



girl scouts  
of nassau county

# Girls' Mental Health Matters:

*A Path to Understanding and Action* | VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1



# Table of Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Background .....</b>                         | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>About Us .....</b>                           | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Lessons from the Field .....</b>             | <b>5</b>  |
| Breaking the Silence .....                      | 5         |
| Centering Youth Voice .....                     | 5         |
| Parallel Pathways for Youth and Adults .....    | 6         |
| Empowered Wayfinding .....                      | 6         |
| Promising Preventative Approaches .....         | 7         |
| <b>GSNC Action Steps .....</b>                  | <b>8</b>  |
| Mental Health First Aid Training .....          | 8         |
| Mental Health Symposium 2.0 .....               | 9         |
| Widening the Circle .....                       | 9         |
| #GSNCNotAlone Challenge .....                   | 10        |
| Girl Scouts Mental Wellness Patch Program ..... | 10        |
| <b>What You Can Do .....</b>                    | <b>11</b> |
| Opportunities for Collaboration .....           | 12        |
| <b>Recommended Resources .....</b>              | <b>13</b> |
| <b>Meet the Experts .....</b>                   | <b>14</b> |



# Background

In February 2024, Girl Scouts of Nassau County (GSNC) hosted its inaugural Mental Health Symposium at the Long Island Children's Museum. The symposium brought together over 50 community stakeholders invested in youth mental health on Long Island for an event dedicated to addressing the mental health crisis in our country, with a focus on our local communities.

Recognizing the importance of fostering open conversation and sharing knowledge to cultivate a supportive environment, GSNC brought together ten experts from diverse fields—including psychiatry, mental health equity, health care policy, crime victim services, adolescent trauma specialists, and more—to discuss issues that adolescents, especially girls, are facing today. The discussion also included tools that we as non-profits, educators, trusted adults, and practitioners can utilize to better serve our population.

This initiative was born of both the need GSNC has seen in the girls we've served in the wake of COVID restrictions ending, as well as the 2023 report on girl mental health from the CDC. For more on the CDC's report, please visit: [bit.ly/cdc-girl-mental-health](https://bit.ly/cdc-girl-mental-health)



Girl Scouts is on a mission to prepare girls to address and meet the unique challenges of today and tomorrow, and supporting girls' mental well-being is one of its hallmark focus areas. The symposium amplified the need for urgent action in Nassau County through our panelists' insights on the latest research, best practices, and strategies needed to reimagine what a comprehensive support system for girls could and should look like.

This report captures our key learnings and action items from this powerful gathering, as well as recommendations for sector leaders and youth-serving organizations to take their own steps to fortify mental well-being for the young people in their care.



*“Addressing mental health is crucial, especially in a post-pandemic world where many are still grappling with its effects. Our goal in hosting this symposium was to create a platform for dialogue, understanding, and education to begin to build solutions for Nassau County. As Girl Scouts, we are dedicated to nurturing young minds, and understanding mental health is a fundamental part of that journey.”*

—RANDELL M. BYNUM, LMSW  
CEO, GIRL SCOUTS OF NASSAU COUNTY







# About Us

The mission of Girl Scouts is to build girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place. Girl Scouts of Nassau County (GSNC) works to ensure that girls in our region can experience all that Girl Scouting has to offer, including renowned STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) programming, entrepreneurial skills training, outdoor experiences, girl fellowship and mentor relationships, and so much more. Girl Scouts of Nassau County is an exemplary leadership program that brings time-tested methods and research-backed opportunities to girls in our region. We proudly serve almost 11,000 girls aged 5-18 in Nassau County, with over 4,000 adult volunteer members.



# Lessons from the Field

The symposium panelists shared a wide range of insights to support mental wellness for the young people in our communities, and left attendees with the following key takeaways.

## 1 Breaking the Silence

More often than not, mental illness is viewed as something to be hidden. This palpable silence creates the conditions for young people to resist the instinct to share what's on their minds, thereby engaging in a harmful cycle of invisible pain and shame.

Silence can also lead to isolation, and there is a growing body of research dedicated to the rampant loneliness epidemic that's plaguing so many of our young people. Creating opportunities for them to ask for help without fear of judgment or embarrassment normalizes the conversation about mental health as part of our daily existence. **Early and ongoing dialogue to understand a day in the life of the young people in our care, inclusive of both what they do and how they feel, is where this work begins.**

Whether interrupting silence in a 1:1 conversation with a young person, or through ensuring that our institutions are safe enough to thoughtfully engage in responsive approaches to mental wellness, **more of us working together to address mental health disparities for our young people starts with making space for open and honest conversations with them and each other.**

## 2 Centering Youth Voice

In some families and communities, cultural stigmas that deem mental health as a deficit or fake illness prevent individuals from seeking care. Making space for authentic youth voices to be heard, particularly marginalized youth voices, helps bridge the treatment gap by starting conversations that both challenge traditional norms, and open up avenues for culturally sensitive mental health support.

Attuned listening and bearing witness also help encourage young people to speak openly about their mental health experiences, which seeds the ground for strong peer-to-peer support groups. Youth are often more receptive to listening and learning about mental health challenges from someone their own age, and this receptivity reduces the stigma and shame that so many of them carry. **Intentional spaces that encourage circle-based and other forms of dialogic shares also foster resilience for young people on their post-traumatic growth journeys and inspires their peers to adopt similar practices.**

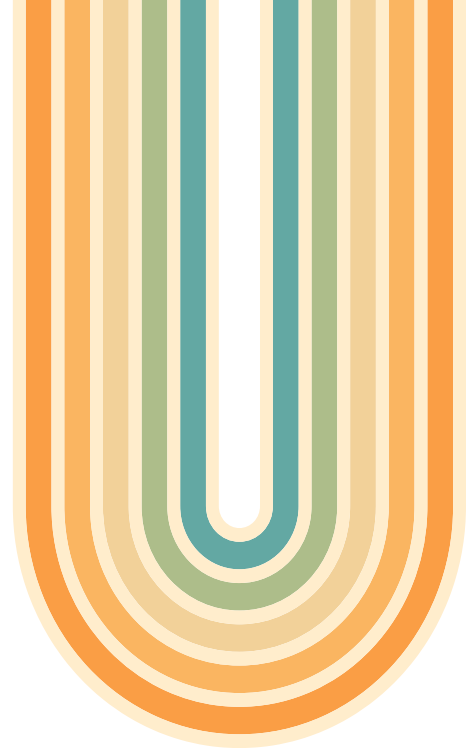




### 3 Parallel Pathways for Youth and Adults

The assumption that adults' lived experiences make them any kind of knowledge bearer or mental health expert is a dangerous and false paradigm. It's not only our youth who struggle to understand their own feelings and emotional health; the adults in their lives experience their own challenges with fluency in these areas. Even adults in youth-serving professional roles are not always trained in youth development and trauma-informed practices, and long-standing, complex, emotional histories of their own can be triggered in their attempts to address mental health challenges that arise for the young people in their care.

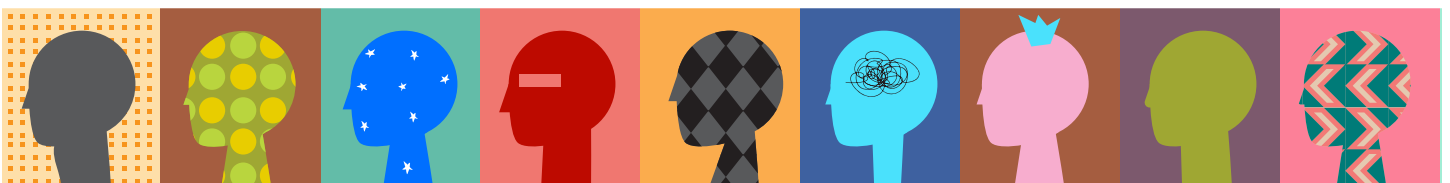
**Ensuring that adults working directly with young people receive the requisite training and spaces to process their own emotions, as well as providing resources for parents and caregivers to access support for themselves, is paramount to the ongoing mental wellness of our youth.**



### 4 Empowered Wayfinding

Educating our youth about mental health while combating a disproportionate amount of misinformation requires accurate, developmentally appropriate, and relatable content for them to engage. **Creating opportunities for structured programming that cover topics such as emotional regulation, coping mechanisms, self-care, and recognizing symptoms of mental health disorders is one way that leaders in schools, community-based organizations, and faith-based groups can galvanize resources, time, and decision-making power to reach youth at scale.**

For better or worse, our young people already bring wayfinding skills to bear as the digital natives that they are, but incorporating critical thinking and discernment standards into mental health programming teaches them to question the reliability of the information they consume online. Core school-based content and/or after school modules that help them identify credible sources, differentiate between opinions and facts, and recognize the influence of algorithms that prioritize sensational content provides a foundation for them to become skilled fact-checkers. This knowledge will help grow a future base of informed consumers who understand how to verify claims related to mental health, and seek out reliable sources like health organizations and experts.



## 5

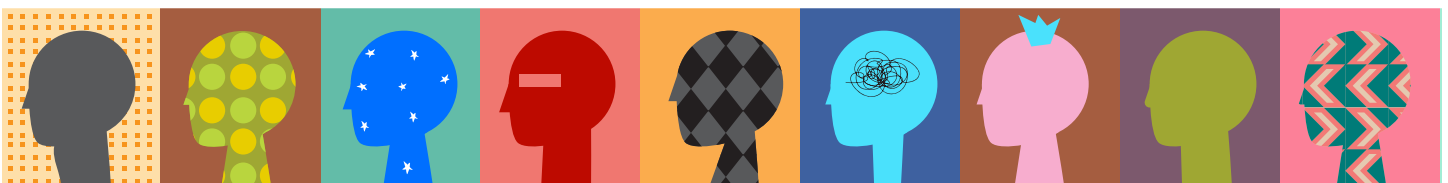
## Promising Preventative Approaches

There is a well-documented mental health workforce shortage in New York and nationally that affects urban and rural communities alike, and has worsened due to increased demand post-pandemic. As of the September 30, 2024 *Bureau of Health Workforce* report from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, New York State currently has 192 designated mental health provider shortage areas, with only 15.5% of need met statewide <sup>1</sup>. Even with expanded access to the types of providers who qualify as licensed mental health practitioners, there's often public funding exclusions that prevent them from delivering services that rely on Medicare and Medicaid funding—of which many everyday Americans use to access care.

*In addition to the provider shortage, the runway between an individual wanting care and beginning treatment with a 'right fit' provider can be anywhere from a few weeks to months on end depending on your location, provider availability in your area, the type of care needed, and your insurance status. These inordinate barriers are hard enough for adults to navigate, and nearly impossible for our young people to do without significant adversity and multiple stops and starts.*

With so many barriers to surmount, investing in youth Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs at scale that are proven to mitigate adverse outcomes for youth, and aggressively promoting mental health fluency amongst more adults in their lives, can help shift the macro focus from treatment to prevention. And there's groundbreaking work being done right here in New York to grow the provider base by training bachelor's-level community wellness workers who can work with small groups in four-to-six week evidence-based mental health interventions. **Because with consistent education and more widely available, trained interventionists, many young people can develop self-awareness and coping skills before reaching a crisis point that requires de-escalation.**

<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Health Workforce, Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Designated Health Professional Shortage Areas Statistics: First Quarter of Fiscal Year 2024*. Oct. 2024, [data.hrsa.gov/Default/GenerateHPSAQuarterlyReport](https://data.hrsa.gov/Default/GenerateHPSAQuarterlyReport).



# GSNC Action Steps

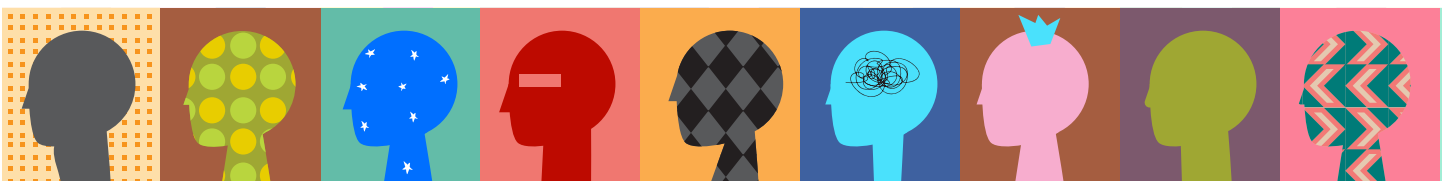
We're doing what it takes to be part of the solution. Through a multi-year strategic plan that GSNC commissioned, we've dedicated time, human capital, and financial resources to support the mental wellness of Girl Scouts in Nassau County. These are just a few of the initiatives we're undertaking over the next three years, and we invite interested thought partners and potential collaborators to contact us for more information at [customercare@gsnc.org](mailto:customercare@gsnc.org).

## 1 Mental Health First Aid Training

Even with the best intentions, adults leading Girl Scout programs do not have all the answers for girls facing mental health and wellness issues. From minor concerns to catastrophic mental health crises, adults in this role need adequate training in order to give girls the best chance of getting the help they need. Just like requiring First Aid training, Mental Health First Aid training is a standard of care that we want to become the norm for all adults supporting youth.

**Mental Health First Aid Certification is an evidence-based program designed to train ordinary people to respond and assist someone experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge or crisis, enabling anyone and everyone to assist in the event of a panic attack, expressed struggle with depression or anxiety, and much more.**

At GSNC, we're committed to breaking the mental health cone of silence for our Girl Scouts, and ensuring that our adults are adequately prepared to do so. The training of even just one adult leading Girl Scout programs has the potential to reach dozens of Girl Scouts in our community aged 5-18. This two-hour training equips them with the skills to navigate mental health and wellness challenges that our Girl Scouts face, spanning everything from teaching self-care to more urgent needs including when to get a professional involved. Our goal is to develop a robust group of caring, trained adults who can respond to these kinds of hardships in the girls' day-to-day lives, skillfully and in real time.





## 2 Mental Health Symposium 2.0

We recognize the importance of fostering open conversations and sharing knowledge to cultivate a supportive environment for mental health, and are excited to announce that our **2nd Annual Mental Health Symposium will take place on Thursday, May 8.**

**Building on the success of our 2024 gathering, our 2025 symposium will once again convene Long Island service providers, practitioners, educators, policy makers, and nonprofits to share resources, strategies, and more to better serve adolescents in our communities.**

Additionally, our 2025 symposium will integrate youth voice with a representative group of older Girl Scouts as panelists, so that we can listen and learn about their mental health successes and challenges in their own words.

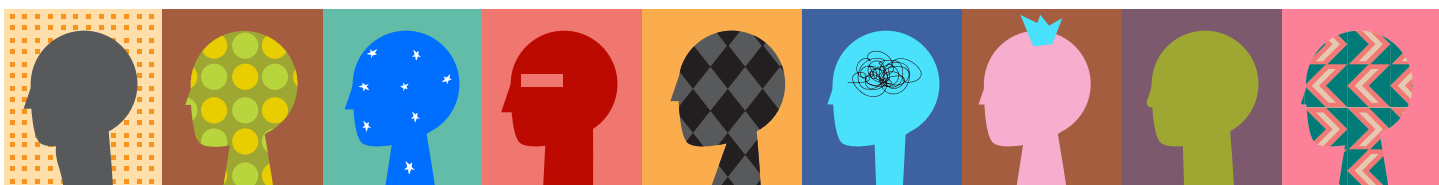
## 3 Widening the Circle

Girls need Girl Scouting as they seek connection, build relationships, and traverse this formative time in life, and our nation needs their perspective and leadership in our communities. Through expanded work with schools, and faith-based and community organizations, GSNC is piloting a newly developed SEL curriculum called Be U, that onboards targeted areas of high growth opportunity to the Girl Scout Leadership Experience. Girl Scouts have always learned the importance of persevering through adversity and drawing on the resilience and courage that are crucial to meeting challenges—skills that girls have drawn on time and time again both in their early personhood journeys, and for the rest of their lives. **When girls feel safe, there is no limit to what they can achieve, and when they've got this solid foundation, they can then take action together to make the world a better place.**

*Girl Scouts obtain the skills, resources, and community to develop a strong sense of self; discover their values, strengths, and the world around them; connect with others in a multicultural environment; and take action to make a difference.*

*By participating in Girl Scouts, girls grow their perseverance, self-esteem, and sociability, leading to lower rates of depression, aggression, and obesity, as well as greater life satisfaction. When youth master these life skills early on, the benefits are long term.*

Topics in developing authentic friendships, goal-setting, building confidence, knowing yourself, and understanding the importance of support systems and giving back are developmentally scaffolded for grades 2-6, and culminate in participants presenting their learnings and activity artifacts exhibition-style to a group of their peers and or the broader school community/families.



## 4 #GSNCNotAlone Challenge



#NotAloneChallenge is a national mental health campaign to remind people they're not alone while providing a free mental health toolkit. The challenge also helps raise funds to provide mental health programming to those in need.



The Inspiring Children Foundation, in partnership with co-founder and chief executive officer of MTV and iHeartMedia Bob Pittman, and Grammy nominated singer-songwriter and mental health pioneer Jewel, joined forces with hundreds of thought leaders, CEOs, celebrities, artists, musicians, and mental health experts to create one of the largest and most wide-reaching mental health campaigns in history. The #NotAloneChallenge achieved 3.2 billion social media impressions and gathered a diverse group of thought leaders and ambassadors to advocate for mental health.

Of the many benefits of Girl Scouting, our members become part of a storied national and international network of more than 50 million girls and women of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. **Girl Scouts are truly never alone, and we are leading our own #GSNCNotAlone Challenge to promote togetherness and sistershood across our 11,000 girls and 4,000 adult volunteer members.** Through awareness campaigns leading up to our 2025 Mental Health Symposium and Mental Health Awareness Month, we will be featuring badge bundles, shop items, and themed activities branded under #GSNCNotAlone.

## 5 Girl Scouts Mental Wellness Patch Program

Becoming a Girl Scout means tapping into a supportive group of people who uplift you every step of the way. For our troops that are ready to go deeper with mental wellness themed programming, the new [Girl Scouts Mental Wellness patch program](#) taps into the strength of the #GSNCNotAlone Challenge to remind girls that they're never alone in facing challenges, and invites troops to dive further into helping girls understand their emotions. While all Girl Scout programs provide a sense of belonging and embrace the value of mental wellness, this one-of-a-kind patch program goes deeper to foster emotional resilience in our girls. **Activities like 'Knowing My Emotions,' 'Finding My Voice,' and 'Showing Up for Me and You' offer specific tools and activities to help Girl Scouts better understand mental well-being through accessible activities like making art and writing poetry.** The Mental Wellness patch program was made possible by the HCA Healthcare Foundation and developed in collaboration with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), and supports Girl Scouts in grades 4–12.



# What You Can Do

As mental health challenges continue to rise among young people, we know that community leaders, educators, and policymakers are being urged to take swift and meaningful action to expand mental health services. The pressures of school, social media, and everyday life can feel overwhelming for today's youth, and it's clear that access to mental health resources can make all the difference.

One of the most immediate recommendations from our expert panel is to increase the availability of school counselors, psychologists, and social workers, ensuring that students have access to high-quality services and professionals when they need support. Equally important is making sure that mental health education is part of our programs across spaces that youth inhabit—making explicit the strategies and tools they can draw upon for stress management and emotional regulation, and deepening critical thinking skills to navigate the content they encounter online.

Community leaders can also play a vital role by promoting awareness and reducing the stigma around mental health. This can be as simple as organizing workshops or launching peer support programs where young people can share their experiences and concerns in a safe space. And by working with local mental health providers, communities can create networks that help young people access services conveniently and barrier-free.

**These efforts are about more than just providing an ecosystem of support—they're about creating a visible culture where it's okay to ask for help, where mental health is valued as much as physical health, and where young people are equipped to navigate the pressures of an increasingly digital age with their confidence intact. And collaboration across direct service providers, thought leaders, policy makers, and child advocates is critical to meet this demand.**

*As we look ahead to 2025, we challenge strategic partners and funders to join us in advancing this work at Girl Scouts of Nassau County. By combining our expertise with your support, we can create sustainable, scalable solutions that empower our girls to thrive.*



# Opportunities for Collaboration Include:

- **Symposium Partnership:** Join our growing roster of program partners for our 2025 Mental Health Symposium by providing tailored resources and activations for both adult and girl participants.
- **Funding for Research and Resources:** Support ongoing research and the development of custom programs that address mental health challenges faced by girls in Nassau County.
- **Commit to Breaking the Silence:** Share this report within your organizations and join us in making your own bold commitments to support youth mental health in your contexts, and let us know! As part of our **#GSNCNotAlone** campaign and 2025 symposium, we'll be featuring these commitments for increased access, visibility, and cross-promotion.



*Interested thought partners and potential collaborators can contact us for more information at [customercare@gsnc.org](mailto:customercare@gsnc.org).*

**It's up to all of us to create the futures we want to see—where every young person has the tools to thrive, both mentally and emotionally. As you engage with the young people in your lives, remember that even a brief moment of attuned listening can make a difference, and keeping these prompts in your short-list of go to affirmations can help meet these moments with tenderness and curiosity:**

*"Your feelings are valid, and I'm really honored that you're sharing them with me."*

*"You can take your time. I'm not in a rush. I just want to understand what's going on."*

*"It's okay if you're not ready to share everything right now. When you are, I'll be here."*

*"Whatever you're going through, you're not alone. We can work through it together."*

*"There's no judgment here. I want to hear how you're feeling today."*

*"This is a safe space, and I care about how you're feeling."*

We encourage you to champion our upcoming **#GSNCNotAlone Challenge**, and hope to see you at our **2025 Mental Health Symposium on Thursday, May 8.**





# Recommended Resources

- [Girl Scouts of Nassau County](#)
- [Girl Scouts of the USA](#)
- [Children's Mental Health & Wellness at Family & Children's Association](#)
- [Family Service League Mental Health & Integrated Care](#)
- [Long Island Children's Museum](#)
- [Long Island Crisis Center](#)
- [Mental Health Association of Nassau County](#)
- [Nassau County Department of Human Services:](#)  
*Office of Mental Health, Chemical Dependency & Developmental Disabilities Services*
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\) Queens/Nassau](#)
- [New York State Be Well Program, a project of the Office of Mental Health](#)
- [New York State Office of Mental Health](#)
- [NuHealth's Outpatient Mental Health Center at Nassau University Medical Center](#)
- [Stony Brook Medicine Depression and Suicide Prevention Resources](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Coalition of Long Island](#)
- [Talkspace's NYC teenspace, free online therapy for NYC teens](#)

This event was made possible by the dedicated members, volunteers, staff, and board members of the Girl Scouts of Nassau County, our esteemed panelists, and support from our funders and local champions like you. Thank you.




## SAVE THE DATE

### 2025 Mental Health Symposium

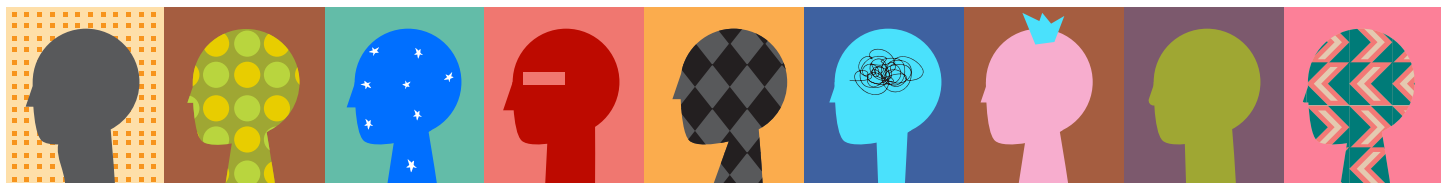
Thursday, May 8, 2025

To join the 2025 Symposium guest list, email [customercare@gsnc.org](mailto:customercare@gsnc.org)

## Social Media Handles

-  **Facebook:** @girlscoutsofnassaucounty
-  **Instagram:** @girlscoutsnassaucounty
-  **LinkedIn:** @GirlScoutsofNassauCounty

*Author Credit: Victoria Crispin (2024)*



# Meet the Experts



## MODERATOR

**Gabby Fidis, RDT, LCAT**  
Creative Arts Therapist  
Bellevue Hospital

Thank you to our moderators and panelists for participating in this important discussion. To learn more about these participants, scan the QR code above, or visit [bit.ly/gsnc-mental-health-panelist-bios-2024](https://bit.ly/gsnc-mental-health-panelist-bios-2024).



## MODERATOR

**Taylor M. John, MPH**  
Trauma Informed Care  
Specialist, Full Spectrum Doula,  
TAYTALKS Podcast Host & Owner



## PANELIST

**Beth Ann Balalaos**  
Access & Inclusion Program Director  
Long Island Children's Museum



## PANELIST

**S.P. Brown/Shanell Parrish-Brown, Esq.**  
Author, attorney, speaker, education  
consultant, professor, and more



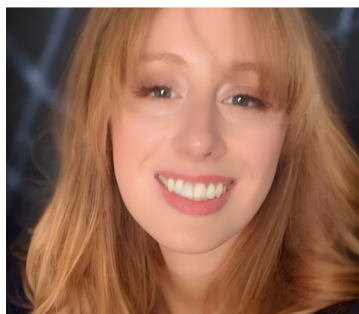
## PANELIST

**Adrian S. Goodwin**  
Law Enforcement Practitioner,  
Entrepreneur, Speaker, Author of  
*Twins in the City*



## PANELIST

**Lisa Halstead, LCSW**  
Student Psychological Counselor  
Queensborough Community College,  
CUNY, and LH Consulting



## PANELIST

**Amanda Jesser-Peña**  
Director of Prevention and  
Development  
Crime Victims Center



## PANELIST

**Chanel Lopez**  
She/Her  
Deputy Director of LGBTQ+ Affairs  
Executive Chambers  
Office of Governor Kathy Hochul



## PANELIST

**David Nemiroff**  
President & CEO  
Harmony Healthcare Long Island



## PANELIST

**Dr. Bernadine Waller, PhD, LMHC**  
NIMH T32 Postdoctoral Research Fellow  
Columbia University  
Irving Medical Center  
New York State Psychiatric Institute

