

Trauma Matters Delaware | Board of Directors Bio Book



Leslie Brower, Board President

Former Chair, Trauma Matters Delaware (retired)

I am a registered nurse with an MS in psychiatric/community mental health nursing. My clinical experience was serving adults with persistent serious mental illness, before the Recovery movement and the development of sophisticated community supports. I taught psychiatric and community mental health nursing at Syracuse University for both undergraduate and graduate students and earned a PhD in the Social Foundations of Public Policy at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Public Affairs.

Since 1988 I have worked exclusively in mental health-related program and policy positions, with the past eight years focused on efforts to establish Delaware as a trauma-informed state. The evolution of this commitment grew out of the life-changing insights of the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study and the implications for individual, family and community distress and wellness. While working toward this agenda I co-founded and chaired Trauma Matters Delaware, a grass-roots organization of public and private sector individuals committed to seeing that vision come to fruition. I retired in 2019 and moved to a home near Middletown with my husband of 34 years where we have wildflower and vegetable gardens and sail on the Chesapeake Bay—if it's not too hot and there is a bit of wind!

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Debra Berke, *Board Vice President*

Debra L. Berke is a graduate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and a Master of Science degree in Human Development and Family Studies. She also holds a Ph.D. in Family Studies from the University of Delaware. Dr. Berke is the Director of Psychology Programs and the Director of the Center for Prevention Science at Wilmington University. Prior to joining the Wilmington University faculty in 2009, she taught family studies and women's studies at Messiah College for

15 years. She also directed the Gender Studies Project at Messiah College.

Dr. Berke has been a consultant for the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, the State of Delaware, and other community organizations. She has served in several offices in the National Council on Family Relations including on the Board of Directors. She has also served as the President of the Family Science Association. In 2015 she joined the Trauma Matters Delaware Steering Group. Since that time she has been instrumental in furthering the cause of using a trauma informed approach by overseeing the development of an undergraduate certificate in Trauma-Informed Approaches and a graduate certificate in Trauma and Resilience at Wilmington University. She has also done multiple trainings for local and state agencies as well as nationally.

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Renée P. Beaman, RN, Board Treasurer

DHSS Division Director

Renée currently leads 130 employees and contractors in DHSS's Division of State Services Centers. This role involves managing an annual budget of over \$30 million dollars, directing and programming for 7,000 volunteers, and directing many DHSS programs. These programs include the State Office of Volunteerism, the Office of Community Services, LIHEAP (Low Income Heating Energy Assistance Program, Family Visitation Program, and Emergency & Transitional Housing Programs.

She serves as an active member of the DHSS Leadership Team and serves on various statewide committees and commissions. Renee initiated the DHSS's Trauma Informed Approach training beginning with the Divisions of State Service Center, Social Services and Child Support Services training over 1000 employees.

Previously Renée was the founder and executive director of Beautiful Gate Outreach Center, which focused on HIV testing, education, counseling and outreach. She is a 2019 Governor's Compassionate Champion Award recipient, an awardee of the National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, and in the Hall of Fame of Delaware Women. She received a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Tuskegee University and a Master's in Healthcare Administration from Southern New Hampshire University. Renée is a Certified Trauma Informed Approach Trainer.

As one who is involved in many different levels of interaction with clients, patients and community members, Renée's introduction to "trauma informed care" changed her entire lens and approach to nursing, healthcare and personal experiences with others. She can now connect and understand trauma and its relationship to behavior. She wants to be able to share this knowledge and empower others to utilize this information as a tool to change and enhance the lives of others they encounter.

Renee is a 24-hour college dance contest winner! She split the \$100 prize money with her partner and could not walk for three days, but had a ton of fun!

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Sharon Merriman-Nai, *Board Secretary*

Sharon Merriman-Nai earned a Master's in Counseling at the University of Delaware (UD) and began her professional career as an out-patient counselor in community mental health working with clients who had experienced trauma, many as children. Since 2001, she has conducted research and evaluation on projects that intersect with health and social justice, including prevention of elder abuse, suicide, substance use, and rape and sexual violence. As an associate scientist at

the UD Center for Drug and Health Studies (CDHS), she managed a portfolio of school-based surveys, including the Delaware School Survey, the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, and the Youth Tobacco Survey.

Although she retired from her full-time position in 2019, she continues to work at CDHS as a facilitator of the State Epidemiological Outcomes Work Group (SEOW), a project supported by the Delaware Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (DSAMH) which promotes the use of data in prevention efforts by highlighting shared risk and protective factors. She has been a member of the TMD Steering Group and Data Committee since 2017. Sharon is also a board member of the Delaware Community Legal Aid Society, Inc. and served on the agency's Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness Council. She currently serves as associate editor of the Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect.

Sharon started tap dancing when she was 39 and believes that following your dreams ~ even if you will never make it to Broadway ~ is a key to resilience!

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Tracey Quillen Carney, *Honorary Board Member* *Delaware First Lady*

Tracey Quillen Carney has served as First Lady of Delaware since January 2017.

She convenes the First Chance Delaware initiative, which has three pillars—ending childhood hunger in Delaware; promoting foundational language skills; and advancing effective recognition of, and response to, childhood trauma. Tracey seeks to use the convening and outreach powers of the First Lady’s

office to bring organizations together to work collaboratively toward those goals. Previously, Tracey was a senior administrator for 15 years at Wilmington Friends School, following 15 years on the staff of then-U.S. Senator Joe Biden.

Tracey convenes the End Childhood Hunger task force (ECHO), and also serves as the current chair of the Delaware Coalition to End Hunger, an honorary Board Member of the Delaware Fund for Women, an Advisory Board member of Fresh Start, and the honorary chair of Delaware’s Dolly Parton Imagination Library and the statewide Library Card Campaign. Her interest in the work of our board stems from personal experience with childhood trauma, as well as from her involvement in education and youth sports. A proud native Delawarean, Tracey was born at the Dover Air Force Base.

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John Himics

Partner, First Ascent Design

John manages digital marketing, web and traditional assets for small to medium sized businesses, nonprofits and schools.

As an Adjunct Professor at the University of Delaware Horn Entrepreneurship, John teaches Entrepreneurial Marketing, focusing on conveying real world marketing experience to undergraduates,

ensuring that they know what marketing tools are in the toolkit after graduation.

John has a Mechanical Engineering degree and started his career as a manufacturing engineer at DuPont before discovering a passion for marketing that led to First Ascent Design. John has been a rock climber since the age of 10, and has a passion for the outdoors.

John is also a member of Delaware Technical College's Business Advisory Board, and a Rotarian at Caesar Rodney Rotary.

Trauma matters to me because it forms the lens through which you see the world. So much can be explained by taking a step back and understanding that you cannot truly understand someone else's perspective. Being trauma-informed, to me, means interacting with people with compassion.

Fun fact is that my first job was teaching rock climbing classes. The part of climbing I love the most is that it's a sport of self-improvement. It's you vs you, not you vs another person, and as such the community that forms around climbing is so supportive.

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Rita Landgraf

Director, Partnerships for Healthy Communities, UD College of Health Sciences

Rita Landgraf first joined the University of Delaware's College of Health Sciences in early 2017 as a professor of practice and distinguished health and social services administrator in residence. She also serves as director of the UD Partnership for Healthy Communities (PHC), a cross-college, cross-state initiative.

Prior to joining the faculty at UD, she served as Cabinet Secretary of the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services from Jan. 22, 2009 through Feb 6, 2017, under Governor Jack Markell's administration. As Secretary, she led the principal agency charged with keeping Delawareans healthy, ensuring they get the health care they need, and providing children, families, individuals with disabilities and seniors with the essential services they depend on. She managed one of the largest departments in Delaware's government, with an annual budget of more than \$2 billion.

She led the State of Delaware's successful efforts to meet the requirements of the Settlement Agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice to promote recovery and community integration of individuals with Serious and Persistent Mental Illness. The USDOJ recognized Delaware for being the first state to achieve this level of transformation. She also oversaw the state's implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

Rita currently serves as a member of the Democrat Governor's Association Healthcare Advisory Council and is on the Board of the Delaware Center for Health Innovation, the Executive Advisory Boards of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Delaware and attack addiction. Rita also serves as the First Lady of Washington College, Chestertown Maryland.

She is a former executive director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Delaware and of The Arc of Delaware, which advocates for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She is also a former president of AARP Delaware.

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Nancy McGee

*Former Sexual Assault Network of Delaware
Coordinator, ContactLifeline, Inc.*

Nancy McGee came to Delaware in 1984 after working in wilderness camps and experiential education programs on the East Coast. She has been working in the human services field ever since. She has a strong background in working with family

systems and individuals (teens and adults) with co-occurring disorders. She was a member of the Steering Committee of Trauma Matters Delaware (TMD) before becoming a TMD Board Member.

Nancy provides training in the community on topics such as Human Trafficking, Trauma Awareness/Trauma Responsiveness, Healthy Relationships, Effective Communication, Ethics, Bias Prevention and Sexual Assault Advocacy. She formerly served as the coordinator for the Sexual Assault Network of Delaware (SAND). She is a gubernatorial appointee to the Sex Offenders Management Board.

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Heather McGonigle

Associate Director of Survivors of Abuse in Recovery, Inc. (SOAR)

Heather McGonigle, LPC, LPCMH recently joined SOAR. Inc in November 2019 as the new Associate Director. Having previously served in the Greater Philadelphia Area, Heather comes with experience in working in general mental health, trauma-informed care/trauma counseling, co-occurring conditions, chemical dependencies, forensic psychology, clinical supervision, and non-profit leadership and program development. Heather also serves as an

affiliate faculty instructor for the Community and Trauma Counseling Graduate program at Jefferson University and the Graduate School of Education Counseling and Mental Health Counseling program at University of Penn. She is a licensed clinician in both PA and DE, with a special interest in trauma treatment.

Trauma is a broad, complex, and pervasive stress experience that can have varying impacts on anyone and at any time. It is often the root to many psychological conditions for which survivors adapt resilient survival mechanisms in managing. Even more often, however, it is unfortunately overlooked in how professionals are able to recognize and conceptualize these impacts on those being served. Understanding the pervasiveness and complexity of trauma will not only improve services that are offered to mitigate these experiences, but it will also create a safer societal environment wherein the risk of re-traumatization will reduce. Trauma matters to me because it is a part of the human experience and therefore should be treated as such. As having experience in non-profit leadership and education as well as working through a trauma lens, one of my passions is to provide trauma awareness and education that will serve to improve experiences of safety for survivors of trauma in many public service sectors.

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Dr. Julius Mullen Sr., Ed.D, NCC, LPCMH, NCC

Chief Clinical Officer, Children and Families First

Leading, teaching, coaching and mentoring are among life's most precious gifts for Dr. Julius Mullen Sr. Julius believes that it is simply an honor to inspire people of all walks of life to be who they wish to be regardless of any life circumstances.

Over the last decade, Julius has been the Chief Clinical Officer for Children & Families First of Delaware where he leads a team of program managers representing a number of professional

disciplines including behavioral health, education, child welfare and community advocacy. Dr. Mullen prides himself with setting his team up for professional and personal excellence at the highest level. He is a passionate about leadership development, professional mentorship and clinical supervision. His love and expertise for brain science, trauma informed care, racial equity and social justice have given him an extensive platform to share his knowledge at national, state and local levels. Dr. J can also be found on the campus of Wilmington University where he enjoys teaching psychology, counseling and education courses. When not in the classroom, Julius mentors doctorate students as they complete their dissertation studies in prevention science.

Julius is also a proud graduate of the Executive Leadership Institute from University of Michigan School of Social Work, School of Business and the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities. He completed his doctoral studies from Wilmington University in Innovation and Leadership in 2004 and earned his master's degree in counseling in 1998. Being a national certified counselor and licensed professional counselor of mental health has given him the pleasure to practice in the state of Delaware where he is also trained in trauma focused cognitive behavioral therapy.