

MENTAL ILLNESS & HOMELESSNESS FROM CRISIS
TO SOLUTIONS - A BETTER APPROACH

AGENDA

SATURDAY

12.06.2025

12:30PM

RECEPTION AND REGISTRATION

1:30 PM

WELCOME AUDIENCE - MASTER OF CEREMONIES MIKE PERLSTEIN WWL-TV
SCREENING - SHATTERED FAMILIES: THE COLLAPSE OF AMERICA'S MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM - NICOLE (NIKKI) FORSTON, PRODUCER

2:35 PM

INTERMISSION

2:50 PM

SPEAKER

- JUDGE KEVIN J CENTANNI, 6TH JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT, PARISH OF JEFFERSON, KENNER

3:10 PM

PANEL ONE

MODERATOR: WILD WAYNE BENJAMIN

PANELISTS:

- Elinore McCance-Katz, M.D., PhD.
- Paul Webster
- Lynda Kaufman
- James Brad McConville, MD
- Denise Dugas

4:10 PM

INTERMISSION AND GUEST SPEAKERS

- Tiffany Barrette, dedicated mental-health advocate, community leader, and family voice for systemic reform in Louisiana.

4:45 PM

PANEL TWO

MODERATOR: DENISE DUGAS

PANELISTS:

- Brian Stettin
- Bethany Yeiser
- Carrie Estes
- Mary Green-Keys
- Gina Recasner

5:45 PM

QUESTION AND ANSWER -

MODERATOR: JANET HAYS

Mike Perlstein

Investigative Reporter at WWL-TV



Mike Perlstein has worked as an investigative reporter at WWL-TV in New Orleans since 2012. As a member of the Eyewitness Investigates team, Mike has tackled a wide range of stories exposing government waste, corrupt officials and

miscarriages of justice in the courts. Mike moved to New Orleans in 1986 to work as a staff writer at the Times- Picayune, where he immersed himself in the region's spicy politics, hard-edged crime news and rich environments for investigative reporting. During Mike's distinguished 20-year career at the newspaper, he wrote extensively about crime and punishment, earning many national and regional journalism awards. Mike was awarded Pulitzer Prizes for Breaking News and Public Service as part of the newspaper team that covered Hurricane Katrina. As an educator, Mike has shared his front-line reporting experiences with hundreds of aspiring journalists, teaching at SUNO, Dillard, Tulane, and Loyola. At Loyola, where he was a Visiting Assistant Professor from 2006-2009, he wrote freelance articles for The New York Times, Washington Post, New Orleans Magazine and others. Mike has a masters degree in journalism from the Medill School at Northwestern University and a bachelor's degree from Reed College. In his spare time, he coaches the soccer and basketball teams of his three children.

Nicole (Nikki) Forston

Film maker | Producer



Nikki partnered with Director: Stephen Seager, MD to produce *Shattered Families: the Collapse of America's Mental Health System*, an historical look at America's disconnected and fractured mental health care system.

Dr. Seager brings home for us in vivid detail and unassailable facts: The “system of care” as it is today feels like determined indifference and neglect. The outcomes are death, homelessness, and incarceration loved-ones living with severe mental illnesses. We know we can do better; the imperative is that we must. The question is: How many more “shattered families” are we willing to sacrifice to the “system” of the status quo? Dr. Seager and his speakers’ stories compel change-makers and policy-changers into bold action.

Hon. Judge Kevin J Centanni



Judge Kevin J. Centanni is a fourth-generation native of Kenner, Louisiana, and currently serves as Justice of the Peace for the 6th Justice Court of Jefferson Parish, representing Kenner and Harahan. First elected in 1996, he has been re-elected without opposition multiple times and has served continuously for nearly three decades.

From 2018 to 2021, Judge Centanni served as President of the Louisiana Justices of the Peace and Constables Association and now holds the position of Immediate Past President. He has also served in leadership roles with the Jefferson Parish Justices of the Peace and Constables Association and has been appointed by the Louisiana Supreme Court to the Technology Commission and the Long-Term Planning Subcommittee of the Judicial Council. Among his many honors, he received the Louisiana State Judicial Award from the Department of Justice and the 2023 Joseph L. Giarrusso Civic Award.

Judge Centanni holds a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration from Southeastern Louisiana University and is a graduate of Tulane University's Executive Government Program. Prior to entering public service, he held executive roles in insurance and municipal operations, including positions with the City of Kenner and Jefferson Parish.

Deeply committed to service, Judge Centanni co-founded multiple community organizations including the Kenner Italian Heritage Festival, the Goodfellows Social Club of Rivertown, and a community food relief program with CRC and Wal-Mart. He continues to serve on boards and advisory committees supporting health, education, and community development.

He and his wife, Mary Burke Centanni, have been married for 40 years and have two daughters and one grandson.

Elinore McCance-Katz, M.D., Ph.D.



Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Human Behavior at the Alpert School of Medicine, Senior Research Fellow School of Public Health at Brown University

Elinore McCance-Katz, M.D., Ph.D. served as the first Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use and led the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services from

2017-2021. She obtained her Ph.D. from Yale University with a specialty in Infectious Disease Epidemiology and is a graduate of the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. She is board certified in General Psychiatry and in Addiction Psychiatry. She continues her practice at Eleanor Slater Hospital in forensic addiction psychiatry. She currently serves as Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Human Behavior at the Alpert School of Medicine and is a Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Behavioral and Social Sciences at the School of Public Health at Brown University. Previously, she served as the first Chief Medical Officer for SAMHSA. Prior to coming to SAMHSA, she served at the University of California, San Francisco as a Professor of Psychiatry, as the Medical Director for the California Department of Alcohol and Drug

Programs, and as the Medical Director of SAMHSA's Clinical Support Systems for Buprenorphine (PCSS-B) and Opioids (PCSS-O). Dr. McCance-Katz has published extensively in the areas of clinical pharmacology, medications development for substance use disorders, drug-drug interactions, and treatment of HIV infection in drug users. She served on the World Health Organization (WHO) committee that developed guidelines on the treatment of drug users living with HIV/AIDS and she served as a physician in the PEPFAR (President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief) initiative where she worked in Vietnam to assist in establishing methadone treatment programs to address opioid use disorder (OUD) and HIV infection in that country. Dr. McCance-Katz lives in Cranston, Rhode Island with her husband and three dogs.

Paul Webster

Cicero Institute, Senior Fellow



Paul Webster is an expert on all things homelessness, including programs and policies. At the Cicero Institute, his research is focused on developing model legislation, effective public policy, and providing testimony in support of these efforts.

Paul brings more than 30 years experience to this work, including roles as Executive Director of LA Alliance for Human Rights and Senior Policy Advisor on homelessness for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Paul lives in California with his wife and dog and is an avid disc golfer.

Lynda Kaufman

VP Development and Public Relations, Psynergy Programs, Inc.



Lynda Kaufmann is a passionate leader and advocate in the field of behavioral health, currently serving as Vice President of Development and Public Relations at Psynergy Programs, Inc. With more than 15 years of dedicated service to Psynergy, Lynda has played a pivotal role in shaping the organization’s growth, expanding its residential and clinical services, and championing sustainable housing solutions for individuals living with severe and persistent mental illness.

Her career reflects a deep commitment to community-based care, advocacy, and responsible development. Under her leadership, Psynergy has secured Community Care Expansion (CCE) funding for innovative senior programs, partnered with counties to launch new behavioral health initiatives, and expanded its supported housing network. Lynda’s vision emphasizes growing “slowly, appropriately, and steadily” to ensure that every program maintains the highest standards of care and dignity for clients.

Beyond her organizational leadership, Lynda is widely recognized as a voice for mental health advocacy in California. In 2020, she was named Corporate Chair of NAMIWalks Northern California, where she championed awareness, support, and resources for families and individuals navigating mental health challenges. Her advocacy extends far beyond Psynergy’s campuses—she has testified before the State Senate, served on county mental health advisory boards, and worked tirelessly to connect families with resources, often going above and beyond to ensure no one is left without support. Her dedication has earned her significant honors, including Psynergy’s 2019 Housing Hero Award from San Mateo County and a prestigious CNN Heroes nomination in 2019. CNN recognized her as one of the “everyday people changing the world,” highlighting her tireless efforts to help families in crisis, relocate vulnerable residents when facilities closed, and personally drive individuals to safe placements when no other options were available. Lynda’s career began in the financial sector, where she excelled as a branch manager and business banker, consistently ranking among the top performers nationally. Yet her true calling emerged in behavioral health, where she has since dedicated her life to advancing recovery-focused care. Her journey—from managing admissions at Drake House, to directing government and public affairs at Psynergy, to her current executive leadership role—illustrates her unwavering belief that recovery happens when people are given the right supports, housing, and community.

Today, Lynda continues to inspire colleagues, families, and advocates across California. She is celebrated not only for her professional achievements but also for her compassion, empathy, and relentless drive to make mental health care accessible and humane. Whether leading organizational growth, chairing statewide initiatives, or meeting families one-on-one, Lynda embodies the mission of Psynergy Programs: to create places where individuals can heal, thrive, and belong.

James Brad McConville, MD

Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine, Psychiatry, and Forensic Psychiatry; Tulane University School of Medicine



Dr. J. Brad McConville received his medical degree from University of Iowa Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine in 2005. He is board-certified by the American Board of Psychiatry & Neurology.

Dr. McConville performs Psychiatry and sees patients at Ochsner Medical Center as well as East Jefferson General Hospital. He also serves as Prog. Dir. of Tulane Internal Medicine & Psychiatry Residency and Assistant Professor of Psychiatry.

Denise Dugas

Mental Health Advocate



Denise Dugas is an accomplished senior healthcare executive with over 26 years of leadership experience across for-profit and nonprofit integrated healthcare organizations, academic health systems, and freestanding behavioral health facilities.

She brings extensive expertise in strategic planning, business development, hospital operations, and leadership mentorship throughout the healthcare continuum, with a primary focus on behavioral health.

Throughout her career, Denise has been a dedicated advocate for mental health, serving on numerous government, community, and healthcare association boards, councils, and committees. While she recognizes the significant progress made in behavioral healthcare over the years, she remains committed to addressing persistent gaps—particularly those related to the social determinants of health affecting individuals with chronic and severe mental illness.

Denise currently works as a behavioral health consultant and serves on the Board of Directors for the Metropolitan Human Services District.

Tiffany Barrette

Tiffany Barrette is a dedicated mental-health advocate, community leader, and family voice for systemic reform in Louisiana.



Untreated serious mental illness. Driven by lived experience and a commitment to improving outcomes for vulnerable individuals, Tiffany focuses on elevating honest dialogue, supporting families navigating complex systems, and pushing for practical, humane reforms to strengthen Louisiana's behavioral-health response.

Tiffany is also an active member of the Metairie Pontchartrain Lions Club, where she volunteers alongside her fellow Lions to serve the local community through outreach, service projects, and support initiatives that uplift families and those in need. In addition to her advocacy work, Tiffany is a devoted mother and a detail-driven project manager, currently studying for her PMP certification. She brings the same diligence to her family life, legal efforts, community projects, and event planning—ensuring every initiative is purposeful and grounded in compassion. Above all, Tiffany is driven by the belief that families deserve a voice, people deserve treatment, and Louisiana can build a mental-health system that truly helps those most in need.

Brian Stettin

Senior Advisor on Severe Mental Illness in the administration of New York City Mayor Eric Adams.



Brian Stettin is Senior Advisor on Severe Mental Illness in the administration of New York City Mayor Eric Adams. He works in collaboration with city agencies and the city's public hospital system to develop and implement policies prioritizing psychiatric care and support for New Yorkers in greatest need.

From 2009 to 2022, Stettin was the policy director for the Treatment Advocacy Center (TAC), a national organization devoted to removing barriers to the treatment of severe mental illness. In this role, he drafted and advocated for legislation enacted federally and in numerous states to improve civil commitment laws and expand access to mental health treatment. Stettin also led TAC's efforts to support communities across the US in the establishment and operation of "assisted outpatient treatment" (AOT) programs. Prior to joining TAC, Stettin spent a decade in state government. From 1999 to 2007, he was an Assistant New York State Attorney General, serving in the Program Development Unit. In this role, he drafted the original proposal of "Kendra's Law" (New York's AOT law) in 1999, as well as significant amendments enacted in 2006. Subsequently he served as counsel to the Health Committee of the New York Assembly and as Special Counsel to the New York State Commissioner of Criminal Justice Services, focusing on civil-law strategies to address neighborhood crime. Stettin is a graduate of City College of New York and the University of Texas School of Law

Bethany Yeiser

President of the CURESZ Foundation, which she established in 2016 with Dr. Henry Nasrallah.



Before her gradual descent into schizophrenia, Bethany was a promising university honors student. By her third year at the university, she had published three articles in biochemistry, and was working as a violinist.

In 2002, following her junior year of college, she spent three months as a volunteer in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya and Lagos, Nigeria, living in poverty. After her return from Africa, she had her first psychotic break. Because of undiagnosed and untreated mental illness, she was no longer able to focus on her studies. The insidious emergence of schizophrenia led her on a path away from the university and into a life of delusion and isolation. In 2003, Bethany left college, only to become homeless for four years. Eventually, a series of events led her to reclaim her life. In 2008, she made a full recovery. Bethany finished her bachelor's degree in molecular biology with honor from the University of Cincinnati in 2011. Today, Bethany is a sought-after motivational speaker with a passion to educate and inspire change in the way schizophrenia is perceived and treated, and in the stigma so negatively attached to this diagnosis. She has shared her story at numerous conferences and events for physicians and health care providers around the country.

Her memoir *Mind Estranged: My Journey from Schizophrenia and Homelessness to Recovery* is her first book, published in the summer of 2014. In March of 2020, Bethany was awarded the Dr. Frederick Frese Award from the Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America for her advocacy. Bethany's second book, *Awakenings: Stories of Recovery and Emergence from Schizophrenia*, came out on February 9, 2024.

Bethany maintains a blog called "Recovery Road" on PsychologyToday.com. Her other interests include performing classical and popular music on violin, and studying ancient Hebrew and Mandarin Chinese.

Read more about Bethany here! <https://www.bethanyyeiser.com/about/>

Mary Green- Keys

Occupational Therapist | Family Member



Mary E. Green-Keys, OTR/L, is a licensed occupational therapist and devoted mother of two whose life has been profoundly shaped by her son’s journey with mental illness. Her story is one of fierce love, quiet

resilience, and the transformative power of showing up—day after day—for someone you love.

As both a caregiver and a clinician, Mary has witnessed firsthand how mental illness can intersect with housing instability, stigma, and systemic gaps in care. Her family’s journey has included navigating the heartbreaking realities of homelessness—an experience that deepened her understanding of how vulnerable individuals and families can fall through the cracks.

With over two decades of experience in occupational therapy and a deeply personal understanding of the emotional and systemic challenges families face, Mary brings a rare and powerful perspective to conversations about mental health, caregiving, and advocacy. Her lived experience has taught her what no textbook could: how to navigate uncertainty with grace, how to hold space for pain and hope at the same time, and how to keep choosing love—even when the path is hard.

Mary speaks with honesty, warmth, and a deep desire to break stigma and build connection. Whether addressing parents, professionals, or community members, she offers not just insight—but a sense of solidarity and strength.

Carrie Estes

Healthcare Consultant | Mental Health Advocate | Mom



Carrie Estes is a lifelong New Orleanian, working as a healthcare consultant for Integrated Health Management while raising four (now grown) children as a single mom. Carrie graduated from the University of North Carolina at

Chapel Hill with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in French. With over 20 years of healthcare management experience, Carrie brings much expertise in business development, operations, human resources, acquisitions and financial management/reporting. As a single mom to four adult children, one of whom suffers from serious mental illness, she can relate to the struggles of families and caregivers trying to navigate our very broken mental health system. While Carrie's son is currently thriving as a direct result of AOT, she and her family struggled alone and frustrated for 10+ years trying to find help. Carrie is a passionate advocate for Healing Minds NOLA, focusing on destigmatizing mental illness, raising awareness of AOT and helping to change legislation. As such, she testified at the Louisiana State Senate to support the passage of the Matthew Samuel Milam Act, which passed unanimously and became law in 2024. Matthew Milam tragically lost his life to suicide from mental illness. This law mandates the receipt of information provided by caregivers to healthcare providers and coordinates inpatient discharge planning. In her free time, Carrie enjoys cooking for her family, needlepointing, reading and walking her dog Moose.

Gina Recasner

Attorney, Mental Health Advocacy Service

Gina Recasner is a New Orleans native, and she obtained her Juris Doctor degree from Tulane University School of Law in 1991. After graduating from Tulane, Ms. Recasner obtained licenses to practice law in Louisiana and Minnesota, and she worked for the Minnesota Court of Appeals, Spears & Spears (New Orleans), the Hennepin County District Court, the Legal Aid Society of Minneapolis, and the New Orleans City Attorney's Office. In October 1996, Ms. Recasner began working for the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (later the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH)) where she practiced in several areas of law including mental health law, public health law, employment law, medical records law, juvenile law, and interdiction law. In 2023, after her retirement from LDH, Ms. Recasner began working for the Mental Health Advocacy Service (MHAS) where she is currently employed. Ms. Recasner represents MHAS clients in assistive outpatient treatment commitment proceedings. Ms. Recasner has practiced mental health law for over 25 years, and she has handled hundreds of adult and juvenile cases addressing numerous mental health issues including inpatient and outpatient commitment proceedings, competency proceedings, and not guilty by reason of insanity proceedings.

Wild Wayne Benjamin

New Orleans Radio Host



Wild Wayne is the voice and spirit of New Orleans — a celebrated radio personality, community leader, philanthropist, and cultural ambassador. As host of the city’s highest- rated afternoon drive radio show, he has become a household name, shaping the soundtrack of New Orleans while giving back to the community that raised him. He is also the unmistakable Voice of the New Orleans Pelicans, serving as the team’s official PA Announcer.

Additionally, he recently served as the entertainment announcer for Super Bowl LIX. In 2024, the City of New Orleans presented him with the Key to the City, cementing his legacy as one of its most influential figures. Wayne’s entrepreneurial drive led him to create Industry Influence, a monthly music conference, showcase, and online platform that has provided aspiring artists with opportunities to perform, network, and connect with industry insiders. His voice and energy have also powered campaigns for some of America’s most recognized brands, including MetroPCS, Raising Cane’s, Pillsbury, McDonald’s, Pepsi, Chevrolet, Sam’s Club, Nabisco, and AT&T.; Equally known for his philanthropy, Wayne founded The Benjamin Foundation in 2000 and continues to serve as Chairman. Through this work, he created the Wild Wayne Summer Experience, an annual program that has reached more than a thousand inner-city youth, introducing them to the rich cultural, historical, and entertainment heritage of Louisiana. He also served as host of the City of New Orleans’ Midnight Basketball League from 2014 to 2019, offering mentorship and safe recreational outlets for young people. From the Super Bowl stage to community classrooms, from the radio booth to global film and television screens, Wild Wayne embodies the resilience, creativity, and soul of New Orleans.

Janet Hays

Director, Healing Minds NOLA



Janet Hays has partnered with like-minded individuals and organizations across the state and nation to demand change that leads toward a full continuum of psychiatric care for seriously mentally ill people in

Louisiana. She advocates for policies and matching funding priorities that focus on evidence-based treatment and care programs. Most recently, Ms. Hays lead an effort to robustly implement Louisiana's under-utilized assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) law. AOT is tailored to the small group of people with serious mental illnesses who cannot or will not adhere to treatment in the community without supervision.

Turning Today's Conversation into Action

Healing Minds NOLA- Post Event Action

Real change doesn't end when this event does. It begins with what we do next

Our Mission

To convert momentum, connection, and insight into advocacy, policy change, and community solutions that improve care for individuals and families affected by severe mental illness.

What Happens Next

1. EVENT FOLLOW UP

- a. All attendees will receive a follow up email including the event recording, highlight clips, key takeaways, policy priorities for 2026, and ways to stay involved through volunteering or partnerships

2. COMMUNITY VIRTUAL ROUND TABLE

- a. Speakers, professionals, and attendees will reconvene virtually to transform discussion into recommendations. A Community Recommendation Report will be shared with leaders, agencies, media, and partners

3. TREATMENT & CARE TASK-FORCE

- a. attendees are invited to participate in focused workgroups addressing legislative reform, strengthening the community care continuum, and expanding public awareness through advocacy and outreach

4. MEDIA AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- a. The events impact will be shared through media outreach, sponsor recognition, and promotion of next-phase reform efforts.

How You Can Help

- Volunteer
- Join a task-force
- Contact policymakers
- Share this message
- Partner or sponsor
- Stay informed
- Tell your story

Stay Connected

Website: HealingMindsNOLA.org

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Text or Call: (504) 356-9888

Together, we move from Awareness to Action — from Crisis to Solutions.