

# 2024 Statewide Symposium in Support of Service Members, Veterans, & Their Families

## Speaker Bios



### **Andrea Banks**

#### **Director, Maricopa Community Colleges**

Andrea Banks is a United States Air Force veteran who is very passionate about helping students succeed. Andrea has over sixteen years of experience in higher education, beginning with her role as an adjunct English instructor. Since joining the Maricopa Community Colleges, Andrea has served as a student success coach, Learning Center coordinator, veteran services coordinator, and currently as the director of Student Affairs at the District Office. In addition to maintaining her adjunct faculty role, Andrea collaborates with key stakeholders and community partners to create opportunities for students, works with the Maricopa Community Colleges Foundation to raise funds for veterans, oversees veterans' initiatives throughout the District, directs the Maricopa Student Senate, manages the Common Pages change process, and the PepsiCo Scholarship program. Andrea holds a M.Ed. from Arizona State University.

Andrea currently serves on Congressman Greg Stanton's Advisory Council, the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services' Veteran Supportive Campus Council, Female Veterans Issues Workgroup, and the Arizona Coalition for Military Families' Higher Education Workgroup. She has presented at several conferences such as the Bellwether National Awards Conference, HeroZona National Business Summit, as well as a panelist for the Phoenix Business Journal, Phoenix Chamber of Commerce, and Arizona Women Veterans Summit. Andrea was a contributing author of the 2014 Arizona Town Hall Report on Vulnerable Populations and recipient of the Achieving My Purpose Community Organization's 2018 Woman of Distinction.



### **Shawn Banzhaf**

#### **Executive Director, Pat Tillman Veterans Center**

Education: MA Sociology, Arizona State University BA Interdisciplinary Studies, Chadron State College, 2010

For twenty-one years Shawn served the United States in the Army National Guard. He retired as the acting First Sergeant of the 1057th Transportation Company. He is an Iraqi War Veteran, during which he earned the Bronze Star and Combat Action Badge during 100 combat missions in and around Baghdad, Ramadi and Fallujah. His unit, the 1074th Transportation Company, was awarded the Meritorious Unit Citation during their yearlong campaign. Shawn is the executive director of the Pat Tillman Veterans Center at Arizona State University where he and his team help provide services to over 16,500 military connected learners. Shawn is the creator and author of the 5 Ls: A Practical Guide for Helping Loved Ones Heal After Trauma. He has trained thousands of individuals on how using this method is a tool anyone can use with a loved one struggling with PTSD, whether veteran or not.



## Jason Barlow

### President & CEO, Habitat for Humanity Central Arizona

Jason Barlow is the President and CEO of Habitat for Humanity Central Arizona. Prior to moving to Arizona, Jason was an executive with St. Francis Hospital and Health Centers for nine years. He is a retired Lieutenant Colonel from the USAF and was a flying squadron commander and U-2 reconnaissance pilot. He was Director of Operations for a for-profit telecommunications company and a Screening Manager for the US Department of Homeland Security, shortly after the terrorist attack of 9-11-01. An Eagle Scout, he is a past Council and Area President for the Boy Scouts of America and served on the boards of the YMCA, County Economic Development Board and was President of four community associations. Jason and his wife, Dr. Jane Barlow, live in Scottsdale and enjoy traveling, golfing, riding bikes, cooking and hiking.

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## Nicki Bartram

### Commander, Maricopa County Sheriff's Office



## Chris Berhow

### CEPC, Phoenix, Department of Veteran Affairs

I recently retired from the VA Police, having done Crisis Intervention training and working with veterans in crisis for many years. I am currently still a chaplain in the US Army Reserve and work now as a Community Engagement and Partnerships Coordinator for the VA, where we build coalitions at a grassroots-level to reach veterans in their own communities.



## **Ashley Breedlove, Psy.D, DBSM**

### **Clinical Health Psychology, Department of VA**

Dr. Breedlove is a licensed clinical health psychologist who operates as a member of the Arizona VA Health Psychology program, a consult-based service with referrals primarily generated from primary and specialty care clinics (e.g. Endocrinology, Sleep Medicine, Physical Medicine & Rehab, Neurology, Gastroenterology, Cardiology, Immunodeficiency Clinic, Oncology, and Palliative Care). Dr. Breedlove specializes in providing time-limited, evidence-based psychotherapy to Veterans presenting with a multitude of health concerns, including diabetes, IBS, headaches, seizures, COPD, heart failure, cancer, tinnitus, and sexual health concerns among others. Dr. Breedlove's primary area of interest and practice is in the assessment and treatment of sleep disorders. Treatments provided include Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I), desensitization for CPAP adherence, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Nightmares (CBT-N) as well as modified and adjunctive treatments for circadian rhythm sleep disorders, hypersomnia, and non-REM parasomnias. Dr. Breedlove also serves as national consultant for the VA CBT-I Training initiative and has completed her board certification in behavioral sleep medicine.



## **Pamela Bridge**

### **Director of Litigation and Advocacy, Community Legal Services**

Pamela Bridge is currently the Director of Litigation and Advocacy for Community Legal Services. Community Legal Services is a nonprofit law firm dedicated to eliminating poverty based inequities in the civil justice system by providing high quality legal advice, advocacy and assistance to low income Arizonans. In her positions, Pamela directs the advocacy and litigation of the firm's thirty attorneys located in 5 counties: Maricopa, Yuma, La Paz, Yavapai and Mohave. Community Legal Services focuses on five main areas: housing, family law, consumer, employment and health and economic stability. Pamela is a current member of the Arizona Access to Justice Commission.



## **Joann Bueno, PHR**

### **Interim State Apprenticeship Director, Arizona Apprenticeship Office, DES**

Joann Bueno is the Interim State Apprenticeship Director at the Department of Economic Security. With a strong focus on collaboration and creating career opportunities, she leads the Arizona Apprenticeship Office with engagement with employers, industry representatives, community colleges, CTE districts, and various local workforce areas. Her dedication and dynamic approach contribute to creating highly skilled individuals, advancing careers, and shaping a thriving labor market in the state through Registered Apprenticeship.



## **Natalie Bui, MSW, LCSW**

**VISN 22 Supervisory Social Worker,  
VISN 22 VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network**

Natalie A. Bui, MSW, LCSW is a leader and licensed clinical social worker with extensive knowledge and experience across various programs at the Veterans Healthcare Administration (VHA). She currently oversees and manages a team of Community Engagement & Partnership Coordinators (CEPCs) who provide technical assistance and support to suicide prevention coalitions with the goal of reducing Veteran suicide throughout Southern California, Arizona and New Mexico. She is passionate about developing effective partnerships and collaborations to improve the quality of life for Veterans, service members, and their families.

Natalie earned her Masters of Social Work from New York University's Silver School of Social Work. She also graduated cum laude with her Bachelor of Arts in Social Work and Minor in Women's Studies from Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana and holds a Certificate in Gender and Development Studies from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai, India. Natalie is a proud military spouse; her husband is currently serving as an Officer in the U.S. Navy Reserves. She has 3 young children and resides in Orange County, California.



## **Tera Calhoun**

**Workforce Development Coordinator, U.S.VETS-Phoenix**

PEOPLE are my PASSION! With over 15 years of experience in Human Resources, Career Development, and Training I serve my PASSION by serving the men & women that have so bravely stepped up to serve our country! My PURPOSE is to assist those in transition by coaching, mentoring, and advocating in the areas of Career Development and Veteran Hiring Initiatives.

Teaching Veterans to focus on their core values and the amazing qualities they bring to the civilian workforce. Developing partnerships throughout the community to offer wrap around services and to build a network of employers and resource providers that support our mission!



## **Francesca Carreon Chacon, MS**

**Community Engagement Partnership Coordinator,  
Department of Veterans Affairs-VISN 22**



## **Stefanie Cary**

### **Prevention Specialist, La Frontera EMPACT Suicide Prevention Center**

Stefanie is an 8-year employee of La Frontera EMPACT-Suicide Prevention Center. She became passionate about suicide prevention and community postvention services following the loss of her father in 2006. She currently leads mental health trainings on the warning signs of depression and suicide, facilitates drug prevention programs in rural communities, and teaches mindfulness to older adults. Stefanie has presented locally and internationally, most recently at the European Symposium on Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour in Denmark, 2022.



## **Diana Crane**

### **Supervisor, Veteran and Military Family Services, Goodwill of Central and Northern Arizona**

I am a former United States Army Chaplain who served for 11 years, including a couple of tours in Iraq. I have been a mental health clinician, a hospital chaplain, and now have the opportunity to serve my fellow veterans. I have a passion for seeing veterans and their family members succeed. I am an avid Lego builder and have a large collection that takes up way too much room in my home!



## **Marcus Denetdale**

### **Regional Associate Director, Home Base/MGB**

Marcus is the Regional Associate Director, Regional & Tribal Relations, of Home Base Arizona – an organization dedicated to healing the invisible wounds for veterans of all eras, service members, military families and families of the fallen through world-class clinical care, wellness, education and research. Marcus has been working in nonprofit organizations since 2003. The last 6 years he worked closely with tribal Nations and communities in various capacities. As a nonprofit administrator, he has developed college scholarship programs, recruited Native American college students, and received research grants for higher education projects totaling over \$2.4m.

Recently, Home Base announced their partnership with ASU's College of Health Solutions to launch the Warrior Health & Fitness program. A FREE 90-day program helping Arizona veterans improve their physical health and well-being through supervised physical exercise, education about healthy eating, living, sleep hygiene, stress management and the health benefits of physical activity.

Marcus is from Farmington, New Mexico, U.S., a citizen of the Navajo Nation, and a U.S. Air Force Veteran. He enjoys mentoring student veterans who are transitioning from service to academia and volunteering with other nonprofits.



## Beth Dietrich

### Recreation Therapy Section Chief, Phoenix VA Healthcare System

Dr. Beth Dietrich, CTRS, Recreation Therapy Section Chief of the Phoenix VA Recreation Therapy Section. I have worked at the Phoenix VA for 16 years and I have been the section chief for the past 3 years. I am a faculty associate at Arizona State University for over 20 years teaching within the Recreation Therapy Department. I have been a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist for over 25 years.



## Justine Ducote

### Chair, Cochise Serving Veterans

Justine entered the Army on 13 November 1990 in Portland, OR and retired on 1 March 2022 at Fort Huachuca AZ after 32 years of service as a Command Sergeant Major. During her service she was primarily in the intelligence field. Upon retirement and 19 years in Sierra Vista, Justine continues to serve as an integral part of the Sierra Vista, Cochise County, and Fort Huachuca communities. She currently serves as the Chair of Cochise Serving Veterans (CSV) which supports Veterans and their families in-need across all of Cochise County. She serves as the Chair for the Greater Sierra Vista United Veterans Council and is a member of the Southeastern Arizona Behavioral Health Services (SEABHS) Board. She is a lifetime member of Disabled American Veterans (DAV), member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Auxiliary and Women's Army Corps. She holds a master's degree in military psychology. Her connection to Fort Huachuca as a Department of the Army Civilian assists in her continued working and productive relationship with the Soldiers, Civilians, and Veterans on Fort Huachuca and the community.



## Autumn Ewert

### Military Program Specialist - Recreational Therapist, Ability 360 Sports and Fitness Center

Autumn Ewert, a dedicated and passionate professional renowned for her expertise as a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS), Military Program Specialist at Ability360 Sports and Fitness Center, and yoga teacher (YTT200). Autumn is a dedicated professional known for her multifaceted expertise in recreational therapy, military program coordination, and yoga instruction. As a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) and Military Program Specialist at Ability360 Sports and Fitness Center, Autumn brings a wealth of experience and a deep commitment to enhancing the lives of veterans and active military members through recreation and wellness initiatives.

With a background in recreational therapy, Autumn possesses a keen understanding of the therapeutic benefits of leisure and recreational activities for individuals with disabilities and special needs. Her work at Ability360 Sports and Fitness Center involves developing and implementing tailored programs that promote physical activity, social engagement, and personal growth for individuals of all abilities, including veterans and military personnel.

Autumn's role as a Military Program Specialist underscores her dedication to serving those who have served their country. Through her efforts, she has created inclusive and empowering programs specifically designed to meet the unique needs of military members, veterans, and their families, fostering a sense of community, support, and resilience.

In addition to her work in recreational therapy and military programming, Autumn is also a certified yoga teacher (YTT200). Her passion for yoga extends beyond the physical practice, as she recognizes its profound impact on mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Through her yoga instruction, Autumn shares her knowledge and fosters a nurturing environment where students can explore self-awareness, mindfulness, and inner balance.

Autumn's holistic approach to wellness, coupled with her expertise in recreational therapy and military programming, reflects her unwavering commitment to empowering individuals to lead fulfilling and meaningful lives. With a genuine passion for serving others and a dedication to promoting holistic well-being, Autumn Ewert continues to make a positive impact in her community and beyond.



## **Holly Figueroa (She/Her)**

### **Tribal Liaison, BCBSAZ Health Choice**

Holly Figueroa is Ohkay Owingeh and Hopi from the village of Sipaulovi and is Sun Clan. Holly serves as the Tribal Liaison for BCBSAZ Health Choice. As the Tribal Liaison, she works to strengthen tribal relations with 17 tribes in BCBSAZ Health Choice service area, focusing on Access to Care, Prevention, Coordination of Care, Nation Building, Training & Education, Reducing Health Disparities, Stigma Reduction, and cross sector tribal collaborative efforts.

With a Cultural Competency background, Holly works to ensure that culturally responsive services are delivered to all including Health Choice members and that providers meet the language and unique cultural needs of those they serve. Holly also develops education and awareness programs for staff and residents of the Health Choice service area to help reduce the stigma aimed at diverse cultures and to raise awareness and decrease health disparities they are often faced with. Holly was born into a military family and is the spouse of an Operation Desert Storm & Operation Vigilant Warrior Veteran. Holly is a certified Adult, Youth, and Veteran Mental Health First Aide Trainer. Holly serves on the Arizona Town Hall Board of Directors; she is a Northern Arizona Healthcare Foundation Certificate Holder; she serves on the President for Arizona Rural Health Association; the MPOWRD Board of Directors. Holly is also a dedicated Ally who works to advocate and ensure Safe Spaces for 2SLGBTQ individuals and community. Additionally, Holly pursues other ways to give back to her community and to be an effective advocate for Native American people everywhere.

Holly is the recipient of the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health 2023 Community Star Award. She is also the recipient of the 2023 Arizona Department of Health Services Michael T. Alison Award for Excellence in Tribal Health.



## **Emory Flagg, Jr., MBA, USAF (Ret)**

### **Career Specialist, Arizona Coalition for Military Families**

A member of the Career Navigation Team at the "Arizona Coalition for Military Families" under the umbrella of "Be Connected," stands as an exemplary career specialist dedicated to guiding and empowering individuals in their pursuit of meaningful employment. His impact transcends traditional boundaries as he extends his mentorship to military members, their families, and veterans, regardless of their unique circumstances.

With an unwavering commitment to service and a remarkable breadth of experience, Emory brings an invaluable blend of knowledge. His educational credentials include Master's degrees in Healthcare and Organizational Leadership Management, providing a solid foundation for his career guidance and leadership endeavors. Complementing this, he boasts over two decades of hands-on leadership and management experience, culminating in a rich tapestry of skills and insights. His military journey, spanning an honorable 22 years, further solidifies his profound understanding of military veteran personnel's unique challenges and aspirations.

Moreover, Emory's multifaceted expertise extends to public speaking and servant leadership and epitomizes the embodiment of a career specialist. He possesses a unique talent for connecting with individuals, effectively securing their commitment, and keeping them engaged in the processes that propel them toward success. His motivating presence is a testament to his ability to inspire individuals to reach their full potential.



## **Amanda S. French**

### **Assistant Director, Phoenix VA Regional Office**

Ms. Amanda French was selected as the Assistant Director of the Phoenix Regional Office, effective March 2022. She shares responsibility for the effective and efficient direction, control, and operation of benefits delivery for 526,000 Veterans and dependents residing in the State of Arizona as well as full operational support of the Phoenix Regional Call Center.

Ms. French began her career with the Department of Veterans Affairs at the St. Paul Pension Management Center (PMC) in August 2007 as a Veterans Service Representative (VSR) and later as an Assistant Coach. In January 2011, Amanda was selected as a Training Consultant with VA Central Office Pension and Fiduciary Service in Washington, D.C. and later transitioned to the Office of Field Operations, Operations Center as the Lead Management Analyst. In 2015 she was selected as the Assistant Service Center Manager at the Salt Lake City Veterans Service Center and in 2019, Ms. French was selected as the SLC Fiduciary Hub Manager.

Ms. French graduated from Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, MN earning a Bachelor of Arts Degree in History. She now lives in Phoenix, AZ with her husband and three-year-old daughter. In her free time, she enjoys running, hiking, and spending time outdoors with her family.





## **Maria Fuentes**

### **Managing Partner, MCF Strategies**

Maria Cristina Fuentes has over 25 years of experience serving federal & state governments, national foundations, and community-based organizations. Maria Cristina's career has focused on strengthening systems through data-driven, solutions-based strategies that demonstrate positive change at the national, state, and local levels. Her passion lies in developing, implementing, and promoting programs that strengthen individuals, families, and communities.

Prior to founding MCF Strategies, Maria Cristina was appointed by Governor Doug Ducey to serve as a member of the Arizona cabinet as Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Youth, Faith and Family. In this role she oversaw statewide initiatives; training & grant programs; and public affairs strategies related to child well-being, juvenile justice, human trafficking, sexual & domestic violence, substance abuse prevention, service & volunteerism, and mitigating the impacts of trauma. Her work for the state of Arizona dramatically broadened and improved community impact and services statewide.

Her background also includes serving as a Presidential appointee to the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Department of Labor, and The White House. Maria also spent a decade at Casey Family Programs where she played a critical role in helping to reduce the number of children in foster care by strengthening families and improving well-being for individuals and communities.

Maria Cristina currently serves as co-chair of the Governor's Council on Child Safety and Family Empowerment and the Governor's Council to Combat Human Trafficking in Arizona.



## **Melinda Gomez**

### **Manager, Military Initiatives, SEMI Foundation**

Melinda Gomez is the SEMI Foundation's Manager of Military Initiatives. She brings expertise in building and growing programs tailored to the military community to elevate SEMI as a leader in the military advocacy space through the VetWorks Initiative. In this role, she is expanding career opportunities for members of the military community and other underrepresented populations across the semiconductor and microelectronics industry.

Melinda has been in workforce development for over 12 years in both government and non-profit sectors. Most recently, she was a Regional Manager with the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring Our Heroes initiative, building business relationships and facilitating internships across all industries for thousands of transitioning service members. Her whole life has been submerged in the military community, which gives her a unique perspective and passion for working with this population. She also coordinates the Foundation's industry image and awareness campaign to boost visibility of opportunities across all populations.

She holds a Master of Public Administration and is a Certified Professional Career Coach. She lives in San Diego with her family and enjoys all the beautiful outdoor activities of the area in her spare time.



## Melissa Green

### Founder & CEO | HR Generalist, Grounds4Cause | Nestlé

By day, Melissa Green navigates the corporate beanfields as an HR Generalist at Nestlé, wrangling benefits packages and smoothing out workplace wrinkles. But by night, or rather by roast, she transforms into Melissa Green, Coffee-Fueled Community Queen!

Melissa's not your average barista, she's the Founder & CEO of Grounds4Cause, a "Roast to Table" empire crafting two soul-sipping coffee brands with a conscience: Southern, Sweet & Sassy® Coffee for military families and Rise Above Coffee® for the LGBTQ+ community.

These aren't just cups of joe, they're #coffee4acause! Each sip fuels a donation to a non-profit supporting these amazing communities. And Melissa doesn't stop there. Her social media is a megaphone, amplifying voices and spreading awareness like wildfire.

But Melissa's not just a CEO, she's a Milspousepreneur and a Mompreneur. Juggling four little bundles of energy, a Navy retiree husband, and a menagerie of fur babies, she still finds time to rock the coffee world with her unique coffee and contagious passion.

So, next time you reach for a cup, remember, it can be more than just a caffeine fix. It can be a sip of support, a community hug, and a small step towards a world that's a little sweeter, a little bolder, one roast at a time.

Want to know more? Follow Melissa's Coffee Crusade on:

Website: <https://grounds4cause.com> Instagram: @S3CoffeeCo | @RiseAboveCoffee  
Facebook: @S3CoffeeCo | @RiseAboveCoffee

Let's get caffeinated for a cause! ☕

P.S. Don't forget, Melissa also wrangles benefits and coffee beans at Nestlé – talk about a multi-talented wonder woman!



## Shawn Heistand

### Connection Coach, Arizona Coalition for Military Families

Shawn Heistand is currently a Connection Coach with the Arizona Coalition for Military Families. Shawn is an Army Combat veteran who spent 10 years in the U.S. Army as a Forward Observer and Recruiting & Retention NCO. Prior to working for the Arizona Coalition for Military Families Shawn served as the Young Adult and Military Ministry Pastor at Abundant Life Foursquare Church. In his free time, Shawn can be found exploring the hiking trails of southern Arizona.



## **Anthony Herrera**

### **Manager, Talent Acquisition, Arizona Public Service**

Anthony Herrera is a human resources leader with over 20 years of experience, specializing in talent acquisition, talent management and project management. Anthony joined APS in 2012 and currently serves the Manager of Talent Acquisition where he has responsibility over the company's overall hiring strategy and programs. As a former United States Marine, Anthony is passionate about serving the military community and has worked to implement a variety of programs at APS aimed at supporting veterans. Anthony received a Bachelor of Science in Business, Human Resource Management from Western Governors University and holds over 20 professional certifications in human resources and project management.

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## **Rachel Krausman**

### **CRRC Coordinator, Phoenix VA**

Rachel is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and native Arizonan. Rachel has worked at the Phoenix VA, in homeless programs, since March 2020. In that time, she has worked as a HUDVASH Case Manager, HUDVASH Supervisor, Veterans Justice Program Supervisor, and the CRRC Coordinator. When she is not working she enjoys hiking, reading, and spending time with her fur babies.

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## **Nathan Kelley**

### **Student Services Manager | Veteran Services, Estrella Mountain Community College**

Nathan Kelley is the Manager of Veteran Services from Estrella Mountain Community College. He holds an Associates in Arts and an Associates in Science from Estrella Mountain Community College and a Bachelor's of Science in Criminal Justice & Criminology with a certificate in Homeland Security from Arizona State University. Nathan served 8 years in the U.S. Army and did 3 combat deployments to Iraq and a humanitarian relief mission to hurricane Katrina in 2005 earning multiple awards and commendations during his time in service to our country.

Nathan started his journey in the Maricopa Community Colleges as a VA work study at EMCC in 2013 and now has over 10 years of experience helping student veterans and their dependents. He is very passionate about helping students achieve their academic and life goals in any arena, but specifically veteran and dependent students who are utilizing VA education benefits or needing to be connected to other VA related services.



## **Eric Knott**

### **Professor of Business, Arizona State University**

Eric Knott is a professor at the W. P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University where he teaches undergraduates and MBAs general management, leadership, human resources, and consulting. He is the past president of the Society for Human Resource Management of Greater Phoenix and past chairman of the board for the Arizona Small Business Association. He has over 20 years of HR leadership experience prior to teaching, owns the consulting firm FinePoint HR, and has won awards for his teaching and his impact in the state's business community.



## **Matthew Langseth**

### **Military Veteran Program Coordinator, City of Tucson**

Matthew is the Military Veteran Program Coordinator for the City of Tucson and the primary Department of Defense (DoD) Skillbridge Program point of contact. He started his career with the City of Tucson in April of 2023.

Matthew served over 21 years in the military as an aviation operations specialist, in various level of responsibility and roles, including facilitator, course manager, branch chief, operations and planning, training, and flight operations. He is the 2015 Arizona Army National Guard Instructor of the Year Winner and recipient of the Order of Saint Michael (Bronze Award).

He is a veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom VIII (Afghanistan) and served in the Active Army, Arizona and Montana Army National Guard, and in the Arizona Army National Guard in an Active Guard Reserve (AGR) status.

Matthew remains active in the veteran, military/veteran spouse, and transitioning service member communities in a volunteer status as the Director of Marketing and Events for a global 501c3 non-profit (Vets2Industry) and mentor. He also stays active in the community as a photographer.



## **Rachel Larson, PhD**

### **Clinical Associate Professor, Director-Military and Veteran Resilience and Health Collaborative, Arizona State University**

Rachel Larson holds her PhD in Health, Wellness and Human Performance. She is a Clinical Associate Professor in Sports Science & Strength and Conditioning in the College of Health Solutions at Arizona State University (ASU). Dr. Larson is also the Director of the Military and Veteran Resilience and Health Collaborative at ASU.

Larson is a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist with distinction (CSCS,\*D) and a Tactical Strength and Conditioning Facilitator certified with distinction (TSAC-F,\*D). As a strength and conditioning coach, Larson has worked with a myriad of athletes & tactical populations over the years. More recently focusing her work with first responders, ROTC and military populations. Larson oversees all First Responder & military internships at ASU as she works closely with these groups to educate and improve physical performance.

Dr. Larson's research includes a focus on neuroscience, health, and performance across the life span of a Warfighter. She leads a data and evaluation team working on various projects to address social determinants of health (SDOH) for Veterans in the state of Arizona. Dr. Larson also runs a large scale DoD (USAMRDC-MTEC) funded project working with multiple military installations to increase readiness through cross-cutting efforts.

Larson's projects have led to the implementation of comprehensive strategies for resiliency and risk reduction to improve health outcomes for Veterans, service members and their families.



## **Erica Leffler**

### **Veteran Community Outreach Coordinator, Virtue Recovery Center**

Erica is a 44 year old mother of three who served her country in the US Army. After her time in service, she went to college and earned her degree in social work. She has spent the last 7 years serving the community as a mental health professional working in private hospitals and the VA. She has recently transitioned to her current role as Veteran Community Outreach Coordinator with Virtue Recovery Centers. She is passionate about helping Veterans and spends much of her free time volunteering for non-profit Veteran service organizations. Erica is driven by three central tenets, which are faith, family and fitness. If she is not spending her time with her family, you will find her running, strength training or finding a mountain to hike. Erica's interest don't stop there, she enjoys shooting, pickle ball, watching movies, cooking, entertaining, and shopping. Erica considers herself a philomath with a passion for information and learning. She is excited to be part of both the clinical skills and practice and the risk reduction track, as this is her 2nd year of presenting at the symposium.



## **Angela LoPresti, LCSW**

### **Local Recovery Coordinator, Southern Arizona VA Health Care System**

Angelika LoPresti, LCSW is the Local Recovery Coordinator for the Southern Arizona VA Health Care System (SAVAHCS), the Evidence Based Psychotherapy Coordinator and the Liaison for the Southern Arizona Veterans Mental Health Advocacy Council. Angelika joined the SAVAHCS team in January 2012. Angelika is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. She earned her Master of Social Work degree at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas.

As the Local Recovery Coordinator, Angelika serves as an internal consultant to Behavioral Health Leadership and VA staff to promote Recovery Oriented Practice within the VA. Angelika coordinates staff training and special projects that focus on mental health stigma reduction, consumer advocacy, peer support, family support, psychosocial rehabilitation and community integration for Veterans.



**Linda MacLeish, MC, LPC**  
Program Director, Building Spiritual Strength Program,  
Casa Veterans Ministry, Franciscan Renewal Center



**Norberto Marquez**  
Manager, Be Connected, Solari Crisis & Human Services

Veteran advocate, NAU Alumni and Gold Axe recipient, servant leader, crisis specialist and 1st generation immigrant. Manager of operations at Solari Crisis & Human Services. Passionate about helping address and eliminate the barriers to physical, mental, financial, and spiritual wellbeing. I strive to make the world a better place by positively impacting one person at a time.



**Russell Mascari**  
Be Connected Liaison, Marine Corps League

Served in the USMC 1953-1961.

I am Past Commandant and an active member of Marine Corps League Detachment 757 Lake Havasu City.

Our League is classified as an IRS 501 c (4) Non-Profit Charity Organization. Our mission is to help active duty service members, veterans and their families.

We raise funds through donations and several fundraising events: our annual Christmas tree sale, Havasu Memorial Walkway Memorial Pavers, rafflles, Lake Havasu City Swap Meet, other exhibits, etc.

Our Detachment also provides 24/7 security for the Annual Run to the Sun Car Show and other events for which we receive donations. With the monies we raise, we help people in need by providing food, clothing, paying utility bills, car repairs, mortgage payments, rent assistance, funeral expenses, etc.

We also assist veterans with education connections and provide scholarships to veteran connected Lake Havasu High School students.

Lake Havasu is a very patriotic city and we are grateful to the community for their support.

I also serve as Arizona's Marine Corps League's Be Connected Liaison Officer and Southwest Division Marine 4 Life Liaison Officer.

Kind regards & Semper Fi,  
Russ Mascari



## **Amanda Mason, MSW, LCSW, NBC-HWC, CDP**

**Social Work Coordinator, Program of General Caregiver Support Services, Phoenix VA Healthcare System**

Amanda Mason, LCSW, NBC-HWC, CDP has served as a Social Work Coordinator for the Program of General Caregiver Support Services (PGCSS) at the Phoenix VA Healthcare System (PVAHCS) since 2020. Amanda's tenure at the PVAHCS began in 2009 as a Social Worker on the Suicide Prevention Team. From 2012-2020 she worked in Homeless Programs, as a Housing and Urban Development - VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Social Work Supervisor and as the Homeless Program Social Work Section Chief. Amanda obtained her MSW from Arizona State University in 2004 and her LCSW in 2009. In 2022 she became a National Board Certified Health and Wellbeing Coach.



## **Kinsey McManus**

**Programs Director, Alzheimer's Association Desert Southwest Chapter**

Kinsey oversees care and support services for people living with dementia and their loved ones across Arizona and southern Nevada. Over the past 20 years, she has had the privilege to work in a variety of healthcare and non-profit organizations providing individual and family counseling, community education, and healthcare advocacy. Kinsey received her M.A. in Psychology from Boston University and her M.S. in Social Work from Columbia University. She is a passionate advocate for involving families in healthcare and brings her knowledge as a family caregiver, clinician, community organizer, and researcher to her current work.



## **Garland Miller**

**State Consultant, Military OneSource**

Has served the military community as the Arizona Military OneSource State Consultant for 12 years. Served 10+ years active-duty Navy with three deployments, was also a Navy spouse who experienced his wife's deployment.



## **Miles Morell**

**Program Administrator, Arizona Department of Veterans' Services**

My name is Miles Morell and I am the Program Administrator at the Arizona Department of Veterans Services. I am an Air Force Veteran and have served in the Veterans space for 7 years now.



## **Danielle Morales, Esq**

### **Staff Attorney, Community Legal Services**

As a recent law graduate, Danielle was with CLS when the firm began its set aside clinic many years ago. Though she spent some time away as in-house counsel for a local community non-profit, Danielle returned to CLS and has seen the unit's work grow in keeping with changes to post conviction relief laws. Danielle now assists low-income Arizonans with obtaining set-asides, restoration of their civil rights, and sealing of their criminal records, while also representing individuals in their unemployment benefit appeals, and before the IRS as they seek tax-debt relief. When she is not practicing law, Danielle enjoys live shows, trying a new recipe, and spending time discovering all the natural beauty that Arizona has to offer through the eyes of her children.



## **Richard Mulder**

### **Executive Director, Quality Resilience Fitness, 501(c)(3)**

A former Army officer, Rich graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 2009. He served five years in the Infantry, completing Air Assault, Airborne, and Ranger Schools as well as a combat tour to Afghanistan, where he led over 120 dismounted patrols and earned the Bronze Star and the Combat Infantryman Badge. After his service, Rich obtained his Strength and Conditioning Specialist certification from the NSCA and his Master's Degree from Arizona State University, where he received the Outstanding Masters Scholar, Teacher and Leader Award. While he continues to train the tactical community, he has also worked with numerous amateur and professional athletes including record-holding powerlifters, collegiate golfers and baseball players, AVP beach volleyball players, and multiple NFL players. From 2018-2023, he served as the strength coach for South Mountain Community College baseball and golf; nineteen Division 1 scholarships were awarded to his athletes in this timeframe and SMCC Men's Golf won the National Championship in 2018 and 2022. In addition to being a certified Transformational Coach with Being True To You, Rich has been published in NSCA Coach, Strength Performance Daily, and has spoken at the Rocky Mountain Region NSCA convention (2017) as well as the annual Grounded Athlete Development Program in Tainan and Taichung, Taiwan (2017-2019). During this time, he was also an adjunct professor at Ottawa University. He was the Strongman Corporation co-chair for the state of Arizona from 2018-2020 and served on the NSCA Arizona State Advisory Board from 2017 to 2020. He is the Founder and Owner of Liberty Performance Training in Phoenix, Arizona as well as the Executive Director of Quality Resilience Fitness, a nation-wide nonprofit organization that promotes mental and physical health for veterans. When not coaching others, training himself, or improving his business, Rich can be found reading good fiction, writing the ongoing fantasy series Calamity's Window, bowhunting, or spending time with his wonderful friends and family.





## Jocelyn Muzzin, LCSW

### Coordinated Entry Specialist, Southern Arizona VA Health Care System

I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and have worked in the Homeless Programs at the Southern Arizona VA Health Care System since 2015. I currently serve as the Tucson Pima Collaboration to End Homelessness Board Chairperson and serve on various committees through the Arizona Balance of State Continuum of Care.



## Brett Neibel

### Phoenix Program Manager, Merging Vets and Players

Brett Neibel served as an infantryman in the United States Marine Corps from 2010 to 2020. During this time, he served under 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines, and 1st Battalion 5th Marines and was a Combat Instructor at the School of Infantry (West). While serving, Brett had the opportunity to travel the world and train in the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Australia, and Japan, as well as a combat deployment to Afghanistan in 2011.

In 2017 Brett was lucky enough to spend a couple of days and nights with some of the MVP Los Angeles members, volunteering at a Bear Grylls's Survival Challenge event in Santa Clarita, CA.

"I immediately noticed that the MVP members were a family and shared the same camaraderie seen in the military despite some of them having left the service years ago. At that time, I didn't know when I would exit the military or what struggles I would face in that transition, but I had this overwhelming feeling that I would need this group in my life when that time came".

Brett left the Marine Corps in August of 2020 and immediately submitted for membership with MVP. "Transition has been and still is an ongoing struggle. Isolation is common amongst veterans, but COVID-19 lockdowns only perpetuated the situation in a new city with no friends or family. I was suffering from depression, loss of identity, and loss of purpose, and if it weren't for the efforts to take MVP to the virtual platform, I know that I would have spiraled".

In September of 2022, MVP expanded to Arizona, opening the 8th chapter in Phoenix. In June of 2023, Brett officially signed on as the Program Manager for MVP Phoenix. "My brothers and sisters at MVP have supported me in my struggles and have always been there to celebrate the wins. MVP has helped me find a new purpose, and I'm not sure I can ever thank them enough".



## **Brock Pennington**

### **Community Liaison, EVS Coalition**

When I was 17 years old I experienced a mental health crisis which led to suicidal ideations and an addiction to IV Heroin. After becoming sober at the age of 19 I joined the Army to serve my country as an infantryman. Shortly after joining, I deployed with 172nd Stryker Brigade to Mosul and Baghdad, Iraq. After returning home I suffered from Complex PTSD due to prior mental health, substance use, and events faced overseas. I left the Army and continued to face mental health and substance use issues for over a decade. I engaged in private practice psychiatry which led to an addiction to Benzodiazepines and stimulants. After being abruptly taken off of these medications I relapsed at 26 years old on Heroin. I struggled with alcohol or opiate use off and on trying to manage my complex PTSD. My last time using opiates I ended up homeless and addicted to Fentanyl, and was offered to detox at battle buddies home.

After detoxing I researched new PTSD treatments, which included psychedelic assisted therapy along with meditation and breath work to create new belief systems. While living in Denver, CO I utilized these treatments, which created a sense of peace for the first time since I was a teenager. I then continued practicing meditation, breath work, exercise, and nutrition to manage inflammation and my stress response to create new positive belief systems about myself and the world around me. I began working in the behavioral health field in 2020 during the pandemic and teach these coping skills (breath work, meditation) while working with patients to reduce risk of relapse and suicides.

I am currently a community liaison for El Dorado Springs Behavioral Health and help manage the City of Tucson homeless outreach coalition, created the EVS Coalition in partnership with the VA, and help motivate others into substance use and mental health treatment daily for one of the largest voluntary level 1 facilities in AZ.



## **Dee Person**

### **Assistant Director, Arizona Coalition for Military Families**

Dee Person is the Assistant Director of the The Arizona Coalition for Military Families. She is a graduate of the United States Naval Academy and a Combat Veteran who served during Operation Enduring and Iraqi Freedom. Dee's role within the Coalition focus on the state's capacity to work together to support service members, veterans and their families. With the core belief that everyone can have a positive impact, we are focused on empowering all Arizona residents with knowledge and skills to make a difference in the lives of those around them through four key areas: Statewide Coordination and Collaboration, Professional Development and Community Education, Regional Community Capacity Building, and Strategic Partnership.



## **Anjulie Pfeifer**

### **Clinical Therapist, Anjulie Pfeifer PLLC**

Anjulie Pfeifer has been a military spouse since 1996. She and her husband have two children. She has encountered many challenges and adventures during her husband's military trainings, deployments, PCS-ing and life as a wife of a service member. She is currently in private practice as a Licensed Professional Counselor and enjoys serving first responders and military members.



## Claire Piazza-Gabriellini

### Suicide Prevention Coordinator, Phoenix VA

I have been in the social work field for 10 years. I started my career in upstate New York working with the homeless veteran population, addressing their psychosocial needs and working on goals of permanent housing solutions while overcoming barriers. I then joined the Bronx VA HUD VASH team, working with veterans in the five boroughs of New York City who were in need of housing and navigating the city's shelter system. In December of 2018 I transitioned to the Phoenix VA and worked for a year in our VA's HUD VASH program. In January of 2020 I decided to make a shift and started in the Suicide Prevention team working as a case manager and later promoted to a program coordinator. It has been a privilege to work with our veterans and help them navigate through their most difficult times. Our team has been able to partner with community agencies to be able to address suicide prevention and postvention needs.



## Angie Rodgers

### Executive Deputy Director, Chief Executive Office, Arizona Department of Economic Security

Angie Rodgers is the Executive Deputy Director and Cabinet Executive Officer of the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES), the state's human services agency. Rodgers sets the strategic direction for DES and oversees the programs and services that help struggling and vulnerable Arizonans reach their potential. To fulfill this mission, Rodgers collaborates with families, community-based organizations, and state and federal partners on employment opportunities, safety net services, and community and business engagement. She also serves as the co-chair of the Governor's Interagency and Community Council on Homelessness and Housing.

Rodgers brings more than 25 years of experience in public policy research and advocacy focusing on human services. She served for 10 years as the President and CEO for the Arizona Food Bank Network (AzFBN), a nonprofit membership organization, representing five large food banks that distribute food statewide to nearly 1,000 partner agencies. Prior to that role, Rodgers served as the Human Services Policy Advisor acting as the liaison between the Governor's Office and DES as well as the Department of Juvenile Corrections. She was instrumental in the development of high-level child and family welfare services policy and budget negotiations for nearly \$750 million in State resources. She directed the state task force on the Earned Income Tax Credit, which lifted thousands of Arizonans out of poverty. Rodgers earned her Master's Degree in Social Work from Arizona State University and her Bachelors' Degrees in Criminology and Sociology from the University of Kansas. She has four amazing children and two sweet dogs.



## Sean Ryan

### Assistant Professor, Arizona State University

Dr. Sean Ryan is an Assistant Clinical Professor at Arizona State University, teaching courses Project Management and Organizational Leadership. Previously he taught Strategy and Policy, Management, Organizational Behavior and Public and Non-profit Management. After graduating from West Point with a bachelor's degree in engineering, Dr. Ryan spent 30 years in the military retiring in 2012 as a Colonel. After graduating from Casa Grande Union High School, he attended the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York where he received the Major General Thomas Sands award as the top Fencer and Foil Team Captain. After graduating from West Point Lieutenant Ryan served as an Infantry Officer at Fort Carson, CO and, upon promotion to Captain, joined the Special Forces (Green Beret). His career in Infantry, Special Forces, Psychological Operations, and strategy was characterized by diverse assignments in Asia, the Middle East, Southwest Asia, and the Americas. He commanded two Special Forces operational detachments, a Special Forces Company, a Psychological Operations Company, and the 17th Psychological Operations Battalion. Immediately after 9/11, then LTC Ryan served on the Army and Joint Staffs in the Pentagon. Later he served as Chief of Staff and Deputy Director of the Joint Center for International Security Forces Assistance and as Deputy Director of the US Central Command Interagency Action Group. He retired from the Army following a tour as the Department of Defense Lead in the Afghanistan Threat Finance Cell in Afghanistan. He subsequently taught Unconventional Warfare and Joint Strategic Planning at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare and School. He received his Ph.D. in Management, a Masters in Strategy Studies, and a Masters in Business Administration. Over the course of his career, COL Ryan earned the Ranger Tab, Master Parachutist Badge, Combat Divers Badge, Military Freefall Badge, and Royal Thai Counterinsurgency Badge. He was awarded the Defense Superior Service Medal, Bronze Star Medal, Army Superior Unit Award and 5 Joint Meritorious Unit Awards from the Army and a Professor of Impact Award from ASU.



## Melissa Rueschhoff, Esq.

### Founder, Partner & Advocate, Holon Law Partners, LLP

Melissa Rueschhoff was born on Blytheville Air Force Base, Arkansas, to a teacher and a B-52 pilot who served in Vietnam. She was raised in Plano, Texas, then received a Bachelor of Science degree in Communications from the University of Texas in Austin and a Jurisprudence Doctorate degree from South Texas College of Law in Houston.

She has been licensed to practice law in Texas, Arizona, Alabama and Hawaii, as well as six United States District Courts. As such, she has practiced civil and criminal law in state and federal courts. Melissa has also been a law professor at University of Arizona's Rogers College of Law in Arizona, Faulkner University's Jones School of Law in Alabama, and University of Hawaii's Richardson School of Law in Hawaii.

Her legal career began as a criminal prosecutor in Special Victims Units and later focused on combating child sex trafficking at home and abroad. In Hawaii, she was an Analyst / Special Prosecutor for the Hawaii Internet Crimes Against Children Unit in the Hawaii Attorney General's Office and a Legislative Attorney for the Hawaii State Legislature Judiciary Chair. She is also a General Partner of R & R Elite Investments, LLP, established for real estate investment purposes.

She served on Hawaii's Ho'Ola Na Pua executive board of directors for six years and currently serves on Washington DC's CGO Foundation executive board of trustees and Arizona's Leading Ladies cadre. She is an AETC senior leader spouse and an invited speaker at PACAF command conferences, leadership symposiums and podcasts worldwide. Melissa was featured in Pacific Edge Women in Business as the first licensed Hawaii attorney under the military spouse reciprocity rule and for her dedication to advocacy.

Melissa channels her 25+ years of experience into advocating for entrepreneurs with a vision for bettering our community and our world. This means turning an idea into a reality with strategic planning, business formations, legislation/lobbying and litigation, if need be. Her motto is "Live intentionally, advocate zealously, and affect meaningful change."



## Joan Sisco

### CEO/Founder, Veterans First LTD

Joan Sisco enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1974 and was honorably discharged in 1977 at the rank of Sergeant, E-5. She founded Veterans First, Ltd. a non profit organization in 2003 and has served as its President/CEO with a Mission of preventing homeless and stabilizing lives of Veterans with special emphasis on Women, Disabled and Senior Veterans. Joan serves on 2 Phoenix VA Hospital Advisory Councils, US Vets, Ashley's Place Advisory Council. She is a member of several veteran and community organizations. Joan was inducted into the Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame, Class of 2009.



## Joshua Stegemeyer

### Suicide Prevention Program Manager, Arizona Department of Health Services

Joshua Stegemeyer serves as the State's suicide prevention coordinator and has worked for Arizona Department of Health Services since January, 2022. Additionally, Joshua serves as a Health Safety Officer for the Arizona Health Emergency Operations Command, meeting the needs of the personnel responding to Arizona's health emergencies. Prior to serving the state of Arizona, Joshua was in practice as a Marriage and Family Therapist in Orange County, California. Joshua holds an M.A. - Psychology, with emphasis in Marriage and Family Therapy, as well as Clinical Counseling, from the Chapman University System, Irvine, California. Joshua is married to his wife Samantha and is a medically retired Army Combat Veteran.



## **Charles (Chuck) Swedrock, MBA, MSW**

**Lifelong Student of Metaphysics & Spirituality,  
International Association for Near-Death Studies (iands.org)**

Bachelor of Science in Computer Science (BSCS) -- 1969 from Pennsylvania State University (PSU). Military Service: Private, Private First Class, Lance Corporal, Corporal -- Nov. 1969 to Nov. 1971 in the United States Marine Corp (USMC). Master of Business Administration (MBA) – 1974-1975 from University of Rochester, Business School. Master of Social Work (MSW, inc.) – 2003-2004 at Roberts Wesleyan College (RWC), NY. A YouTube recording of a talk I gave for a retirement community in California can be found at the following link: “A Life Guided by Experiences – Chuck Swedrock” or [https://youtu.be/C2Bs5g18a\\_U](https://youtu.be/C2Bs5g18a_U). That talk covered an overview of IANDS, the subject of NDEs, et al., and significant parts of my life journey to be involved in this subject matter.



## **John Tansill**

**Director of Veteran Affairs, SkillStorm**

John Tansill retired from the Marine Corps Reserve after 28 years of active and reserve service at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He served in the Infantry, ANGLICO, Operations, and as a Public Affairs Officer. Tansill received his BA from Seton Hall University where he played basketball as a walk-on in the Big East Conference. He has 13 years' experience on Wall Street working on the floors of the AMEX, NYSE, Cantor Fitzgerald, and Morgan Stanley and ran his own business for more than a decade. Tansill has managed more than 300 Marines in a combat zone as a Captain and was a Chief of Staff / Strategic Consultant for CACI International supporting the US Coast Guard Counterterrorism and Port Security efforts for the Department of Homeland Security. Tansill just entered his 10th year in helping Veterans "Accelerate Opportunity into the IT industry, as software developers or cyber professionals. He was excited to join SkillStorm in March 2021 as their Director of Veteran Programs, as they make recruiting Veterans one of their main priorities and have been recognized by DOL with the 2022 - Platinum and 2023 - Gold Hire Vets Medallion Award for our Veteran Hiring and Military Times "Best for Vets" Employer 3 years in a row.



## **CW5 Ret. Trisha Thompson**

**DAV Commander, Disabled American Veterans**

I retired in Arizona from the US Army in 2006 as a CW5 Master Army Aviator. I was the Senior Instructor Pilot, Test Pilot, Instrument Examiner for the UH-60 Blackhawk. I have an extensive 26-year aviation background in Helicopters and Fixed Wing aircraft. I hold a Bachelor of Science Degree in Aviation Space and Technology.

I currently serve as the Commander for the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Chapter 14, Sierra Vista, AZ. I am also a Veterans Service Officer for DAV, filing Veterans Administration claims for our disabled Veterans and their families. I serve as the Veterans Assistance Program Grant Writer for Cochise Serving Veterans non-profit organization as well as grant writing, pro-bono, for other non-profits supporting Veterans in need. I am a member of the American Legion and of Military Officer Association of American. In addition, I bring a myriad of experience with veteran organizations and their leadership teams. As the DAV Commander and Veterans Service Officer, I work with Director of Constituent Services Military & Veterans Affairs in AZ, Arizona Department of Veteran Services and most Veteran Services organizations dedicated to supporting veterans and their families. I served on the Board of Veterans Affairs for Representative for Congresswoman Ann Kirkpatrick (AZ-02) to support all our Veterans. I currently serve on the board as 2nd Chair of the United Veterans Council for the City of Sierra Vista.



## Cesar Torres

### Community Engagement Program Manager, Arizona Coalition for Military Families

Cesar, a retired Master Sergeant from the US Air Force, channels his passion for aiding service members, veterans, and their families into his Community Engagement Program Manager role. With a wealth of experience in team management, administrative tasks, logistics, and IT responsibilities, he dedicates himself to supporting those who have served their country.



## Alisia (Giac-Thao) Tran

### Associate Professor, Arizona State University

Alisia (Giac-Thao) Tran is faculty at Arizona State University (School of Counseling and Counseling Psychology) and Phoenix College (Counseling Department). She heads the Tran Ethnic and Minority Psychology and Experiences (TEMPE) Lab and, to date, has published over 40 peer-reviewed papers, with a special interest in diverse populations, including racial/ethnic minorities, veterans/military, and athletes. Her scholarship has been recognized in major public forums, including USA Today, the BBC, and the New York Times. Her clinical training emphasized neuropsychology, pediatrics, veterans, and college students. She has been humbled and honored by her selection as the 2021 American Psychological Association Minority Fellowship Program Early Career Awardee for research, 2018 Asian American Psychological Association Early Career Research awardee, and the 2017 Arizona Psychological Association Faculty of the Year.



## Jamie Valderrama

### Associate Teaching Professor, Arizona State University

Jamie Valderrama is an Associate Teaching Professor and Undergraduate Coordinator at Arizona State University for the Integrative Health Initiative housed within the School of Social Work. Jamie is passionate about providing tools for responsive living via mindful practices and uses her extensive background in education to successfully integrate that knowledge within her courses as well as help both the community and ASU faculty integrate it into their coursework. Jamie currently teaches both undergraduate and graduate stress management courses, looking at the physiological and psychological responses to stress, neuroplasticity and ways to self-regulate through the lens of mindfulness. In addition to teaching and training, Jamie conducts keynotes and workshops on the personal and professional benefits of mindfulness, sits on ASU's Lifelong Learning Institute and Health and Wellness Committees and recently received the Arizona Behavioral Health Leadership in Service Award and ASU Apple Polisher Award for excellence in teaching. Jamie holds a B.S. in Biology Education and a M.A. in Interdisciplinary Studies with an emphasis on Integrative Health Modalities.



## Joshua Wear

### Rural Health Coordinator, NAVAHCS

Joshua Wear was appointed as one of two Rural Health Coordinator at Northern Arizona VA Health Care System (NAVAHCS) on February 12, 2023.

Prior to this position Mr. Wear was the Vocational Development Specialist with NAVAHCS, based at the Flagstaff VA Clinic with the VA Homeless Team in 2016. During his tenure with the NAVAHCS Homeless Team he was appointed as the Homeless Veteran Stand Down Coordinator in 2017 and held these positions till 2023. In this capacity Mr. Wear worked with multiple departments to establish outreach coordination and improved internal and external communication about community event increasing VA presence in the community.

Prior to joining the Department of Veteran Affairs Mr. Wear worked at Norco College as a Veteran Rep/VA work-study assisting newly discharged veteran to get started with GI Bill benefits and college classes.

Joshua served in the U.S. Navy from 2002- 2012 as an Aviation Electricians Mate. Mr. Wear reached the rank of E-5/ Second Class Petty Officer and earned Aviation Warfare pin for F/A-18 E/F in 2006. Mr. Wear separated from the U.S. Navy with an Honorable discharge.

Joshua moved to Flagstaff, AZ in 2016. In his spare time, he is often found hiking and exploring the mountains and deserts of Arizona and is currently a board member of a nonprofit organization called: Changed By Nature Outdoors. Changed By Nature is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that provides free outdoor opportunities to present and past military, first responders, youth, and people with serious permanent disabilities to get outdoors and do anything from gold panning to hiking, hunting, fishing, kayaking, 4x4ing and much more.





## Michael Wainscott

### Manager of Veteran Services, Phoenix College

Michael Wainscott is a United States Marine Corps veteran who believes that higher education is our greatest equalizer. Michael has over 14 years of experience in higher education, including 10 years working with veterans and military families. Since joining the Maricopa Community Colleges, Michael has served as the current manager of Veteran Services at Phoenix College, is the Vice-President of the Maricopa Veterans Education Taskforce(MVET), the past President of the Arizona Veterans Program Association(AVPA), and student veteran Mentor. In addition to his current role, Michael collaborates with key stakeholders and community partners to create opportunities for students to provide assistance/resources/employment opportunities to veteran students and their dependents. This includes a partnership with the Mana House, Southwest Veterans Chamber of Commerce, Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and others. Michael holds a BA in Education with a minor in Math from Arizona State University.



## Dean Wenrich

### Connection Coach, Arizona Coalition for Military Families

Dean Wenrich is a Connection Coach with Be Connected. He is a Vietnam Air Force veteran with a passion for his fellow veterans. After his separation from the military, he earned his Bachelor of Science degree and then worked in industry for quite a few years until he realized his real calling - helping others to improve their lives. Dean came to us from the public health sector. He also worked for a number of years in the public schools in Mohave County, Arizona.



## Lucy Willing

### Operations Director, Love Your School

Lucy is passionate about school choice and empowering families to find school options that serve them best. New to Arizona, she was amazed that a state can offer so many education possibilities for families! Lucy has a Bachelor's in Biblical Studies from Lancaster Bible College with a focus in counseling. She is also currently working towards her MDiv at Phoenix Seminary. Lucy worked in early childhood development programs serving children ages one to five, and also spent years tutoring and academic-mentoring students ages 14-22 in the United States, Lebanon, Slovakia, and the Netherlands. Lucy knows first-hand how important individualized education is for students and is grateful to live in Arizona where children are given the opportunity to attend a school that allows them to thrive!



## Mike Wold, MS, MBA

### Arizona Coordinator, Institute for Healing of Memories North America

Mike Wold is the volunteer Arizona Regional Coordinator for the Institute for Healing of Memories, an organization that conducts weekend Healing of Memories Workshops throughout the world, providing healing to people who are suffering psychologically or spiritually from the painful memories of the past. He coordinates these workshops for veterans in Arizona. Mike is a US Navy veteran who is involved in organizations serving veterans and their families including being the leader of the Our Lady of Joy Military Ministry in Carefree, Arizona. In 2019 Mike was inducted into the Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame.

Mike was a successful organizational development consultant, leadership coach, teacher and facilitator for more than 15 years and gained 25 years of experience in management and project management in the private and public sector. He is a former Financial Director and Assistant Commissioner for the Minnesota Department of Economic Security. He is also a former Engineering and Program Management Director at Lockheed Martin Corporation where he led large engineering organizations and business units. He served as a graduate level adjunct instructor at both the University of Minnesota and the Saint Mary's University of Minnesota. He holds an MS Degree in Mathematics from the University of Iowa and an MBA from the Carlson School of the University of Minnesota.



## Wanda Wright

### Director, Arizona State University, Office for Veteran and Military Academic Engagement

Director Wanda Wright is the third generation of her family to serve in the U.S. military. As a 1985 United States Air Force Academy graduate she began her military career as Deputy Budget Officer with the Tactical Air Command in South Carolina. During 21 years with the Arizona National Guard, she served in various positions finishing her career as the Director of Staff for the Adjutant General in Phoenix. She retired from military service in 2011 at the rank of Colonel. In 2015, Director Wright was selected by Governor Doug Ducey to lead the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services.

Director Wright was selected as the Director of the Office for Veteran and Military Academic Engagement and began her duties on 1 June 2023.



## Peta Yanka

### Director, Veteran and Military Services

Pete has worked within the field of higher education for over 25 years serving in different capacities within the community college setting, time at a large land grant institution, to his current home at Northern Arizona University. Within the various positions he served in, there has been a consistency of serving the Military Connected community. Through these different roles and environments, he has been able to better understand the unique aspect these students face along with gaining a strong appreciation for this amazing and diverse student community.