

VitAL Alabama Annual Conference

Shaping the Future of Behavioral Health

Tuscaloosa, AL - Bryant Conference Center

August 21-22, 2025



Thursday, August 21 Agenda

7:45 a.m.

Check-in/Breakfast

Room: Sellers Foyer

8:45 a.m.

Welcome & Announcements

Room: Sellers Auditorium

Plenary Sessions

9:00 a.m. - 10:15 a.m.

Room: Sellers Auditorium

A Man in Recovery's Point of View: Seeking the Opportunity, Not the Obligation

Brandon Novak

10:15 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

Break

10:30 a.m. - 11:45 p.m.

Room: Sellers Auditorium

Understanding SUD/ODU on the College Campus: Combatting Stigma

Kristina Canfield

*Sponsored by the Opioid Response Network (ORN)

11:45 p.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Lunch

Room: Sellers Foyer

Volunteer Service Opportunity

Breakout Session 1

12:30 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Building Resilience through Adversities

Zina Monette Cartwell, MS, CPS, IPS

The Lived Experiences with Mental Health Amongst First Responders: A Phenomenological Inquiry into Alabama Firefighters

Matthew B. McKenzie, PhD & David Albright, PhD

What's So Great About Having a Job? - An Integrated Approach to Employment in Recovery

Josh Law, MPA

Bullying: Discussing Approaches to Bullying Prevention and Intervention

Andrea Zavitz, MS, MBA, LPC, LMHC, NCC

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Thursday, August 21 Agenda cont.

Sensory Regulation and De-escalation: Emerging Initiatives among Law Enforcement and Community Agencies

Jessica Hoggle, DSW, LICSW & Craig Parker, LT

The Fine Print Wasn't in ASL: Rethinking Ethics with Deaf Clients

Amanda G. Somdal, DSW, LICSW-S, Brian "BAM" Moss, BSW & Sandy Pascual, M.S. MBA

2:00 p.m. - 2:15 p.m.

Break

Breakout Session 2

2:15 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.

Peer to Peer: Real Voices Supporting Mental Health and Well-Being

Dena Cook, Ed.S, M.Ed, B.S. & Kelly Richards, M.Ed.

Shaping the Stigma by Utilizing Social Workers with Law Enforcement Agencies

Lauren Kirksey, MSW & Jessica May, BSW

Community-Driven Approaches to Strengthen School-Based Behavioral Health Systems

Whitney Monya Zeigler, LMSW

Building Our Own: Creating School-Based Mental Health Services in Tuscaloosa County

Angela Kelly, MSW, Devan Wood, LMSW, Jakari McDougald, LMSW,

Elizabeth Wells LICSW-S, Emily Smith, LICSW-S, & Tiffany Hutchinson, LMSW

From Consequences to Belonging: Bridging Justice and Behavioral Health for Youth in Schools

Jordan Cameron, MSW, MPH

Preventing the Crispy Effect: Reducing Burnout for Ourselves While Improving the Lives of Our Clients

Leilani Mason, LICSW-PIP, EMDR Certified, EMDR CIT

3:45 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. - **Optional:** Sensory Activation Vehicle Viewing

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Friday, August 22 Agenda

7:45 a.m.

Check-in/Breakfast

Room: Sellers Foyer

8:45 a.m.

Welcome & Announcements

Room: Sellers Auditorium

Plenary Sessions

9:00 a.m. - 10:15 a.m.

Room: Sellers Auditorium

The Fight You Don't See Coming: A Survivor's Story of Hope

Darryl Strawberry

10:15 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

Break

10:30 a.m. - 11:45 p.m.

Room: Sellers Auditorium

The Opposite of Suicide Isn't Prevention: A New Approach to an Old Crisis

David Woods Bartley

11:45 p.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Lunch

Room: Sellers Foyer

Volunteer Service Opportunity

Optional: Sensory Activation Vehicle Viewing

Breakout Session 3

12:30 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Empowering Adolescents: Harnessing Anime and Mental Health Protective Factors

Jermaine A. Wall, LICSW-S

Invisible Wounds: Addressing Moral Injury & Psychological Barriers to Care Among First Responders

Leilani Mason, LICSW-PIP, EMDR Certified, EMDR CIT

The Tech Effect: How Digital Devices are Reshaping Behavioral Health

Whitney Johnson, MS, MPH, CHESÂ®

Promoting Positive Mental Health: Creating A Safe and Supportive School Environment

Jennifer Smith, LMSW

VitAL Annual Conference

Shaping the Future of Behavioral Health

Tuscaloosa, AL - Bryant Conference Center

August 21-22, 2025



Friday, August 22 Agenda cont.

Fostering Long-Term Recovery Through the Four Dimensions

Curt Lindsley, BA, FBSS

Betrayed by the System: Ethical Practice with Clients Who've Lost Trust in Care

Sam Marion, MSW, LCSW & Elizabeth Marston, MSW, LCSW

2:00 p.m. - 2:15 p.m.

Break

Breakout Session 4

2:15 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.

Reclaiming the Black Body: Understanding Body Image Across Generations

Charlece "Charlie" Bishop, MS, LMFT, Certified OCD Specialist

From Burnout to Balance: Supporting Those Who Serve

Ethan Gates, LMSW

Empowering Recovery: Emotional CPR Skills for Substance Use Peer Support Specialists

Kunwal M. Scott, DNP, FNP-C, PMHNP-C

Bridging Behavioral Health and Education: Addressing Discipline as a Mental Health Issue

Whitney Zeigler, LMSW

Treatment of Justice Involved Populations: Continuum of Care from Incarceration to Community

Rebecca C. Bensema, MS, Justin White, LT, Felicia Greer, MS, LBSW & Kim Randolph, RN

Consent, Autonomy, and the Nervous System: Ethical Practice with Complex Clients

Sam Marion, MSW, LCSW & Elizabeth Marston, MSW, LCSW