

2024 SWAG Annual Conference

Harmonizing Care: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Well-Being Conference

Friday, March 22, 2024 - 8:15 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

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- 8:15 a.m. **Registration**
- 8:45 a.m. **Welcoming Remarks—[Elizabeth Cruz, LCSW](#)**
Social Work Alumni Group Leader
- Aula Canaria, BVB 1.328
- 9:00 a.m. **HCAP Leadership, [Rhonda BeLue, Ph.D.](#)**
Associate Dean for Community Engagement and Partnerships, Professor, Public Health
- Aula Canaria, BVB 1.328
- 9:15 a.m. **Social Work Department, Derek Plantenga, LCSW**
Professor of Practice, Director, BSW program
- Aula Canaria, BVB 1.328
- 9:30 a.m. **10-minute break**
- 9:45 a.m. **Keynote Speaker—[Diego M. Bernal](#)**
State Representative, District 123
- Aula Canaria, BVB 1.328
- 11:15 a.m. **Lunch and Networking**
- Gregory Luna Room, BVB 1.338
- 11:50 a.m. **10-minute break**
- 12:00 p.m. **Breakout Session 1**
- BVB 1.312 – [Nonviolent Communication for Inner Peace and Social Justice](#)
 - BVB 1.318 – [Social Work Informatics: A New Specialty](#)
 - BVB 1.328 – [A Celebration of the Neurodiversity Movement](#)
 - BVB 2.304 – [Navigating Ethical Issues and Commitment to Clients](#)
 - Ethics CEU
 - BVB 3.318 – [The Neuroscience Application of Blue Zone Principles](#)
 - BVB 3.326 – [Accessing Capital and Credit in the Under-Served Markets](#)

- BVB 3.328 – [Rental Housing Affordability in Texas: Data for Communities and Policymakers](#)

1:10 p.m. 10-minute break

1:25 p.m. Breakout Session 2

- BVB 1.312 – [Working with Marginalized Populations in Multi-Modal Therapies](#)
- BVB 1.318 – [Social Work Informatics: A New Specialty](#)
- BVB 1.328 – [Nonviolent Communication for Inner Peace and Social Justice](#)
- BVB 2.304 – [Navigating Ethical Issues and Commitment to Clients](#)
 - Ethics CEU
- BVB 3.318 – [Introduction to Trauma-Informed Care and Implementing Trauma-Informed Care Principles](#)
- BVB 3.326 – [Hoarding Disorder: Let's Not Call Them Hoarders!](#)

2:40 p.m. 10-minute break

2:50 p.m. Breakout Session 3

- BVB 1.312 – [Working with Marginalized Populations in Multi-Modal Therapies](#)
- BVB 1.318 – [Accessing Capital and Credit in the Under-Served Markets](#)
- BVB 1.328 – [Moving mindfully, living meaningfully: An OT perspective on yoga and meditation for improving women's pelvic floor health](#)
- BVB 2.304 – [Navigating Ethical Issues and Commitment to Clients](#)
 - Ethics CEU
- BVB 3.318 – [Introduction to Trauma-Informed Care and Implementing Trauma-Informed Care Principles](#)
- BVB 3.326 – [Hoarding Disorder: Let's Not Call Them Hoarders!](#)

4:05 p.m. 10-minute break

4:15 p.m. Closing Remarks

- Aula Canaria, BVB 1.328



Diego M. Bernal

State Representative, District 123

Representative Diego Bernal was born in South Texas and raised in San Antonio. After graduating from Thomas Jefferson High School in the city's West side, he attended the University of Michigan, where he earned his undergraduate degree, Master's in Social Work, and law degree. After graduating from law school, he returned to San Antonio permanently as a MALDEF staff attorney, advocating and litigating on behalf of working people, children, and immigrant communities. In June 2011, Diego was elected to the San Antonio City Council representing District 1. Representative Bernal was elected to the Texas House of Representatives in February 2015. He represents District 123, home to downtown and north central San Antonio, parts of the city's West Side, along with the City of

Castle Hills. He currently serves as a member of the House Committee on Agriculture and Livestock and the House Committee on Urban Affairs.

Moving mindfully, living meaningfully: An OT perspective on yoga and meditation for improving women's pelvic floor health

Women's pelvic floor health dysfunction, specifically urinary incontinence, greatly impacts their ability to participate in meaningful occupations. Combining yoga with OT as an integrative therapy along with EEG biofeedback offers an accessible and easy approach to addressing symptoms. Additionally, yoga provides a preventative neuroprotective modality to support women's healthy aging and pelvic floor health.



Lindsey Sutton, OTD, PhD, C-IAYT (Yoga Therapist)

Crescent Pelvic Health + Wellness, Core Essentials

Lindsey recently earned a doctoral in Occupational Therapy at Baylor University and has worked as an educator, yoga practitioner, and yoga therapist. She is a children's yoga book author and music album co-producer and has designed yoga teacher training workshops on Parkinson's and mental wellness for children. She holds a PhD in Geography and has taught as a faculty member at several universities nationwide. Yoga has given Lindsey the opportunity to combine her passion for human development and well-being in serving as an outreach educator and volunteer teacher in the many locations where she has lived. Yoga, in fact, is what brought Lindsey to OT, being drawn to the field's holistic and whole-person approach to therapy and rehabilitation. As a future OT, Lindsey is passionate about promoting pelvic floor health and wellness and is dedicated to bringing OT to the forefront in this practice setting to provide quality therapy and rehabilitation care for patients.

Working with Marginalized Populations in Multi-Modal Therapies

Learners will be engaged directly to become familiar with Play Therapy basics when working with marginalized populations and how to individualize therapeutic tools to the specific needs of the client/s. The session will split participants into groups and provide time for group work and demonstration.



Elvia Obregon-Mendoza, LCSW, RPT '13

Selah Your Life Wellness LLC

Elvia Obregon, LCSW, RPT, Precision Nutrition Coach, Internal Family Systems Therapist is a Bilingual (Spanish/English) Social Worker. Elvia has been working in the field of social work for 10+ years in the areas of child welfare, medical and mental health field. Elvia is the founder and lead clinician of Selah Your Life Wellness, which provides holistic wellness support to community leaders and counselors who are needing support in areas of burn-out, life transitions, grief and are needing guidance with restoring relationships. Elvia enjoys hiking and giving back to her community by being involved in multiple local organizations.



Nancy Franklin, LCSW, RPT-S

Private Practice

Nancy Franklin, LCSW, LMFT, RPT-S, has been working in the field of social work for 35+ years in the area of mental health. Nancy is also a Certified Psychodramatist as well as a Certified Sand Tray therapist. Nancy is the founder and former President of the local San Antonio Play Therapy Chapter and the former Director of Children and Family Services at the Ecumenical Center in San Antonio. She has also served in several leadership roles in the community including owning her own private practice, as an active volunteer with La Leche League International, and in various leadership roles in her church. Nancy specializes in working with children and families in areas of sensory processing issues, grief, PTSD, and relationship issues.

Hoarding Disorder: Let's Not Call Them Hoarders!

This presentation will help attendees understand the mental health complications that come along with this diagnosis. There is not just one single outcome of 'just cleaning it up'. Learn how to utilize collaborative measures to secure a feasible outcome of support.



Helen Flores '98

Law Offices of Carol Bertsch, PC

Helen Flores, a long-time advocate for persons with dementia and their caregivers, has been in the San Antonio geriatric-focused realm, supporting older adults, families, and caregivers for over 25 years. Her experience has been in various portions of elder care such as retirement community management, Alzheimer's Association employee, aging life care management and in-home, and private pay care services. She is a long-time volunteer and former Board President of the Alzheimer's Association (2011- 2017) and the former President of the Alamo Area Home Care Council (2019-2021).

Ten Months ago, Helen transitioned into another form of geriatric and caregiver support - elder and disability law. At the Law Offices of Carol Bertsch, PC, Helen is the Director of Operations.

Helen's passion is educating people on aging-related topics and serving as a resource for many. She is married to her handsome husband of 29 years. She has a sophomore-aged son attending college at Texas Lutheran University studying nursing. She has found a new love for gardening – thanks to the COVID pandemic. Helen enjoys social opportunities in the community and loves to have FUN.

Accessing Capital and Credit in the Under-Served Markets

The inequality of capital and credit for those individuals in underserved communities. Why are these processes not equally available? Why is this group unaware and/or uneducated in this process? What changes need to be made to reach these communities?



Alex Herrera

Operation HOPE

Alex is a Financial Wellbeing Coach with Operation HOPE Inside Bank of America – San Antonio, TX. His passion is taking knowledge obtained by working in the financial industry for the past 20 years and using it to educate and empower individuals to make better personal financial decisions. He currently lives in San Antonio and has extensive knowledge in credit, mortgage, and increasing personal wealth.

He specializes in Credit, Money Management, and Homeownership coaching. He has done similar work within the mortgage/financial private sector, advising clients on building legacy wealth through real estate/land ownership by using financing strategies. He truly believes in Operation HOPE's mission of financial literacy for all.

Introduction to Trauma-Informed Care and Implementing Trauma-Informed Care Principles

In this session, attendees will receive an overview of key elements to help build their foundation of trauma-informed care. This includes an introduction to adverse childhood experiences, the impact of trauma, and trauma-informed care. This session will also provide an overview of the impact of trauma and an introduction to the six key principles of a trauma-informed approach. The information in this course will serve as building blocks to help you on your trauma-informed journey. This presentation is derived from Basics of ACEs, Building Resilience and Using a Trauma-Informed approach training received by international speaker, Becky Haas.



Jessica Huerta

Institute for Trauma-Informed Care at University Health

Jessica Huerta has over 20 years of experience in the non-profit sector, working with individuals and families in crisis by helping them find hope and opportunities in challenging times. As the senior educator at the Institute for Trauma-Informed Care with University Health, Jessica serves as a lead trainer on trauma awareness, ACEs, and Trauma-Informed Care. Her passion is to bring awareness about the many challenges families encounter as they navigate various systems. Jessica holds a bachelor's degree in education from Texas A&M San Antonio and is dedicated to making a positive impact in her community.

A Celebration of the Neurodiversity Movement

An important conversation as we learn the history of the neurodiversity movement, what neurodiversity means and how to begin sharing this information with those you interface with daily. It will be a celebration of diversity and an opportunity to share the strengths that autists can bring to their families, the classroom, to employers, and to the community at large!



Anna Paola Smith, LCSW

Autism Community Network

Anna Paola Smith attended The University of Texas at Austin, where she received her BA in Psychology and her master's degree in social work. She has had the opportunity to work with children and families in school, hospital, and clinical settings. Anna Paola's interests lie in family systems and how the development of one child may impact the entire family unit. She started a sibling support group at the Autism Community Network and does routine follow-ups with caregivers after their child receives an autism diagnosis. Anna Paola is also part of an interdisciplinary diagnostic team that uses a strength-based approach to address the unique presentation of the child and family.

Rental Housing Affordability in Texas: Data for Communities and Policymakers

Housing affordability continues to pose a challenge in communities across the state and disproportionately affects renter households. This session will highlight data trends regarding the affordability and accessibility of housing among renter households of different income groups and how shortages in affordable housing can affect community well-being.



Monica Cruz, PhD

UTSA Institute for Demographic and Socioeconomic Research

Dr. Cruz serves as a legislative liaison with the Texas legislature and supports the data needs of the Center's network of statewide and local affiliates. She has also assisted with survey and qualitative research for the Texas Department of Transportation and community assessments for various Head Start organizations. Her research interests include housing, economic development, poverty, and employment. She has worked as a legislative aide for the Texas Senate, as a program director for the City of San Antonio, and with other non-profit organizations as a policy analyst and researcher. Prior to joining the TDC staff, she served as an administrator for civic engagement in higher education and has taught courses in public policy, Texas government, and American Politics.



Salaha Uddin, PhD

UTSA Institute for Demographic and Socioeconomic Research

Dr. Uddin supports the Center's work in applied geospatial analysis, spatial modeling, econometric modeling, socioeconomic data analysis, and the application of urban planning tools and techniques. His research interests revolve around integrating spatial and socioeconomic factors in environmental, urban, and transportation studies. Before joining the Institute for Demographic and Socioeconomic Research (IDSER) at UTSA, he gained experience in academia and industry.

Social Work Informatics: A New Specialty

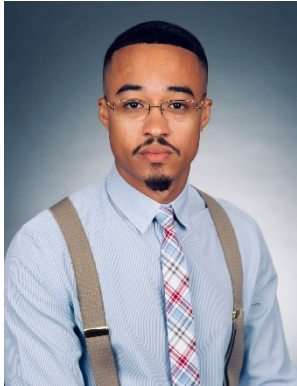
Social Work informatics is the specialty that integrates social work with information and analytical sciences to improve engagement, assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, termination, and follow-up in clinical and non-clinical settings.

Raul Rodriguez III, LCSW-S

Ohtli Therapy, PLLC

Raul is a Texas-based licensed Clinical Social Worker & Board Approved Clinical Supervisor with a background in Acute Psychiatric Program Management, Behavioral Health Utilization Management, Mobile Crisis Outreach, and Psychotherapy. He is also passionate about iOS development, problem-solving, and crafting great end-user experiences through cross-functional collaboration. As a technically minded mental health clinician, Raul strongly believes that integrated software solutions are essential to providing more affordable and accessible mental health services to all.

Nonviolent Communication for Inner Peace and Social Justice



Dieter Cantu '15

Cantu Appraisers & Consultants

Dieter Cantu is a seasoned community organizer, activist, and social entrepreneur with a deep commitment to reforming systems that perpetuate inequality. Drawing from his personal experiences as a youth within the juvenile and child welfare systems, where he encountered stark disparities, Dieter employs a strategic and multidisciplinary approach to drive transformative change.

Dieter Cantu stands as the founder of the Cantu's Books to Incarcerated Youth Project, an initiative that has demonstrated substantial impact throughout the state of Texas. This program delivers a diverse selection of books to youth residing in various Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) facilities, with a primary focus on augmenting children's literacy and reading proficiencies, thereby empowering them to embrace educational opportunities. However, the initiative extends far beyond literary enrichment. Data and statistics validate the program's effectiveness. A comprehensive study conducted in collaboration with the Texas Juvenile Justice Department indicates a substantial improvement in the literacy and educational engagement of participating youth. Specifically, the program has yielded a 30% increase in reading comprehension levels among these youth, subsequently enhancing their prospects for educational success and post-release opportunities. The initiative's holistic approach encompasses a pen pal program, forging essential human connections for the youth. Additionally, it plays a pivotal role in establishing a crucial bridge to wraparound services upon their release, ensuring that they receive the necessary support for successful reintegration into society. The result is a notable reduction in recidivism rates, with a 40% decrease in the number of program participants re-entering the juvenile justice system within the first year of release. This multifaceted approach signifies a paradigm shift away from punitive measures, effectively dispelling the negative stigmas historically associated with corrective actions.

He has been instrumental in developing and implementing a comprehensive public policy platform that advocates for proactive criminal justice strategies. Dieter has also served as a Violence Interrupter and Supervisor with Cure Violence, cultivating partnerships with law enforcement agencies and elected officials to orchestrate collaborative efforts aimed at rehabilitating individuals involved in violent offenses. He has been a dedicated advocate for youth through court testimonies, managing gang mediations, and resolving biases and intergroup tensions in challenging and socially charged environments.

Notably, Dieter's contributions extended to former President Barack Obama's 21st Century Police Task Force, where he introduced fresh perspectives leading to improvements in the operations and policy initiatives of the San Antonio Police Department.

Dieter's remarkable impact has earned him recognition, including the honor of having his own day designated in San Antonio, TX on February 13th, 2018, and in Houston, TX on October 23rd. He has received prestigious awards such as the Reebok Human Rights Award, a seat on the Reebok Board of Directors, and acknowledgment as a Forbes Coach, Houston Business Journal 40 Under 40 awardee, American Express Leadership Academy Fellow, NAACP Millennial Gamechanger Award Recipient, and JustLeadershipUSA (JLUSA) Fellow. Dieter's multifaceted experience extends to expertise in cross-sector collaboration, trauma-informed care, and the application of evidence-based practices, enhancing his ability to catalyze positive societal change.

Navigating Ethical Issues and Commitment to Clients

Navigating ethical dilemmas requires a healthy balance between honoring client autonomy and providing interventions that are in the client's best interest. At times, it can be challenging to determine which path to take.



Vanessa Valles, LCSW-S '09

A New Start Counseling

Vanessa Valles LCSW-S has been working in the mental health field for over the past 20 years and has worked in a variety of clinical, administrative, and leadership roles. Her populations of focus include adults, seniors, adolescents, and children. She has worked in outpatient clinics, partial and inpatient hospitalization settings, private practice, quality assurance, higher education, mobile crisis assessments, as a board approved clinical supervisor, consultant, administrator, and group practice owner.

Vanessa is passionate about developing and training social workers, clinicians, and students. As well as helping other professionals elevate themselves in the field to expand their ability to positively impact the lives of others. Vanessa specializes in working with individuals working through different emotional and mental health issues including those related to trauma, relationship issues, personality issues, anxiety and mood disorders and grief.

The Neuroscience Application of Blue Zone Principles

The Blue Zone research addresses longevity and quality of life, but what does it look like to live these principles, and how can we, as healers, incorporate these principles into daily life for our clients?



Dr. Sunita Punjabi, PhD, LPC-A, BCIA

Dr. Sunita Punjabi, the founder of Brain Coach LLC, is an expert trainer in neuro-feedback, using therapeutic methods from the fast-growing field of neuroplasticity. For more than 25 years, Dr. Punjabi has been guiding people towards finding their best life. Based on her research, helping people to find a sense of life and purpose ignites the brain while reversing or slowing brain degeneration. Through her doctorate work with the Chicago School of Professional Psychology and her professional work in the community, she teaches individuals proven strategies to uncover and break barriers to living a life that they love. Dr. Punjabi brings her

Eastern heritage to modern day science in order to assist people to intentionally create meaning and find a cause worthy of their lives. Dr. Punjabi uses neuro-integration technology and psychology to help individuals experience the mental transformation that can be measured at the neurological level and is sustainable.

Social Work Alumni Group Leadership

The purpose of the Social Work Alumni Group (SWAG) is to create a network of alumni who share the affinity of being a Social Work Roadrunner. Through our network, we aim to facilitate an inclusive environment among UTSA alumni, students, faculty, and staff to advance the interests and needs of our community.

For more information about the council, please reach out to swag@utsa.edu.

Elizabeth 'Liz' Cruz, LCSW '10

Seema Bhatia, LCSW '20

Bethany Gutierrez, MSW '14, '20

Rogelio Narvaez, LMSW '22

Samantha Roman, LMSW '20

Tony Salinas, MSW '22

Proceeds from the SWAG Conference help fund the SWAG Scholarship for MSW students and SWAG operating costs.

Thank you to our Sponsors!

This event is possible thanks to the generous support of our sponsors:



Introducing a new recipient of the

SOCIAL WORK ALUMNI GROUP ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP

Joshua Lugan, '24

Oceanside, CA
Master of Social Work

Joshua is a first-generation college student pursuing a Master of Social Work at the College of Health, Community and Policy, where he maintains a stellar GPA.

Joshua is a veteran of the Marine Reserves, and upon passing the LMSW exam, he wants to work with the Veteran's Affairs Department to assist other veterans. Having first-hand experience, he knows the strengths and weaknesses of the VA medical system, and it has fueled his desire to enter the field of social work. He looks forward to creating and implementing change to improve services for veterans.

Joshua's internship at SAMMinistries, assisting community members experiencing homelessness, has been a rewarding experience. He has completed over 500 hours for his generalist field practicum at the Transitional Living Learning Center (TLLC). He has worked with many families in the community and worked alongside collaborative interdisciplinary teams and case managers. He is a National Association of Social Workers member and has served as the vice president of his employer's Unit Advisory Council (UAC). The UAC includes civilian and active-duty personnel who volunteer their time to build up morale through fun and engaging events.



"Thank you so much for this scholarship I wanted to say that this scholarship will provide me with an opportunity to focus on my studies, and I won't have to worry about my tuition payments. I'm really excited to serve the community - I am going to be working for the VA."

Thank you for your generosity!