



**Dr. Riana Elyse Anderson** she/her/hers  
Associate Professor, *Columbia University*

**Bio:** Dr. Riana Elyse Anderson is an Associate Professor at Columbia University's School of Social Work. She earned her PhD in Clinical and Community Psychology at the University of Virginia and completed a Clinical and Community Psychology Residency at Yale University's School of Medicine and a Fellowship in Applied Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania. On the whole, Dr. Anderson aims to facilitate healing in Black families with practical applications of her research and clinical services, as well as through public engagement, teaching, mentorship, and policy recommendations. Dr. Anderson uses mixed methods to study discrimination and racial socialization in Black families and apply her findings to help families reduce their racial stress. She is particularly interested in how family-based interventions help to improve Black youth's psychosocial well-being and health-related behaviors. Dr. Anderson is the developer and director of the EMBRace (Engaging, Managing, and Bonding through Race) intervention and CEO and Founder of RACE Space Inc., and loves to translate her work for a variety of audiences, particularly those whom she serves in the community, via blogs, video, and literary articles. Additionally, for her early career accomplishments, Dr. Anderson has been the recipient of over twenty awards, including national awards from SRA, SRCDD, APS, and FABBS. Finally, Dr. Anderson was born in, raised for, and returned to Detroit and is becoming increasingly addicted to cake pops.

**Gael Aitor** He/Him  
Founder, *Astro Studios*

**Bio:** Gael Aitor is the founder of Astro Studios, a creative agency focused on youth well-being both online and offline, and was previously the creator and host of 'Teenager Therapy,' the largest teen mental health podcast with over 1,000,000 followers. At 21 years old, he has six years of experience in the podcasting space and is an expert at growing engaged Gen Z audiences on social media. Previous guests of 'Teenager Therapy,' include Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, Adam Mosseri, and U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Murthy. Aitor has been featured in The New York Times, Teen Vogue, and the TIME100 Talks for his work at 'Teenager Therapy.' He has also spoken at notable events such as the Aspen Ideas Festival and the White House Youth Summit. His most recent podcast 'GrownKid' is a guide to help youth transition into young adulthood,



launch careers, and find their purpose as they enter their 20s made in partnership with the Schultz Family Foundation and Joy Coalition.

## Laura Jane Cohen

Delegate, *Virginia General Assembly*

**Bio:** Laura Jane started her career working for the Democratic Lt. Governor and Secretary of State of Georgia, her native state. In 2001, she moved to Fairfax County and became an advocate on Capitol Hill for several disease prevention and treatment organizations, eventually becoming director of outreach for a national Parkinson's nonprofit.

After having two kids, Laura Jane taught preschool for several years before becoming a long-term substitute teacher in Fairfax County Public Schools. Later, as her children entered school, Laura Jane served on the Cherry Run Elementary PTA board for nine years – three years as staff relations chair, two terms as president, and as liaison to the Fairfax County Council of PTAs.

In addition to her advocacy work, Laura Jane was a small business owner for several years, running a vintage home décor shop with a close friend in Clifton. Following the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida, Laura Jane began volunteering with Moms Demand Action, proudly wearing her red shirt to lobby lawmakers in Richmond and D.C. to reform weak gun laws. She remains an active volunteer with the group to this day.

When Laura Jane's local school board member refused to respond to her plea to add classroom doors to her children's open-concept elementary school, and instead insisted teachers should be armed, she knew she had to challenge the incumbent in the next election.

Claiming a nearly ten-point victory, Laura Jane went to work for Springfield District families in 2020. On the School Board, she has fought to address COVID learning loss, teach accurate and inclusive history, increase teacher and staff pay, protect school libraries from censorship, prevent gun violence, defend LGBTQIA+ students, and give



teachers and school staff a seat at the decision-making table with collective bargaining rights.

In the General Assembly, Laura Jane will stand up to Governor Youngkin's far-right agenda and stop Richmond Republicans from undermining Virginian's values. She will fight to protect our world-class local public schools, defend abortion access, prevent gun violence, and protect our democracy.

A graduate of the University of Georgia, Laura Jane and Seth met in high school and have been married for more than twenty years. Both of their kids attend local public schools, though one will graduate this June and go on to Virginia Commonwealth University. In her free time, Laura Jane loves to hang out with her crazy family and volunteer with Food for Neighbors and Moms Demand Action. She also enjoys refinishing furniture, hiking, trashy reality tv, and bourbon.

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**Zaharra C.** she/her  
Youth Co-Chair

**Bio:** Zaharra is an activist, musician, athlete, artist, and writer. As an Ethiopian-Italian-American, Zaharra has learned to embrace her culture. Throughout her life in, she has experienced microaggressions and racism; this has helped her to acquire the skills to educate those who are uneducated, and fighting against bias inside and out of the school systems is her focus. Zaharra's recent involvements include having two films, that she collaborated on, shown in the Youth Film Festival '22, one of them winning the Audience Choice Award. During the '21-'22 Renaissance School awards ceremony she was awarded the Doc Wilbur as an Eighth-grader, and she has also participated in numerous endeavors such as the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Teen Stylin' Event in 2022 and being a Panelist at a Virginia Humanities conference in 2022." Zaharra has been a member of the Youth-Nex *Youth Advisory Council* and a former youth presenters at the 2022 Youth-Nex conference.

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**Rachael Deane** she/her  
 Chief Executive Officer, *Voices for Virginia's Children*

**Bio:** Rachael Deane is an attorney, policy advocate, nonprofit strategist, and mother. She serves as Chief Executive Officer at Voices for Virginia's Children, Virginia's only statewide, multi-issue youth policy advocacy organization.

Rachael's career has been dedicated to legal and policy advocacy for racial equity, economic justice, and thriving families at the local, state, and national levels. She joined Voices after many years as a legal aid attorney and as Legal Director of the Youth Justice Program at the Legal Aid Justice Center, where she led policy campaigns to end Virginia's school-to-prison pipeline and to fund student mental health supports in public education. Prior to her career in children's law and policy, Rachael led statewide and national investigations into housing and lending discrimination as an advocate with Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc., and the National Fair Housing Alliance.

**Nancy L. Deutsch** she/her  
 Professor & Director, *UVA EHD & Youth-Nex*

**Bio:** Nancy Deutsch is Director of Youth-Nex, Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs, and the Linda K. Bunker Professor of Education at the University of Virginia's School of Education and Human Development. She is also Co-Director of UVA TYDE (Thriving Youth in a Digital Environment), and affiliate of the UVA Equity Center. Her research focuses on understanding the process of adolescent development as it unfolds within local relationships and environments with a goal of understanding how to create settings that better support youth, especially those who have experienced structural oppression. She is passionate about the use of mixed methods in developmental and educational research. Dr. Deutsch engages in a variety of activities to help translate research to practice, including working with the National Mentoring Resource Center and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America's research advisory boards. In addition to her research and mentoring, Dr. Deutsch is enjoying watching her very own (spunky and creative) middle-schooler as she navigates adolescence.





**Alisha J. Hines, PhD** She/Her  
*Center for Scholars & Storytellers @ UCLA*

**Bio:** Dr. Alisha J. Hines is a writer and researcher. She is currently the Director of Research for the Center for Scholars & Storytellers at UCLA. Dr. Hines leads a team of 12 researchers across the entire portfolio of original and third-party research conducted on behalf of the Center, including our signature annual Teens and Screens Report. Dr. Hines earned her PhD from Duke University and is a former faculty member of Wake Forest University, she currently resides in Los Angeles, CA.

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**Aarya K.** she/her  
 Youth Presenter

**Bio:** Aarya K. is a freshman. Aarya has been participating in scientific research since 7th grade, where she has been recognized for her studies on healthcare at the District and State levels. With a publication in the Pulitzer Center for her research-based writing, Aarya has also penned science articles for a newsletter she founded and is a writer for the official school press. Aarya is looking to further combine her passion for medical sciences and communications through the Youth-Nex Blog. A board member of the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) Youth Advisory Council, Aarya has been active in discussing the future of research and health policy for youth across the state. In addition to being a master procrastinator, she enjoys debate, and creative writing and spends much of her time amidst science journals chasing down rabbit holes. Aarya is looking forward to being a panelist for the ninth iteration of the Youth-Nex Conference, where she is excited to exchange perspectives on current pressing issues and explore the science of technology and mental health in an evolving world.

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**Brooke Lehmann** She/Her  
 President, *Capitolworks, LLC*

**Bio:** Brooke Lehmann is a clinical social worker and public interest attorney with professional expertise in health and social policy, including social justice and health inequities. Ms. Lehmann has spent over two decades providing direct clinical and



advocacy services while simultaneously working to improve the systems that administer these services through policy development and legislative advocacy. As the Founder and President of Capitolworks, LLC, Ms. Lehmann has managed multi-million dollar local, state, and federal advocacy campaigns, providing legislative analysis and strategy expertise to clients serving vulnerable populations of children, youth, families, and communities. This work includes the development of effective grassroots advocates through regular trainings, workshops, and technical assistance. Ms. Lehmann is also a Lecturer at the University of Virginia's Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, where she teaches social and health policy, as well as a clinic that offers students the opportunity to gain real-world experience while working with Capitolworks clients. Ms. Lehmann received her B.A. from Indiana University and her M.S.W. from the University of Pennsylvania. She completed a clinical fellowship at the Yale Child Study Center and was a Bush fellow at Yale University's Bush Center for Child Development. Finally, Ms. Lehmann graduated cum laude from American University's Washington College of Law and is licensed to practice law in DC and Maryland.

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**Dr. Mike Lyons** He/Him  
Associate Professor, *Youth-Nex*

**Bio:** Michael Lyons is interested in the social-emotional development of middle and high school students in a positive psychological and traditional mental health framework. Specifically, his research reflects an interest in understanding the mechanisms and practices in a school setting that promote student well-being and school-relevant outcomes (e.g., grades and behavior) through an ecological model. Lyons is especially interested in school-based mentoring programs as one approach for promoting student well-being and enhancing academic outcomes. His research on school-based mentoring has been published in journals such as *School Psychology*, *American Journal of Community Psychology*, and *Applied Developmental Science*. Lyons is also a member of the National Mentoring Resource Center (NMRC) research board and is on the editorial board for the journals *Psychology in the Schools* and *School Psychology*.

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**Dr. Channing Mathews** she/her  
Assistant Professor, *UVA & Youth-Nex*

**Bio:** Dr. Mathews is an Assistant Professor Community Area of Psychology. Her research considers how youth of color draw upon their ethnic-racial identity (i.e., the process and meaning associated with the role of ethnicity and race in one's life) and critical consciousness (i.e., one's awareness of social inequality and the tools, beliefs, and actions used to challenge such inequality) development as motivators for their STEM based academic engagement and activism. Her work focuses on these processes during adolescence and emerging adulthood, drawing from theoretical and methodological approaches in education, psychology, and African American studies. Dr. Mathews' scholarship has three central foci: 1) integrating ethnic-racial identity and critical consciousness factors as dual promoters of positive Black and Latinx adolescent and emerging adult development, 2) examining how both ethnic-racial identity and critical consciousness promote STEM orientation, and 3) assessing the complexity of ethnic-racial identity and critical action behaviors (including STEM-based activism) in both Black and Latinx adolescence and adulthood.

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**Lakeisha Steele** She/Her  
Vice President of Policy, *CASEL*

**Bio:** Lakeisha Steele is CASEL's Vice President of Policy, where she leads the non-partisan non-profit field leader's federal and state strategy for advancing social and emotional learning in public policy. Before joining CASEL, Lakeisha served in the Biden-Harris Administration as the Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs at the Department of Education. Prior to her service in the Biden-Harris Administration, Lakeisha served eight years on Capitol Hill in the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives, most recently as Senior Education Policy Advisor on the House Education & Labor Committee where she led K-12 education policy, including provisions in the American Rescue Plan Act, which delivered the largest investment in K-12 education in history, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, and the CARES Act, for House Democrats under the leadership of Chairman Bobby Scott (VA-03). Prior to her work on the House Education and Labor Committee, Lakeisha advanced priorities in K-12 and higher education for U.S. Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR1) and the Democratic Whip, United States Senator Richard J. Durbin



(D-IL). She was successful in creating a grant program to improve trauma support services and mental health care in schools, and a grant to support school-based mentoring programs. She spent eight years working in the legal industry performing risk management for law firms. She holds a bachelor's degree from Western Illinois University and a Master of Public Administration from American University. She is from Kankakee, Illinois and the beautiful southside of Chicago.

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## **Jessica L. Schleider** she/her

Associate Professor in the Departments of Medical Social Sciences, Pediatrics & Psychology, *Northwestern University*

**Bio:** Dr. Jessica L. Schleider (she/her) is the Founding Director of the Lab for Scalable Mental Health and Associate Professor of Medical Social Sciences, Pediatrics, and Psychology at Northwestern University. She also serves as Director of Digital Services at Northwestern's Center for Behavioral Intervention Technologies.

Dr. Schleider's professional mission is to build, test, and disseminate scalable, evidence-based mental health solutions that bridge previously-unfillable gaps in mental health ecosystems, with a focus on single-session interventions (SSIs) for underserved youth. In support of her work in this area, she has secured >\$7.5 million in federal (NIH, NSF, HRSA), foundation, and industry funding as PI or Project Lead. Dr. Schleider has been recognized via numerous national awards for research excellence and innovation, including the NIH Director's Early Independence Award. Her work has been featured in media outlets such as The Wall Street Journal and The Atlantic, and she was previously chosen as one of Forbes' 30 Under 30 in Healthcare.

Dr. Schleider has published more than 120 peer-reviewed articles. She has also created or co-created seven open-access, single-session mental health programs, which have reached >50,000 people to date. Based on these programs, Dr. Schleider and her colleagues wrote a self-help workbook, *The Growth Mindset Workbook for Teens*. She also co-edited the *Oxford Guide to Brief and Low-Intensity Interventions for Children and Young People* and wrote a nonfiction book, *LITTLE TREATMENTS, BIG EFFECTS* on how single-session interventions can transform mental health.





To support individuals and institutions in scaling evidence-based SSIs, Dr. Schleider regularly consults for national and state-level health care organizations, digital health and social media companies, and providers across the globe.

Dr. Schleider completed her PhD in Clinical Psychology at Harvard University in 2018, along with her Doctoral Internship in Clinical and Community Psychology at Yale School of Medicine.

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**Dr. Stef Sequeira** she/her  
Assistant Professor, *UVA & Youth-Nex*

**Bio:** Dr. Sequeira studies how social threat and reward processes develop during childhood and adolescence and are associated with the development of psychopathology, with a focus on anxiety disorders and suicidal thoughts and behaviors (STBs) in youth with anxiety disorders. She integrates ecologically valid methods at multiple levels of analysis into her work, including ecological momentary assessment (EMA), functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), and eye-tracking. Taking a multimethod approach, Dr. Sequeira pursues three interrelated lines of research: 1) Developing and testing novel measures to study social threat and reward processes (e.g., how the brain responds to peer rejection/acceptance; how youth perceive social threat or reward on social media); 2) Linking brain and social behavior to better understand the development of psychopathology, and 3) Investigating associations between reward functioning, anxiety, and STBs during adolescence.

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**Vanessa V. Volpe** she/her  
Associate Professor of Psychology, Director of the Black Health Lab, *North Carolina State University*

**Bio:** Vanessa V. Volpe, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Psychology at North Carolina State University and Director of the Black Health Lab research group. As an applied developmental psychologist with a focus on health equity, she studies the ways that racism and other intersectional forms of oppression impact the stress-related health outcomes of Black youth from across the African diaspora in the United States. More specifically, she investigates the dynamic ways that online environments, social media,



and technology provide both challenges and opportunities for the health, development, and liberation of Black youth.

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**Reanna V.** she/her  
Youth Presenter

**Bio:** Reanna V. is a public policy researcher and advocate focused on racial equity and youth engagement in policy development. Her research on racial microaggressions in Virginia's school districts inspired her to focus on actionable, local solutions that drive real change. Currently interning at Interfaith Action for Human Rights, Reanna is gaining hands-on experience in advancing systemic change in the field of prison reform. As a Fairfax County Student Human Rights Commissioner, Reanna supports policies that address issues on mental health and racial justice.

When she's not advocating for reform, Reanna can be found leading her High School's competitive debate team, organizing nonprofit debate workshops in schools with predominantly ethnic student bodies to empower students to sharpen their voices and engage in civic discussions from a young age. As the president of her school's DECA chapter, Reanna leads initiatives in career development and community outreach.

Whether leading an active leader at her school or advocating for reform, Reanna is dedicated to ensuring that youth play a central role in shaping policy.

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**Susitna V.** she/her  
Youth Presenter

**Bio:** I'm Susitna V., a Junior in High School with a strong passion for government and law. My civic engagement journey began as a House Page for Virginia's 86th district in 2022, igniting my commitment to public service and legislative work. Currently, I serve as a Voter Engagement Intern at the Institute for Youth In Policy and as the State Policy Director at the American Youth Association. In these roles, I focus on expanding voter outreach and education, working closely with Get Out The Vote (GOTV) organizations to encourage youth participation in elections. I'm driven to create a positive societal



impact and am eager to apply my skills and passion to future opportunities and endeavors.

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## **Vaile Wright** she/her

Senior Director, Health Care Innovation, *American Psychological Association*

**Bio:** Vaile Wright, PhD is the Senior Director for the Office of Health Care Innovation at the American Psychological Association. She is a licensed psychologist, and researcher focusing on developing strategies to leverage technology and data to address issues within health care including increasing access, measuring care, improving efficiencies and optimizing treatment delivery at both the individual and system levels. Dr. Wright has maintained an active line of research with peer-reviewed articles in multiple journals including *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, *Psychotherapy and Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*. As a spokesperson for APA, she has been interviewed by television, radio, print and online media including CNN, NBC News, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and NPR on a range of topics including stress, politics, discrimination and harassment, COVID, serious mental illness, telehealth and technology, and access to mental health care. Dr. Wright received her PhD in counseling psychology from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and is licensed in the District of Columbia.

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## **Ashleigh Greene Wade** she/her/hers

Assistant Professor of Media Studies and African American Studies,  
*University of Virginia*

**Bio:** Ashleigh Greene Wade is an Assistant Professor of Media Studies and African American Studies at the University of Virginia. Broadly speaking, her work traverses the fields of Black girlhood studies, digital and visual media studies, Black Feminist theory, and digital humanities. Wade has a Ph.D. in Women's and Gender Studies from Rutgers University and is an alumna of the Carter G. Woodson Institute for African American and African Studies Fellowship Program. Her work on Black cultural production appears in *Cultural Studies*, *The Black Scholar*, *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies*, *Visual Arts Research*, *Women, Gender, and Families of*



Color, and National Political Science Review. Wade's debut monograph, *Black Girl Autopoetics: Agency and Possibility in Everyday Digital Practice* (Duke University Press), explores the role of Black girls' digital practices in documenting and preserving everyday Black life.

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## **Henry Willis** he/him/his

Assistant Professor, *University of Maryland, College Park*

**Bio:** Henry A. Willis, Ph.D. is originally from Jackson, Mississippi, and he received his Ph.D. from the Clinical Psychology program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Willis is a faculty member in the Clinical Psychology program at the University of Maryland, College Park in 2023. He is the creator and director of the Cultural Resilience, Equity, and Technology (CREATE) Research Lab at UMD College Park. His program of research includes exploring the relationship between online and offline racial discrimination and mental health outcomes among African American youth and young adults, understanding sociocultural protective factors (i.e., racial identity) and how they impact psychopathology within African Americans, creating cultural adaptations of evidence-based treatments, and utilizing mobile-health technologies to increase access to mental health treatments for underserved populations.