service to our community is so important. And self-care is above all. This is definitely a career where you can lose your sense of self if you're not mindful. The better you can care for yourself, the better you can serve others.

**—Dawn Gaden, yoga teacher, life coach and LPC at a counseling practice in Beverly Hills, Michigan**

Before deciding to become a counselor, I worked 15 years in corporate America. Because I enjoyed working in business, I decided to open my own counseling practice after returning to school and graduating with a counseling degree. As the founder and owner of Grace Liberty Counseling, I'm able to pursue my passion of serving others as a counselor while continuing to stay involved with the business

aspect of owning my own company. I provide counseling services to children, adolescents, individuals and families. Each individual and family has unique strengths to draw out and build upon, and I am passionate about helping my clients build healthier, [more] meaningful and happier lives.

The piece of advice I would give to graduate students and new professionals who are entering the profession today is to have faith and to stay focused. I've learned that building my counseling practice takes time, finances, planning and execution. I find that self-care, being mindful and having the support of your friends and family are important. I also find it helpful to collaborate and consult with other professionals. Life is a journey, and you are the answer to somebody's prayer. If you do your part to add to the health and well-being of others and your community, you will find counseling to be a fulfilling career.

**—Abigail Castel, LMHC and clinical supervisor with a counseling practice in Bellevue, Washington**

My journey to professional counseling began in my undergraduate program, working toward a bachelor's degree in psychology. I received two field placements, one as an assistant to a school social worker, working with pregnant teenage students, and the other working with at-risk teenagers and their families in a local nonprofit agency. Both placements were challenging and rewarding experiences that led me to continue to follow my passion in counseling children, youth and their families.

During my journey as an LPC intern, I was very fortunate to have been matched with an encouraging, honest and helpful supervisor. She helped me navigate the seemingly scary road to private practice and encouraged my professional growth and connection with other amazing therapists.

My best piece of advice for new graduates and professionals is [to] connect with mentors and other professionals in your field and explore various

counseling avenues. Throughout my journey to private practice and owning my own practice, I have found invaluable connections that nurtured my professional and personal growth. On my path to becoming a counselor, I have made connections through my employment at nonprofit agencies, schools, advocacy programs and volunteerism within the mental health community. Instead of finding myself in competition with other therapists, I have learned to embrace an attitude of learning, sharing knowledge and celebrating the successes of others, as they have celebrated my successes.

Without the mentorship of my supervisor and other experienced therapists, I would not have been as confident or prepared to take the leap of faith into owning my own private practice. [Working in an office as] a private practitioner can be lonely and isolating work. However, I make it a priority to continue to seek out and connect with other therapists as a mentor, consultant and friend. I have learned to share about my own professional journey, challenges, trials and successes to encourage other therapists on their professional path to nurture ethical, professional and beneficial relationships with their clients. Creating a network of accountability and encouragement to other counselors and therapists helps to create able therapists to best meet the needs of their clients.

I have heard numerous horror stories from clients who have experienced unethical, maleficent and unprofessional therapy from other practitioners. I hope to be one link in building a stronger and [more] able network of therapists to meet client needs. [Involvement] with professional networks and organizations is another avenue to be connected with and stay updated on counseling, theoretical and ethical standards.

**—Courtney Guhl, licensed professional counselor supervisor and registered play therapist in private practice in Fort Worth, Texas**

I was an anxious child, and I grew up to be an

anxious adult. I suffered with panic attacks and anxiety for more than 20 years. My undergraduate degree is in communications, and after working in the public relations/advertising field for a while, I left to start a family. I then ran a small business with my husband. While raising our two children, I really felt the limits that panic disorder had placed on my life. It became increasingly difficult for me to do the most basic of things, such as go to the supermarket, and I was quickly running out of excuses for why I could not attend events. I thought that this was the way I would have to live my life.

I finally sought help and got relief from a very talented therapist, and I realized how powerful therapy can be. I was able to get my life back and do things without all of the “what if” thinking. It became clear to me that a career helping others to get relief from anxiety is what the universe had planned for me.

[Choosing my specialty as a counselor] was an easy decision for me. I know anxiety from the inside. I believe that unless you have suffered with panic and anxiety, it is really hard to fully understand what it is like to live a life filled with terror and dread and constantly be on guard. My clients appreciate that I get it and also realize that there is hope.

I would advise new professionals to find a modality that they believe in and then train with experts and learn as much as they can. I would also suggest having a mentor or someone with experience in the same modality with whom they can consult.

I’m not sure if this is career advice. However, one of my professors once told me to enjoy the journey, and I am!

**—Tish Schuman, LPC, national board certified clinical hypnotherapist, certified master hypnotherapist and owner of Calm Pathways Counseling in Mount Laurel, New Jersey**

I was interested in psychology while in high school in the seventies in south Louisiana. The thought of eight years of college [for psychology degrees] was a huge deterrent, so I majored in English

literature and journalism and began a career as a print reporter in the early eighties. I really got into my assignments digging for the roots, the solutions and the personal in each story.

After getting married and having a child, I miscarried a second child five months into term and then had three subsequent miscarriages. I sought out the help of a psychologist to reroute my life.

My therapist was a widow, a mother of two young sons when her husband was tragically killed. Her story was one of slow and steady coursework in psychology to support her family and define herself in the wake of her new existence. She told me it actually didn't matter if she — or now myself — didn't graduate; it was the getting out and being part of something we enjoy that was important.

At age 35, I enrolled in an adult program at the University of Delaware and took classes on the days my son was in KinderCare. Then my husband's work transferred us to Mexico City. I finished my undergraduate degree in psychology at the United States International University located there and began a prep course for a master's program exam. I was going all the way!

When we were] transferred back to the United States, I started my master's in counseling psychology at the age of 40 at Immaculata University in Pennsylvania and graduated at age 43. I became an LPC three years later and, now, at age 58, I enjoy a private practice in two locations that completes me.

Everyone has a story at some level of development. As a therapist, I help my clients write and rewrite their own stories.

Graduate students and new professionals will achieve maximum satisfaction if they are truly interested in their clients' narratives and help them edit out the superficial and flesh out the deeper meanings of their lives.

As a specialty, I chose treating eating disorders because they embody the definition of a true mystery illness. Unraveling that mystery and seeing a

healthy young person emerge is a life's work well spent. I also found through the years that I have a great love for and connection with these young women for an inexplicable reason. Perhaps it is a motherly instinct not fully tapped.

**—Diane R. Girardot, LPC with offices in Philadelphia and Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania**

I spent 23 years in the special education field as a teacher, supervisor and director of student services. The one service I saw [that] we were missing the most was tending to the mental health of the students and, most especially, their parents, who were struggling with raising a child with mild to severe special needs. I used a lot of federal funds to begin an elementary counseling program and developed some parenting programs. That led me to the interest in another degree, and I went back to school for counseling. I eventually left education and went into counseling practice. My degrees also led me to work part time in a private foster care program as an educational and career counselor/consultant. I've been in private practice for 23 years, and [I am] getting ready to retire pretty soon.

I was drawn to the profession even before my educational experience by a counselor who helped me through a serious depression. She may have saved my life, and I wanted to help others.

One way my path has changed is finding out what I like and don't like. About six years ago, I stopped working with children, very discouraged that most of it was divorce cases wanting the counselor to be on each parent's side. I admire those who are really good at that.

My advice, especially in private practice, is learn how to do your business as well as counseling. Most programs do not prepare us for the business end, and we are naive. I was shocked in the beginning that [clients] don't pay their bills, they blow off appointments and they expect the utmost from you but nothing from themselves in terms of communication. It would be so much easier just to know [this] and



accept the realities in the beginning. I've talked to many others who have felt the same way. This is what I wish I had received along the way.

One of the best pieces of advice I received was from a counseling professor who said, "You have to care passionately and not care all at the same time."

Also, that sometimes we're the teacher and sometimes the learner. Learn to do both well.

**—Dianne Kruse, LCPC in Nampa, Idaho**

I've enjoyed my winding path from Peace Corps volunteer to computer trainer/tester to counselor. When I considered becoming a counselor prior to college, I couldn't fathom how I'd listen to people's problems all day and still feel OK in the evening. Not knowing what career to choose, I enrolled in computer science, thinking I'd be good at it. When I graduated with a bachelor's in 1986, the job offers I received sounded boring, and the jobs didn't feel meaningful. So I joined the Peace Corps — something that had been on my mind for years. I served in Mali, West Africa, teaching high school math and maternal and child health. Living abroad expanded my mind. An extra bonus was meeting my husband.

Once back in the United States, I found a job teaching a software product to insurance companies. Although I loved teaching and traveling all over the country, I wished I was teaching something more meaningful to people's lives. Once we had children, I became a software tester because it allowed me a flexible schedule.

Even as a kid I enjoyed having deep conversations. I still do. As a teen, I was the friend people talked to. As the go-to hair stylist for my fellow Peace Corps volunteers, the conversations went deep. One friend accused me of having a "truth serum."

Although the computer field was good to me, ultimately it wasn't fulfilling. I realized I wanted to have those conversations and help people as a profession. At the age of 40, I enrolled in a master's in counseling program and loved it. After graduating,

I worked in a children's program for two years, then joined some friends in their private practice. That was eight years ago.

I know counseling is a good fit for me because it matches who I have always been. Not only do I get to have meaningful conversations and help people, I also continually learn and grow on a personal level. What a bonus! Currently my growth is focused on tuning into and trusting my intuition. I am noticing some positive effects.

Some of the lessons I've learned thus far are: Our brains are dangerous places, and we generally believe the negative stuff going on in there. Growth and healing are possible. Mindfulness is the pathway to growth. Address childhood wounds. Energy psychology (e.g., tapping) is cool, and it works.

My advice to those entering this field: Get therapy. Be compassionate and caring with yourself and your clients, of course, but turn that good healing inward.

My current career goal is to expand into teaching and training of the concepts that I find so meaningful. In addition, I've set a goal of having a TED Talk on a counseling topic by the time I'm 60. Wish me luck!

**—Penny Mechley-Porter, LPC in private practice in Erie, Pennsylvania**

I knew at the age of 17 that I wanted to be a school counselor. At that time in my state, it was required for you to get a degree and certification as a teacher (K-12) in order to be a school counselor. I pursued the path to school counseling by obtaining my bachelor's degree in secondary social studies education, which allowed me to take some broad field psychology courses that related to my interest in counseling.

When I was 17, my stepfather was in a rehabilitation center, and I visited him with my mom every weekend. I met a person [another patient/resident] in the center who just needed to talk and process his feelings. I would listen to him every weekend.

He told my mother that I was a great listener and really helped him to express his feelings. It was the moment that I knew I wanted to be in a helping profession.

School counseling is not a job for me, it is a passion. I love the everyday experience of helping students grow in the areas of personal, academic and career development. Each day is a different journey, which keeps the art of counseling interesting.

I have had the opportunity to work as a school counselor in all grades from prekindergarten to 12th grade. It has been a rewarding experience to work and learn about each developmental level. I have become interested in teaching future school counselors and have become an adjunct professor in school counseling.

Every day of school counseling is different. You must be flexible. I have learned to be data driven and produce data that show results of my work. Relationships become the most important part of counseling in the schools. You have to be connected to the faculty, staff, students, parents and community to earn the rapport and respect to be able to do a good job.

The one piece of advice that I received that was most helpful to me as a school counselor was to not get caught up in a single counseling theory. As you practice, you will use many theories and develop your own way of serving clients. That helped me to find what works and what style fits my personality and ability to help others.

**—Brian Law, school counselor at Valdosta High School in Georgia and adjunct professor in the Department of Psychology, Counseling and Family Therapy at Valdosta State University**

In high school, my career goal was to become a counselor. After a lengthy detour, I have. At the age of 21, having completed my bachelor's degree, I took my first counseling course. It was required that we work with a student intern. The intern I was paired with was not a good fit for me. At the end

of that term, I decided to take a break from school and planned to go back later.

Coincidentally, I heard that the phone company (in 1972 there was only one!) was offering paid training in computer programming. I passed the aptitude test and was hired. Thirty-five years later, I had been a vice president at two international financial institutions and an independent project management consultant. Technology was an interesting and challenging career and I enjoyed it. I noticed, however, that I was losing enthusiasm for the work. I didn't hate it. I just wanted something new.

I thought about giving counseling a try, but it was a big risk for me to leave the high-tech arena. A quote I read from Tennessee Williams helped clarify my direction: "There is a time for departure even when there is no certain place to go." I entered a counseling program at Portland State University and received my master's in counseling in marriage and family therapy and mental health counseling.

Counseling has been extremely rewarding for me. It is also interesting and challenging in an entirely different way. One of my areas of focus is working with business professionals because I share a frame of reference for the problems business folks deal with — relationship problems and issues related to Type A behavior patterns such as chronic stress, workaholism and perfectionism. I also help people deal with anxiety, depression, life transitions, grief, past trauma and a desire for personal growth. I am honored on a daily basis to be allowed into my clients' lives and trusted to help them.

My suggestion for prospective counselors is to get information about the health care industry to make an informed career choice. Consider aspects of the counseling profession that are ancillary to the therapeutic methods used with clients. These include private practice versus organizational work [and] financial, regulatory, legal, ethical, licensing, marketing, technological and insurance requirements.

My excitement for counseling continues to

grow. Looking back, I owe my interest in this work to counselors who helped me along the way — my wonderful high school counselor and a brilliant psychologist who helped me discover the strength within myself. I offer my clients my presence and the skills I've learned to help them find a deeper awareness of their own competence, value and humanity. I hope when they look back, they also feel enriched by the experience.

**—Ramona Roberts, LPC and counselor supervisor in private practice in Portland, Oregon, and clinic director of the Community Counseling Clinic at Portland State University**

Nearly 50 counselors answered Counseling Today's call to share career stories for this article — too many to print here. Read more responses from these practitioners at CT Online at [wp.me/p2BxKN-4P](http://wp.me/p2BxKN-4P).

Bethany Bray is a staff writer and social media coordinator for Counseling Today. Contact her at [bbray@counseling.org](mailto:bbray@counseling.org). Letters to the editor: [ct@counseling.org](mailto:ct@counseling.org)



# ABOUT NATIONAL PREVENTION WEEK

**NATIONAL PREVENTION WEEK IS AN ANNUAL HEALTH OBSERVANCE DEDICATED TO INCREASING PUBLIC AWARENESS OF, AND ACTION AROUND, MENTAL HEALTH AND/OR SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS.**

## Purpose of National Prevention Week

The three primary goals of National Prevention Week are to:

- Involve communities in raising awareness about behavioral health issues and implementing prevention strategies, and showcasing effectiveness of evidence-based prevention programs;
- Foster partnerships and collaboration with federal agencies and national organizations dedicated to behavioral and public health; and
- Promote and disseminate quality behavioral health resources and publications

Each year, National Prevention Week includes daily themes to focus on major substance use and mental health topics. The 2019 daily themes are:

- A Monday, May 13: Preventing Prescription and Opioid Drug Misuse
- Tuesday, May 14: Preventing Underage Drinking and Alcohol Misuse
- Wednesday, May 15: Preventing Illicit Drug Use and Youth Marijuana Use
- Thursday, May 16: Preventing Youth Tobacco Use
- Friday, May 17: Preventing Suicide hospital where he works.

## Why Does National Prevention Week Occur in May?

National Prevention Week (NPW) is held each year during the third week of May. Originally, SAMHSA chose this week because it is near the start of summer, an important time for school, communities, and prevention professionals to re-focus on prevention. Adolescents and full-time college students most often use substances for the first time during June or July, according to SAMHSA's National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) data on adolescents – 2012 (PDF | 704 KB) and NSDUH data on full-time college students – 2015 (PDF | 1.2 MB).

As national participation in NPW has increased over the years, the third week in May now serves as a week-long observance created by SAMHSA to celebrate prevention efforts in organizations and communities across the nation, and across all ages. We know communities make prevention happen every day – not just during NPW – and NPW is the perfect time to promote and celebrate a year's worth of prevention efforts, as well as get news, ideas, and resources to strengthen daily, weekly, and



monthly prevention activities.

Plus, the timing of National Prevention Week still provides a timely opportunity for schools and organizations to host prevention-themed events and activities before the school year ends, raising awareness about this important issue among students and their families. These are key periods of social transitions, a risk factor for youth substance use, and an opportunity to develop or strengthen the community, school, and family bonds that protect young people from substance use and strengthen community health overall. More information can be found in The Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health.

**CARBAJAL HONORS 2019**  
**CONGRESSIONAL**  
**WOMEN OF THE YEAR**  
**AWARD WINNERS**

Today, to mark the conclusion of Women’s History Month, Rep. Salud Carbajal announced the winners of the 2019 Congressional Women of the Year Award. The six winners of this year’s award are: Jill Anderson (Lompoc), Tania Israel (Santa Barbara), Dr. Leola Dublin Macmillan (Morro Bay), Yessenia Marroquin (Santa Barbara), Anahi Mendoza (Santa Maria), and Sandi Sigurdson (San Luis Obispo).

The annual Congressional Women of the Year Award honors exceptional women across the 24th Congressional District who have left a positive impact on their communities. Winners span a variety of backgrounds and professions and represent the thousands of women working tirelessly to improve quality of life on the Central Coast.

“The recipients of this year’s Congressional Women of the Year Award are all doing incredible work to improve the quality of life on the Central Coast, often without the recognition or compensation they deserve,” Carbajal said. “From creating spaces for compassion and understanding in our communities, to improving healthcare for our underserved populations, it is a privilege to recognize these trailblazers for their indelible contributions to our community.”

Dr. Leola Dublin Macmillan (Morro Bay)

Dr. Leola Dublin Macmillan serves on the board of Just Communities Central Coast, is on the steering committee of RACE Matters SLO County, and is a member of the SLO Police



*Dr. Leola Dublin Macmillan (calpoly.edu)*

Department’s Police And Community Together (PACT) community group. She has taught as a Lecturer at Cal Poly for the Ethnic Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies departments. Leola is deeply invested in making our community a more just and equitable place. She has organized and led many workshops on the Central Coast, sharing her extensive knowledge about how difference (in race/class/gender/sexual orientation/(dis)ability) is understood within US contexts. Above all, she is a passionate advocate for her students. She has been supporting and guiding students in pursuing their own advocacy projects, including helping with organizing the UnstoPPable Conference at Cal Poly and bringing to the attention of SLO City Council the need for improved lighting in neighborhoods surrounding Cal Poly campus. She selflessly and patiently educates our communities on difficult to discuss topics such as structural racism.

# DROP-IN ARTICLE

## *Do You Focus on #4Mind4Body?*

Mental health is essential to everyone's overall health and well-being, and mental illnesses are common and treatable. So much of what we do physically impacts us mentally – it's important to pay attention to both your physical health and your mental health, which can help you achieve overall wellness and set you on a path to recovery.

Did you know that Mental Health America (MHA) founded *May is Mental Health Month* back in 1949? That means this year marks MHA's 70th year celebrating Mental Health Month!

This *May is Mental Health Month* [ORGANIZATION NAME] is expanding its focus from 2018 and raising awareness about the connection between physical health and mental health, through the theme #4Mind4Body. We are exploring the topics of animal companionship, spirituality and religion, humor, work-life balance, and recreation and social connections as ways to boost mental health and general wellness.

A healthy lifestyle can help to prevent the onset or worsening of mental health conditions, as well as chronic conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. It can also help people recover from these conditions. For those dealing with a chronic health condition and the people who care for them, it can be especially important to focus on mental health. When dealing with dueling diagnoses, focusing on both physical and mental health concerns can be daunting – but critically important in achieving overall wellness.

There are things you can do that may help. Finding a reason to laugh, going for a walk with a friend, meditating, playing with a pet, or working from home once a week can go a long way in making you both physically and mentally healthy. The company of animals – whether as pets or service animals— can have a profound impact on a person's quality of life and ability to recover from illnesses. A pet can be a source of comfort and can help us to live mentally healthier lives. And whether you go to church, meditate daily, or simply find time to enjoy that cup of tea each morning while checking in with yourself – it can be important to connect with your spiritual side in order to find that mind-body connection.

[ORGANIZATION] wants everyone to know that mental illnesses are real, and recovery is always the goal. Living a healthy lifestyle may not be easy but can be achieved by gradually making small changes and building on those successes. Finding the balance between work and play, the ups and downs of life, physical health and mental health, can help you on the path towards focusing both #4Mind4Body.

For more information, visit [www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may).



# 2019 BIKE BREAKFAST



**Stop by on your way to school or work!**

Come celebrate Bike Month with us and help demonstrate what SLO County is capable of when we all make an effort to reduce congestion, improve our health, save money and commute smart. People can stop by on their way to school or work.

May is also Mental Health Awareness Month. We encourage people to do self-care and activities to increase their mental health. Staying physically active has shown to promote positive mental health. Riding your bike to work is a great way to not only help the environment, but also a great way to promote physical activity.

**DONUTS BY  
SLODOCO, FRUIT  
AND OTHER  
BREAKFAST ITEMS  
AVAILABLE!**

**FRIDAY, MAY 17TH, 7:00-9AM**

**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PREVENTION  
AND OUTREACH**

**277 SOUTH STREET, SUITE T  
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA 93401**



[www.slocounty.ca.gov/BH](http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/BH)



# DATES TO REMEMBER

## APRIL

- Alcohol Awareness Month
- Stress Awareness Month
- National Autism Awareness Month
- National Counseling Month
- National Minority Health Month
- World Autism Awareness Day (Apr. 2)
- World Health Day (Apr. 7)
- National Alcohol Screening Day (Apr. 11)
- National Stress Awareness Day (Apr. 16)

## MAY

- Mental Health Month
- National Maternal Depression Awareness Month
- Self-Discovery Month
- Women's Health Month
- National Anxiety and Depression Awareness Week (May 12-18)
- National Women's Health Week (May 12-18)
- National Prevention Week (May 12-18)
- National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day (May 9)

## JUNE

- National PTSD Awareness Month
- Men's Health Month
- National Men's Health Week (June 10-16)
- International Day of Yoga June 21)
- National PTSD Awareness Day June 27)

## Drug & Alcohol Services

**SAN LUIS OBISPO ADULTS**  
2180 JOHNSON AVE,  
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA 93401  
(805)781-4275

**SAN LUIS OBISPO YOUTH**  
277 SOUTH ST. SUITE T,  
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA 93401  
(805)781-4754

**PASO ROBLES ADULTS & YOUTH**  
1763 RAMADA DRIVE,  
PASO ROBLES, CA 93446  
(805)226-3200

**ATASCADERO YOUTH & ADULTS**  
5575 HOSPITAL DRIVE  
ATASCADERO, CA 93422  
(805)461-6080

**PREVENTION & OUTREACH**  
277 SOUTH ST. SUITE T,  
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA 93401  
(805)781-4754

## Mental Health Services

**SAN LUIS OBISPO YOUTH 0-5  
MARTHA'S PLACE CHILDREN'S  
ASSESSMENT CENTER**  
2925 MCMILLAN AVE,  
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA 93401  
(805)781-4948

**SAN LUIS OBISPO YOUTH**  
1989 VICENTE,  
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA 93401  
(805)781-4179

**SAN LUIS OBISPO ADULT**  
2178 JOHNSON AVE,  
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA 93401

(805)781-4700

**SAN LUIS OBISPO PSYCHIATRIC HEALTH  
FACILITY**  
2178 JOHNSON AVE,  
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA 93401  
(805)781-4711

**ARROYO GRANDE YOUTH**  
345 S. HALCYON,  
ARROYO GRANDE, CA 93420  
(805)473-7060

**ARROYO GRANDE ADULTS**  
1650 GRAND AVE,  
ARROYO GRANDE, CA 93420

(805)474-2154  
**ATASCADERO YOUTH & ADULTS**  
5575 HOSPITAL DRIVE,  
ATASCADERO, CA 93422  
(805)461-6060

**SERVICES AFFIRMING FAMILY  
EMPOWERMENT (SAFE)**  
1086 GRAND AVE. ARROYO  
GRANDE, CA 93420  
(805)4742105

## Resources in the Community

**TRANSITIONS-MENTAL HEALTH  
ASSOCIATION (TMHA)**  
784 HIGH ST,  
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA 93401  
(805) - 540 - 6500

**COMMUNITY ACTION  
PARTNERSHIP OF SLO (CAPSLO)**  
1030 SOUTH WOOD DR,  
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA 93401  
(805) 544 - 4355

**THE LINK FAMILY RESOURCE  
CENTER**  
6500 MORRO RD #A,  
ATASCADERO, CA 93422  
(805) 466 - 5404

**CENTER FOR FAMILY  
STRENGTHENING (CFS)**  
3480 HIGUERA ST SUITE 100,  
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA 93401  
(805) 543 - 6216

**WILSHIRE COMMUNITY SERVICES**  
285 SOUTH STREET SUITE J  
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA, 93401  
(805) 547 - 7025

**COMMUNITY COUNSELING CENTER (CCC)**  
1129 MARSH ST,  
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA 93405  
(805) 543 - 7969

**FAMILY CARE NETWORK (FCN)**  
1255 KENDALL RD,  
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA 93401  
(805) 781 - 3535

**RISE | RESPECT. INSPIRE. SUPPORT.  
EMPOWER.**  
LGBTQ HEALTHY RELATION-  
SHIPS SUPPORT GROUP  
(805) 226 - 6791

**ACCESS SUPPORT NETWORK**  
1320 NIPOMO ST.  
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA 93401  
(805) 781 - 3660

**GAY AND LESBIAN ALLIANCE  
(GALA) OF THE CENTRAL COAST**  
(805) 541 - 4252

**TRANZ CENTRAL COAST**  
SLO AND NORTH COUNTY  
SUPPORT GROUPS  
(805) 242 - 3821

# Cultural Competence Committee



Behavioral Health  
Department

Health Agency