



# VASGW

The Virginia Association  
for Specialists in Group Work

## Group-a-Rama

April 17, 2026



1801 Alexander Bell Drive  
Reston, VA 20191

- 8:15-8:45am Check-In, Donation collection for INOVA Children's Cancer Ward (see donation information for items), Continental Breakfast & Coffee, 50/50 Raffle and Prize Raffle Tickets for Sale (cash or Zelle)
- 8:45-8:55am Opening Remarks
- 8:55-10:30am Keynote Speakers: **Kim Crumbley and Laura Rankhorn, School Counselors, Authors and Podcasters (Counselor Accents)**

### ***The Ripple Effect: Small Groups, Big Impact***

Counselors often face the challenge of balancing passion with sustainability — diving into initiatives with intense energy, only to find that the momentum fades, leaving them frustrated or burned out. This session, *The Ripple Effect: Small Groups, Big Impact*, addresses the struggle of intensity versus consistency and how it affects the impact of counseling programs. Using small groups as a practical lens, participants will explore how consistent, steady efforts — rather than short bursts of intensity — lead to deeper trust, stronger student engagement, and lasting program success. Through stories, strategies, and actionable takeaways, counselors will leave equipped to manage their energy, create sustainable practices, and foster meaningful ripple effects in their work.

10:45-11:45am Session A

#### **A-1/2 Small Group Sleuths: Using Data to Solve Student Needs**

**Presenters:** Kim Crumbley, MEd School Counseling & Laura Rankhorn EdS School Counseling

**Audience:** School Counselors, (ES, MS, HS), Graduate Students, Supervisors and Educators

**Summary:** Step into the role of data detective and join us for "Small Group Sleuths: Using Data to Solve Student Needs," a high-energy session where school counselors crack the case on what truly drives student success. Using a fun investigation-style framework, you'll learn how to spot hidden needs in your data, select the right students, gather meaningful evidence, analyze trends, and implement targeted small group interventions that actually make an impact. If you want to walk away with practical tools, real-world strategies, and a fresh way to make your groups more effective, this session is your next big case. Grab your metaphorical magnifying glass and get ready to solve the mystery behind stronger, smarter, data-powered small groups—your future groups (and your students!) will thank you.

**Session Learning Objectives: 1.)** Analyze Student Data to Identify Needs: Counselors will learn to review academic, behavioral, and social-emotional data to determine which students will benefit most from

small group interventions. **2.)** Design and Implement Data-Informed Small Groups: Counselors will create structured small group plans, including measurable goals, evidence-based activities, and strategies tailored to student needs. **3.)** Evaluate Group Effectiveness and Adjust Interventions: Counselors will learn methods for monitoring progress, interpreting post-group data, and refining interventions to maximize student outcomes.

**A-3 Group Counseling Techniques for International Populations: Activities Based on Experts from the Field\***

**\*This presentation does not qualify for CE hours**

**Presenters:** Sarah Yi, Aidan Markley, GMU Master's in Counseling students & Dr. Sam Steen, Professor at GMU and Director of the Research Action Consortium

**Audience:** Private Practitioners/Agency Counselors, General (open to all counseling professionals), Graduate Students, Supervisors and Educators

**Summary:** This program provides creative activities that can be used when facilitating groups with international populations. The techniques, tools, and skills shared in the session are informed by group experts with experience in international environments outside of the U.S. The ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors "Ability to identify and overcome barriers" and "Leadership and teamwork skills to work effectively in diverse groups", and "Cultural awareness, sensitivity, and responsiveness" align with this session's outcomes.

**Session Learning Objectives:** **1).** Apply research-informed, new, and potentially unorthodox counseling techniques during group sessions with international/multicultural populations. **2).** Enhance cultural responsiveness using an expanded counseling toolkit for groups with different cultural backgrounds and/or nationalities. **3).** Explore the facilitation of group techniques with a variety of multicultural perspectives in an international context.

**A-4 Felt Belonging: Creating LGBTQIA+ Celebratory and Neuro-Affirming Group Processes\***

**\*This presentation does not qualify for CE hours**

**Presenters:** Hela Baer, LCSW & Anna Morrison, LMSW

**Audience:** School Counselors, (ES, MS,HS), Private Practitioners/Agency Counselors, General (open to all counseling professionals), Graduate Students, Supervisors and Educators

**Summary:** Join us for a workshop that moves beyond definitions and focuses on the practice of creating LGBTQIA+ celebratory and neuro-affirming group processes that cultivate a culture of belonging and connection. Participants will be introduced to a framework for assessing and developing inclusive group processes in therapeutic and education settings. While this workshop focuses on supporting LGBTQIA+ and neurodivergent youth, this framework can be used to support youth of all identities and experiences.

**Session Learning Objectives:** **1).** Describe at least three domains of inclusive group processes. **2).** Assess current facilitation practices using the Five Domains framework. **3).** Identify at least two strategies to foster a culture of belonging in group processes.

**A-5 The Nature of Group Healing: Integrating Ecotherapy and Systems Theory for Enhanced Therapeutic Outcomes\***

**\*This presentation does not qualify for CE hours**

**Presenter:** Iman Mostafa, GMU Master's in Counseling student

**Audience:** General (open to all counseling professionals)

**Summary:** This curriculum will provide a unique approach that integrates ecotherapy and systems theory to enhance group therapy experiences for clients and counselors. This integrative approach reframes well-being, healing and growth as being deeply connected to Earth and its natural ecosystems. Participants will learn practical strategies that leverage their environmental contexts to deepen group cohesion, foster greater personal insight, and improve therapeutic outcomes. This content supports ASCA Mindset Standard M 1.

**Session Learning Objectives:** **1).** Identify at least three core principles of ecotherapy and systems theory that are directly applicable to work in group therapy settings. **2).** Develop one activity or intervention that successfully integrates a specific natural element (e.g., an outdoor space or natural materials) to

enhance group cohesion. **3).** Explain how the natural environment can be used as a co-therapist or symbolic tool to reframe clients' problems within the context of their broader systemic and ecological relationships.

#### **A-6 A Guide to Facilitating Groups with Diverse Populations**

**Presenter:** Gregory C. Wright, LCPC, NCC

**Audience:** Private Practitioners/Agency Counselors, General (open to all counseling professionals), Graduate Students, Supervisors and Educators

**Summary:** This session explores ethical and culturally responsive group counseling with diverse populations. Grounded in ASGW Best Practices and ASCA's Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success, it emphasizes fostering belonging, empathy, and growth. Examples from men's groups and Black clients highlight adapting interventions to promote safety, cultural identity, and empowerment while addressing developmental and relational needs within inclusive group settings.

**Session Learning Objectives: 1).** How to better engage minority males about mental health **2).** How important engagement is with the counseling relationship **3).** Why mental health is so hard for minority males

11:45am-12:30pm Lunch – buffet with selection of meats, cheese and fruit

12:30-1:30pm Session B

#### **B-1 Pokémon Power: Leveraging a Worldwide Craze to Engage Students in SEL**

**Presenter:** Becca Wilson, Licensed Professional School Counselor

**Audience:** School Counselors, (ES, MS, HS), Private Practitioners/Agency Counselors; General (open to all counseling professionals); Graduate Students; Supervisors and Educators

**Summary:** This session explores ideas for 6–8-week small groups that fuse the evidence-based Zones of Regulation curriculum with counselor-crafted SEL trading cards inspired by the Pokémon universe. You'll leave with a digital set of SEL "Trainer Cards" to deploy each week, helping students evolve their emotional vocabulary, unlock regulation strategies, and build a take-home SEL Pokédex. While primarily intended for elementary practitioners, the tools in this session can help level up therapeutic buy-in for Pokémon fans of any age.

**Session Learning Objectives: 1).** Understand the Zones of Regulation framework and identify options to use it in a 6–8-week intervention. **2).** Consider how leveraging student interests leads to increased buy-in. **3).** Be equipped with Pokémon cards to help teach and positively reinforce Zones of Regulation and other SEL strategies

#### **B-2 From Storytelling to Resilience: Creative Group Techniques for Emotional Growth and Prevention**

**Presenter:** Dr. Maryam Majd, Developmental Psychologist

**Audience:** School Counselors, (ES, MS, HS), Private Practitioners/Agency Counselors, General (open to all counseling professionals), Graduate Students, Supervisors and Educators

**Summary:** This experiential session demonstrates creativity-based group methods that translate developmental-psychology research into practical prevention tools. Using storytelling, art, and imagination, participants learn three adaptable group techniques, Creative Identity Mapping, Emotion Color Circles, and Story Building for Resilience, to strengthen self-regulation, empathy, and protective thinking. A brief documentary segment will illustrate real-world applications of these methods in schools and community settings.

**Session Learning Objectives: 1).** Explain how storytelling and creative expression enhance emotional regulation and resilience. **2).** Apply three practical creativity-based group techniques in school and community settings. **3).** Integrate developmental research findings into group curricula for prevention and emotional growth.

- B-3 Group Counseling Leadership Skills for School Counselors**  
**Presenter:** Dr. Sam Steen, Professor at GMU and Director of the Research Action Consortium  
**Audience:** School Counselors, (ES, MS,HS), Graduate Students, Supervisors and Educators  
**Summary:** In this session, participants will review knowledge and group counseling leadership skills to create culturally affirming groups for students in elementary, middle and high schools. Participants will critique and generate groups based on the “TRATE My Group” framework which helps counselors plan, implement and evaluate Tier 1, Tier 2 and nontraditional groups (e.g., clubs, after school programs). This session aligns with the ASCA’s student standards “Leadership and teamwork skills to work effectively in diverse groups”.  
**Session Learning Objectives: 1).** Create culturally affirming groups for students in elementary, middle or high schools **2).** Generate different types of groups across MTSS Tiers based on the “TRATE My Group” framework **3).** Determine 5 Steps to take when applying the knowledge and skills learned in the session
- B-4 One-Hour Lifeline: Reflections of a Group Art Therapist Working in Inpatient Settings**  
**Presenter:** Yonsenia White, LPC, LPCC, ATR, CMCC  
**Audience:** Private Practitioners/Agency Counselors, General (open to all counseling professionals), Graduate Students, Supervisors and Educators  
**Summary:** Group art therapists provide two types of psychotherapy in multiple daily groups, with clientele of all ages, diagnoses and acuity levels at a hectic pace with changing environmental elements. Within one hour, these providers build therapeutic rapport and skill-building with clients they may never see again. This session explores a group art therapist’s experience in creating “one-hour lifelines” and offers helpful clinical management strategies for emerging and seasoned group therapists working in similar settings.  
**Session Learning Objectives: 1).** Describe the impact and benefits of introducing creativity into group session work; **2).** Learn to use client resistance as a therapeutic tool that strengthens boundary setting for group safety and empathy building; **3).** Adopt self-care practices for crisis care management and provider self-reflection.
- B-5 Bridging Voices Through Group Work: Equipping Counselors for Bilingual Campuses and Classrooms**  
**Presenters:** Joy Mwendwa, LPC; Sam Landa, Ph.D., LPC; Bosede Balogun, Ph.D.; Deepa Emmanuel, MA  
**Audience:** School Counselors, (ES, MS, HS), Supervisors and Educators  
**Summary: Summary:** This session examines statistics and trends in bilingual student populations across educational settings and explores implications for counseling practice and supervision. Through literature review and case studies, participants will evaluate culturally responsive group counseling models and classroom-based interventions. Emphasis will be placed on equipping counselors with practical strategies to reduce linguistic barriers, enhance cultural competence, and implement effective group approaches within diverse academic and clinical environments.  
**Session Learning Objectives: 1.** Discuss current statistics and trends related to bilingual students across educational settings. **2.** Analyze the implications of bilingual populations for counseling practice and counselor supervision. **3.** Apply culturally responsive group counseling strategies through applied case study analysis to support bilingual students in classroom and clinical settings

1:45-2:45pm

Session C

- C-1 Kimochis® in Action: Building Emotional Awareness and Connection Through Group Work**  
**Presenters:** Becca Wilson & Richard Jones-Hang, Licensed Professional School Counselors  
**Audience:** Elementary School Counselors, Private Practitioners/Agency Counselors, Graduate Students  
**Summary:** Discover how the Kimochis® curriculum can transform group counseling by teaching children to identify, express, and manage emotions in fun, hands-on ways. This interactive session will introduce the core concepts of Kimochis®, explore practical resources for school and private practice settings, and

demonstrate how to adapt lessons for small group use. Leave with tools and strategies to create emotionally safe spaces where students learn empathy, self-regulation, and positive communication. **Session Learning Objectives: 1).** Have a general understanding of Kimochis curriculum **2).** Gain familiarity with session resources that they can access and use in their school or private practice. **3).** Understand ways to apply the curriculum to a small group format.

**C-2 Healing in Community: Integrating Faith into Group Work\***

**\*This presentation does not qualify for CE hours**

**Presenters:** Irene Kiraithe-Muchene & Shelly Taylor, Masters in Clinical Mental Health students

**Audience:** General (open to all counseling professionals), Graduate Students

**Summary:** This presentation explores how faith integration and trauma-informed care strengthen group work in Christian counseling settings. Participants learn how scripture, emotional regulation skills, and supportive group structure foster resilience, belonging, confidence, and healthy relationship skills. The session will highlight the importance of creating safe, spiritually grounded groups and will offer practical ideas for engaging activities that build connection, deepen reflection, and support whole-person healing in a church-based counseling environment.

**Session Learning Objectives: 1).** Participants will describe how faith integration enhances safety and connection in groups. **2).** Participants will identify trauma-informed practices that support emotional and relational growth. **3).** Participants will implement practical, faith-aligned activities that promote resilience and group engagement

**C-3 Tips and Tricks to Make Managing Groups More Manageable**

**Presenter:** Johanna Druen, Licensed Professional School Counselor

**Audience:** School Counselors, (ES, MS, HS), Graduate Students

**Summary:** Small group counseling can feel daunting at first, yet research shows it is as effective as individual therapy while reaching more students in one setting (APA, 2023). Initially, I questioned its value, but in six years of counseling on the elementary level, I saw 100% improvement in targeted mindsets and behaviors in every group I ran. This session will equip participants with practical tools to create safe spaces, collect data for membership and curriculum decisions, and design a six-week program—without extensive prep time or costly resources.

**Session Learning Objectives: 1).** Participants will demonstrate creativity to create and manage group curricula **2).** Participants will be able to apply media and technology skills **3).** Participants will have ideas to create positive and supportive relationships with [other] students who are in their groups

**C-4 Music, Marks, and Mandalas**

**Presenter:** Melissa Deaton Cook, LPC, NCC, ACS

**Audience:** General (open to all counseling professionals)

**Summary:** In this experiential workshop we will play with percussion instruments and art supplies as we create mandalas together. Feel your sense of well-being and grounding increase as we play, create, and co-regulate together. We will increase our energy and re-set our nervous systems together. Mandala meets drum circle! No experience or talent required. All supplies provided.

**Session Learning Objectives: 1).** Gain an understanding of how music making and expressive art invitations can improve emotional well-being. **2).** Experience and understand how music and expressive arts create community. **3).** Walk away with 3 ideas on how to implement simple mandala making invitations with your groups.

**C-5 No Member Left Behind: Broaching as the Path to Equitable Group Work**

**Presenter:** Syreeta Wright, EdS, LPC, CSAC, NCC

**Audience:** General (open to all counseling professionals)

**Summary:** This session will highlight the critical role of facilitator-led broaching in group counseling. Broaching, the proactive introduction of cultural and identity factors, is essential for building psychological safety and authentic cohesion. It leverages established group norms to validate

marginalized members, deepen universality, and equip the group to manage microaggressions. Broaching transforms the group from a passive space into an equitable, restorative, and effective therapeutic environment.

**Session Learning Objectives: 1).** Attendees will be able to define broaching and explain why it is vital for establishing group safety. **2).** Attendees will be able to formulate at least one group rule related to broaching during the group contracting phase. **3).** Attendees will be able to analyze a brief group scenario and determine an appropriate response using broaching.

2:45pm

Closing and Raffles

**50/50 Raffle for the VCA Foundation**

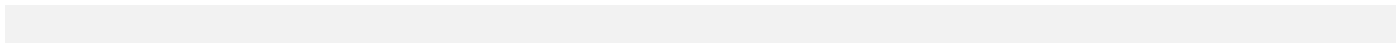
**What is the VCA Foundation?** The VCA Foundation is a non-profit, charitable, philanthropic endowment fund. The primary purpose of the fund is to support counselors in Virginia through; the VCA Leadership Academy, publication of the VCA Journal, VCA Convention Keynote speaker and offering Grants and Fellowships.

2:45 - 3:30pm To Receive a Confirmation of Attendance you must complete the evaluation that will be emailed to you. To receive CE's you must fill out an evaluation for each session attended. Once all evaluations have been completed you will be emailed your CE certificate.

\*Attendees will receive a certificate of participation for 4.5 hours. Attendees can receive 4.5 hours of CE's once all session evaluations are completed.

Virginia Counselors Association (VCA) has been approved by NBCC as an Approved Continuing Education Provider, ACEP No. 2047. Programs that do not qualify for NBCC credit are clearly identified. Virginia Counselors Association (VCA) is solely responsible for all aspects of the programs.

Please see the next page for cost and other information.





1801 Alexander Bell Drive, Reston, VA 20191

**Donations:** We will be collecting the following items for the Cancer ward at Fairfax INOVA Children’s Hospital: Crayons, Markers, Individual small bubbles, Play-Doh, Play-Doh tools, Craft kits - more so for 8y+, and Lego sets - easy to hard as all ages like these (harder ones especially for the older kids). Here is the link to their Amazon Wishlist for our whole child life department too: <https://www.inovachildrens.org/donate>

**PARKING at ASCE Bechtel Center:** Group-A-Rama parking is FREE and there are ample parking spaces on the left or right side of the conference center. Park and come in through the building’s front entrance.

**DIRECTIONS to ASCE Bechtel Center, AND AREA INFORMATION:**

**Google Maps:** <https://maps.app.goo.gl/cx79mFLgEZ1U2xUD6>

**FROM THE 495 BELTWAY (495):** Take VA- 267 West (Dulles Toll Road) to exit 14 (VA-674)/Hunter Mill Road. Turn left onto Hunter Mill Road and go 0.3 miles. Turn right onto Sunrise Valley Drive and go .04 miles. Turn right onto Alexander Bell Drive, go 0.1 mile and the conference center is on the right.

**FROM RESTON PARKWAY:** If heading north on Reston Parkway (VA-602) turn right on Sunrise Valley Drive (before the Dulles Toll Road overpass) and go 2.5 miles. Turn left on Alexander Bell Drive, go 0.1 mile and the conference center is on your right.

**Information for the On-Line Registration:**

Name:

Email:

Current Work Setting:

\* (note school)

Cost: <b>Until March 8</b>	Cost: <b>March 9 – April 10</b>
VCA/VASGW Members: \$70	VCA/VASGW Members: \$80
Non- VCA/VASGW Members: \$85	Non-VCA/VASGW Members: \$95
Graduate Students*: \$55	Graduate Students*: \$55
Retired Counselors: \$55	Retired Counselors: \$55

**No On-Site Registration**

**Breakfast:** Assorted pastries, fruit, juice, coffee, and water

**Lunch:** Assorted sandwiches, pasta salads, salad, chips, soda/water, and cookie

If you have any dietary restrictions and need to discuss alternative options, please contact Dr. Terri Mason at [tmasonvca@aol.com](mailto:tmasonvca@aol.com)

## Presenter Bio's

### Keynote Speakers - Kim Crumbley & Laura Rankhorn

Laura Rankhorn and Kim Crumbley have been school counselors in Alabama with combined educational experience of over 30 years. Together they host the critically acclaimed Counselor Accents Podcast. They wrote the books, *Growing Your Program for School Counselors*, *Working Smarter, Not Harder as School Counselors*, and recently released a children's book, *Hi, Gene!* Most days Kim and Laura are "in the trenches" as school counselors, but they also speak nationally and work with school systems to help train school counselors on ways to run an effective school counseling program. Both Kim and Laura received the RAMP designation for their schools in 2023. Spoiler alert: Laura is slated to earn it again this summer. Kim was also named the 2023 Alabama Elementary School Counselor of the Year! Their free time is spent focusing on their hobby: school counseling!

### Hela Baer

Hela Baer, LCSW, E-RYT (she/they) is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker specializing in trauma-informed, relational therapy that integrates mindfulness, body-based practices, and human-animal-nature connection. Using an LGBTQIA+ celebratory and neuro-affirming approach, Hela works with teens and adults who want to better understand themselves, process trauma and loss, alleviate symptoms of anxiety and/or depression, manage stressors with more ease, heal relational wounds, and cultivate meaning and joy in everyday life. Hela currently works as a psychotherapist at Alexandria Place Therapy and Cloverleaf Equine Center, and has nearly 20 years of facilitation experience in intercultural, educational, and therapeutic settings.

### Bosede Balogun

Dr. Balogun is a Licensed Professional Counselor in the state of Virginia and holds a PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision. She is trained in EMDR, and her clinical work focuses on trauma, serving first responders, children, adolescents, and families. Her experience spans various community settings, including parenting coaching and facilitating therapeutic groups for survivors of domestic violence. Dr. Balogun is a co author of a published book and has presented at local, national, and international conferences. Her research interests include supporting international students in counseling programs, examining the impact of pornography use, particularly among individuals with childhood abuse histories, and the role of self compassion in healing. She is dedicated to mentoring and contributing to the development of emerging counselors. Outside of her professional work, she enjoys traveling, cooking, and spending quality time with her friends and family.

### Melissa Deaton Cook

Melissa Deaton Cook, LPC, NCC, ACS is a bilingual Licensed Professional Counselor and Drum Circle Facilitator. She has incorporated music, movement, nature, and creativity both in her personal life and in her professional career for over 30 years. Melissa uses trauma informed expressive arts and play therapy where she integrates the theories of Dr. Bruce Perry (Neurosequential model) and Dr. Stephen Porges (Polyvagal theory) in her work with children and teens. Melissa is the sole proprietor of Spiral Roots LLC.

### Johanna Druen

Johanna Druen began teaching English in 1992 and earned her Master of Arts in Education from Western Kentucky University in 1997. With over 30 years in education, she has taught English and Gender Studies from grades 6 through college. Johanna brings seven years of counseling experience across elementary and high school levels in two states, complemented by work as a Behavior Clinician and in-home counselor. Trained in Trauma-Informed CBT, she currently serves as a school counselor while pursuing coursework at GMU to qualify for her LPCA. Her career reflects a deep commitment to supporting students academically and emotionally.

### Deepa Emmanuel

Deepa Emmanuel completed her M.A. in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Liberty University, following which, she worked as a therapist for inner-city at-risk youth in Lynchburg, Virginia. She later moved back to India, where she did voluntary work at the children and adolescents unit of the Department of Psychiatry at one of the best medical institutions in the country, until the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to strict lockdown measures in India, she began working from home as an academic journal reviewer and editor. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision at Liberty University.

### Richard Jones-Hang

Richard Jones-Hang is a 12-year professional school counselor with FCPS and previously was a Latin teacher. Richard has presented on tai chi and mindfulness applications in counseling, and play-based skills learning at the national, state, and local levels. His personal interests include baking, cooking, cosplaying, and playing with his 6-year-old rescue pit terrier Lavender.

### Sam Landa

Sam Landa, Ph.D., LPC, is a Licensed Professional Counselor specializing in individual counseling, trauma treatment, and process group facilitation. He integrates cognitive-behavioral and attachment-based approaches with trauma-informed care to foster growth and resilience. His clinical and research interests include anxiety, interpersonal relationships, attachment theory, shame, family role dynamics, and multiculturalism. Dr. Landa is passionate about helping clients find meaning and purpose through faith and psychology. Outside of counseling, he enjoys teaching, spending time with his family, playing sports, and hosting the God Attachment Healing podcast, which explores how attachment theory intersects with spirituality.

### Irene Kiraithe-Muchene

I am a graduate counseling student building clinical expertise in trauma-informed counseling for individuals and groups. I facilitate emotional regulation, guide group process, and foster healthy connection using a strengths-based, client-centered approach. I prioritize client autonomy and integrate faith only when requested. I have supported groups in a community and church setting, emphasizing emotional safety, structured interventions, and practical strategies that promote resilience, belonging, and reflective growth in clinically grounded, ethically sound group work.

### Dr. Brian Maiden

Dr. Brian S. Maiden is an Assistant Professor of Counselor Education at Virginia State University and the School Counseling Coordinator. He has taught Group Counseling at both Virginia Tech and Virginia State, and his work centers on identity development, reflective practice, and culturally responsive group facilitation. Dr. Maiden helps adults explore authenticity, presence, and the personal stories that shape how they move through the world. His approach integrates trauma-informed principles, creative metaphor, and experiential activities that promote insight, connection, and growth. He designs and leads reflective group experiences in educational and community settings and is known for a grounded, relational style that supports self-awareness and meaningful engagement.

### Dr. Maryam Majd

Dr. Maryam Majd is a developmental psychologist, author, and Qualified Mental Health Professional (QMHP-A/C) and Applied Psychology in Reston, Virginia. Her doctoral research, *Relationship Between School Type and Quality of Neighborhood with Children's Social Vulnerability* (Liberty University, 2024), examines how environmental factors shape resilience. Through her books *The Sun and Charlie*, she translates psychological research into story-based curricula that help children build protective thinking and emotional intelligence. She

leads workshops for schools and families using creative group techniques to prevent vulnerability and promote mental well-being.

#### Aidan Markley

I graduated from Virginia Tech in 2024 with a BS in Psychology, and am currently pursuing a M.Ed in Clinical Mental Health Counseling at George Mason University. I have obtained experience in the mental health field in both residential and clinical settings during my time as an undergraduate and postgraduate. As I work through my graduate program, I continue to seek out new opportunities where I can apply my educational and clinical experience in hopes of deepening my understanding of mental health care. After I have completed my Master's program, I intend to obtain a PhD in Clinical Psychology

#### Joy Maweu Mwendwa

Joy Maweu Mwendwa is an Associate Professor in the Department of Counselor Education and Family Studies at Liberty University. She holds a Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision from Old Dominion University. With over two decades in the counseling profession, her work settings have included a college counseling center, community mental health, churches, and internationally in Kenya, Tanzania, and Malawi. As an LPC (VA), she mostly works with women, immigrants, and international students and international professionals. Her research interests are on qualitative and indigenous research methodologies, the development of the profession of counseling internationally, and the multicultural competence.

#### Anna Morrison

Anna Morrison, LMSW (she/her) is a Supervisee in Social Work at Fairfax Place Therapy and Cloverleaf Equine Center. As a proud member of the LGBTQIA community, Anna's practice focuses on expressive, somatic, and animal-assisted psychotherapeutic interventions for LGBTQIA youth and their families in Northern Virginia. With a background in LGBTQIA youth advocacy, including chairing GLSEN Maryland and leading American University's LGBTQIA student support programs, Anna is passionate about creating spaces of belonging for her youth and adult clients to explore the stressors and joys associated with having marginalized identities, and find connection to community and resources that increase their wellbeing.

#### Iman Mostafa

Iman Mostafa is currently pursuing a Master's degree in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling program at George Mason University. Building on over a decade of experience in behavioral health settings and in childcare, Iman is passionate about exploring integrative and holistic approaches to healing. Her clinical interests center on leveraging the natural environment to facilitate deeper connection and personal insight within group settings. Currently, Iman's focus is on exploring and developing creative curricula that integrate ecotherapy and systems theory to support clients navigating complex relational dynamics.

#### Dr. Sam Steen

Dr. Sam Steen holds a bachelors in Psychology, a Master's Degree in School Counseling and a Ph.D. in Education with a specialty in preparing school counselors and mental health professionals. He holds the rank of Professor and is a licensed Professional School Counselor, the Director of the Research Action Consortium, and the former Director of the Child, Family, Community Engagement Division at George Mason University. Dr. Steen specializes in school counseling, group counseling and cultivating Black students' academic identity development. He was a school counselor for 10 years and this experience shapes his research agenda, approach to teaching, and service.

### Shelly Taylor

Shelley is a graduate counseling intern committed to providing warm, collaborative, and growth-focused support to clients. Her clinical interests include working with couples, young adults, and group counseling settings. She integrates cognitive-behavioral strategies, trauma-informed practices, and faith-based perspectives when desired by the client. Drawing from strengths-based approaches, she emphasizes creating a safe and supportive environment where clients can explore challenges, strengthen relationships, and deepen emotional insight. She is passionate about helping individuals navigate life transitions, build healthier communication patterns, and develop practical tools for long-term well-being as she continues her professional training.

### Becca Wilson

Becca Wilson is in her 13th year as a school counselor. She has 3 years experience at the middle school level and 10 years at the elementary school level. Becca believes in the magic and efficiency of group work and loves to blend evidence-based practices with current trends and creativity to increase client and student buy-in. Becca is a proud mom to 2 kids, aged 8 and 5, and an 8-year-old husky mix.

### Gregory C. Wright

Gregory Wright is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and supervisor specializing in holistic, culturally responsive, and spiritually integrated counseling. His work focuses on creating spaces for healing and transformation through authentic connection and ethical presence.

### Syreeta Wright

Syreeta Wright is a doctoral student in Counselor Education and Supervision at Virginia Commonwealth University. She earned an Education Specialist degree in Counseling from Old Dominion University and a Master's degree in Counseling with specializations in School Counseling and Marriage and Family Counseling from Regent University. Licensed as a professional counselor in Virginia since 2011, she also holds licenses in Georgia and Washington, D.C. Syreeta has supervised graduate students and residents in counseling and brings 20 years of experience across schools, hospitals, residential programs, military, and private practice. Her clinical and research interests focus on healing for women survivors of intimate partner violence, and counselor education and supervision.

### Sarah Yi

Sarah Yi has a Bachelor's in Urban and Environmental Policy and Computer Science from Occidental College. She received the Community Action Award there, signifying her contributions to advancing community-driven programs to build healthy, thriving communities and achieve social, economic, and environmental justice. Previously at Deloitte, she served as a presenter, event coordinator, and mentor in the Climate Equity, Asian and Allies, and Native American/Native Hawaiian communities. Sarah is currently a Master's student in Clinical Mental Health Counseling at George Mason University. She is interested in gaining experience applying group counseling practices more broadly in a community and societal context.