

NEWS FROM

# GAMFT

Georgia Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

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AUGUST 2021

# Weathering the Quarantine Together

Kara McDaniel, Ph.D., LPC, President-Elect



Kara McDaniel

Are you continuing to quarantine at home with your partner due to COVID? Are you at your wits end? There is no doubt that the ongoing quarantine and social distancing guidelines as a result of COVID have tested all marriages.

Although making a marriage work and keeping it afloat can be difficult even under the best of circumstances, there are steps that you and your partner can take to ride the waves of stress and uncertainty.

## What you can do:

- **Schedule one-on-one time:** All too often, I hear couples talk about the competing forces that they grapple with daily; competing forces that drive a wedge between them rather than bringing them together. Commit to carving out time together for the sole purpose of connecting and strengthening your relationship. This may include watching your favorite TV show, taking a walk in the neighborhood, planning a date night at home, working on a household project together, learning a fun fact and sharing it with your partner, playing your favorite board game, learning how to cook together, etc. Regardless of the activity, make it fun, relax and enjoy yourself!
- **Assertive communication:** Prioritize your wants and needs within the relationship and learn how to assert them. If you don't convey what you want and need within the relationship, your partner will never know.
- **Exercise:** Exercise serves as a great stress reducer. Each day commit to a minimum of 30 minutes engaging in your favorite physical activity, such as walking, running, yoga, or weight training. Now more than ever, there are so many online resources that are easily accessible.

- **Keep a routine:** Wake up and go to bed at the same time each day, take a shower, get dressed, and establish a routine throughout the day. Be sure to include how much time you plan to work, exercise, engage in self-care activities, and spend time together with your partner and/or family.
- **Boundaries:** Reflect on what is truly important to you and if it is not that important to you, learn how to say, “no”. When your work is done at the end of each day, take a short pause to decompress before joining in on your life after work.
- **Carve out time alone:** If your home has enough rooms, go into a different room to work. If you don’t have access to a separate room, use headphones to drown out noise and distractions. And, most importantly, set some time aside to engage in self-care activities.
- **Engage socially with others:** Since it is impossible for your partner to meet all your needs, schedule a date/time for a virtual or in-person (per your comfort level based on current social distancing guidelines) get together with your good friend and/or family member. You can spend time just catching up, playing virtual games, or registering to take a virtual painting class together.
- **Reflect on the positives:** Check your filter. If you are constantly thinking negatively about your partner, you will most likely begin to build a sense of resentment, which will then have an impact on how you relate to your partner. Practice reflecting on your partner’s positive qualities and the reasons you chose him/her to be your partner in life.

Finally, if your marriage is continuously strained during this time, help is only a phone call away! Therapists, such as myself, who specialize in marital/couples therapy may be located in your area by searching Google, Psychology Today, Good Therapy, or the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT). ■

# Member Spotlight:

## Ronda D. Shirley, MBA, MS, LMFT

GAMFT's quarterly Member Spotlight features a member within our community who is contributing to the field of Marriage and Family Therapy in Georgia through leadership, advocacy, or service work. This quarter's newsletter is proud to feature Ronda Shirley, a marriage and family therapist in Warner Robins, GA — and new member on the GAMFT board!

Ronda Shirley was born and raised in Macon, GA. She currently practices in Warner Robins, GA and is hoping to start moving back towards Macon to work in her hometown. Practicing since 2014, she has an eclectic background within community agencies, hospitals and private practice. She now owns her practice, Shirley Therapeutic and Consulting Services, LLC.

### **Why did you decide to become a MFT?**

RS: A couple of things were happening in my life when I decided to be a therapist. I was in corporate management, and there were a lot of things that I did not like about the management side. But I enjoyed building rapport and motivation with my teammates. The second thing is that during a difficult time in our marriage, my husband and I were searching for a marriage therapist. I knew I wanted a person of color with similar life experiences. In my search, I found that there were not a lot of therapists of color, especially in my area, that fit what I was looking for.



***Ronda D. Shirley,  
MBA, MS, LMFT***

So when I decided to be a therapist, I found that I could blend the things I liked in management and my own experience in therapy.

I hear it with my clients now. It is almost a whisper, "Do you have any black therapists". Therapy still has an element of being taboo within the culture. Then you add the fact that you are doing something that the culture does not necessarily embrace. When you find someone who understands the culture, there is an element of collaboration that can make it a bit more comfortable with who we are.

*I learned to recognize the different faces of countertransference in this role and to do my own work on myself.*

### **Where have you practiced as a MFT in the past, and what was that like?**

RS: Because I went into the field so late, I entered into the field at 43. My aim was to hit hard. I took on a plethora of different jobs. My first job was working at a residential center for women who struggle with substance dependence and helping them to utilize getting their children back as an intervention tool for recidivism. I did community work where I went into the homes and provided therapy for children and adolescents. I worked at a psychiatric hospital for children and adolescents. I also worked at a group practice setting before building my own practice. I went that

route because I wanted to experience it at all levels. To be an MFT, I believe it is important to experience going into home-based therapy to understand how they are living, where they are living and how they look in the home.

When I was doing community work, I found myself having something similar to survivor's guilt when I would go into certain homes. There would be women that were close to the same age as me, and they might look similar to me or remind me of myself, with such different lives. It reminded me of having the option to get on a certain conveyor belt, like at an airport, that you can hop on and takes you where you need to go. It was like I was able to get on the conveyor belt and they weren't able to. And it caused a lot of reflection and sometimes sadness because I thought, there could have been one boyfriend or one small decision away from being a woman with the options that I have versus the struggle they have. I learned to recognize the different faces of countertransference in this role and to do my own work on myself.

### **What is your theoretical approach or orientation to working with your clients?**

RS: I'm a bit of an integrationist, but I really try to match based on what the client needs. For a family, I find that structural therapy is what I generally like to use. But because I have a background in corporate, I lean in with contextual. I find that we walk around with a lot of debt and mixed loyalties, and with many entitlements. We have these ledgers that we keep this stuff on, but we don't converse with people about them. I find that contextual works well with many of my clients.

### **What does being a Marriage and Family Therapist mean to you?**

RS: Being in Macon, I've seen how the city has morphed and changed and has become so violent. One of the things that I've had the opportunity of noticing is that we have lost the structure of family. Our adolescents are taking a hard hit due to this, and it is resulting in chronic and fatal violence. Additionally, we have a loss of industry and increase in crime. I believe that family is the bedrock to what the communities will look like. Show me a community that is deficient in marriages and has not found a way to create a traditional structure of family, and I will show you a community that is struggling to maintain itself. A family can mean the traditional family with a mother and father like I had, a blended family like I have now, or something else that has stability and consistency. Being an MFT means that I can help put back structure in families. To have healthy communities, we need healthy families. So Marriage and Family Therapy is not just about having couples or individuals thriving, but ensuring that you have solid families so that you can build healthy communities.

### **What do you do when you aren't practicing Marriage and Family Therapy?**

RS: Because I own my practice, I have to put on my other hat, which is the administration portion of marketing or studying to be plugged in and effective. But in my off time, I love Netflix binging and traveling. One of my favorite shows on Netflix right now is Sex/Life. When traveling, I'm a beach bum. I want to hit all of the beaches in the continental US.

### **What are your hopes for the future of the Marriage and Family Therapy field in Georgia?**

RS: This is part of why I am excited to be membership chair. I hope we are able to show the uniqueness of what we offer and how it is such a benefit to society. We are the bedrock to society when we work with families directly and indirectly. We have the ability to work on the state and nation from the ground up.

*Show me a community that is deficient in marriages and has not found a way to create a traditional structure of family, and I will show you a community that is struggling to maintain itself.*

### **Where can people reach you or find information about your practice?**

People can reach me by calling the practice at (478)-922-2700. My website is <https://mywarnerrobinstherapy.org/>. I am most active on Instagram and my handle is @relationshipstrategist. ■

# Upcoming GAMFT Events



*Meg McLeroy,  
Ethics Committee Chair*

## **August Virtual Town Hall: *I'm ok, You're ok: A conversation about the intersection of self-care and ethics***

- Date: Friday, August 27
- Time: 12:00pm to 1:30pm, EST
- Location: Zoom
- CEs: 1.5 Ethics hours pending approval

Join GAMFT Ethics Committee Chair Meg McLeroy, LMFT and James Punelli II, JD serves as Associate Counsel for AAMFT for a candid conversation about the ethical imperative to maintain well-being and cultivate hope as we continue to navigate a pandemic and the competing demands on our time and energy.

[Click here to register!](#)



*Shirley Shani Ben-Zvi  
Student Representative*

## **Virtual Coffee with your Student Rep**

- Date: Friday, September 17
- Time: 12:00pm to 1:00pm, EST
- Location: Zoom

Join Student Representative Shirley Shani Ben-Zvi for her monthly virtual coffee where students and new professionals are invited to connect, ask questions, and discuss topics related to becoming a MFT.

[Click here to register!](#)

# Upcoming Events, continued



Cecil Walker  
Multicultural Issues Chair

## September Virtual Town Hall *Hosted by the Multicultural Committee*

- Date: Friday, September 24
- Time: 12:00pm to 1:30pm, EST
- Location: Zoom

[Click here to register!](#)



## Supervisor-Supervisee Panel Plus Meet & Greet

- Date: Friday, October 15
- Time: 11:30am to 1:00pm, EST
- Location: Zoom

Are you looking for supervision, or interested in learning more about how to find the right supervisor? This event will have a panel of supervisors with current openings for supervisees. The supervisors will share about different supervision styles and answer supervisee questions.

[Click here to register!](#)

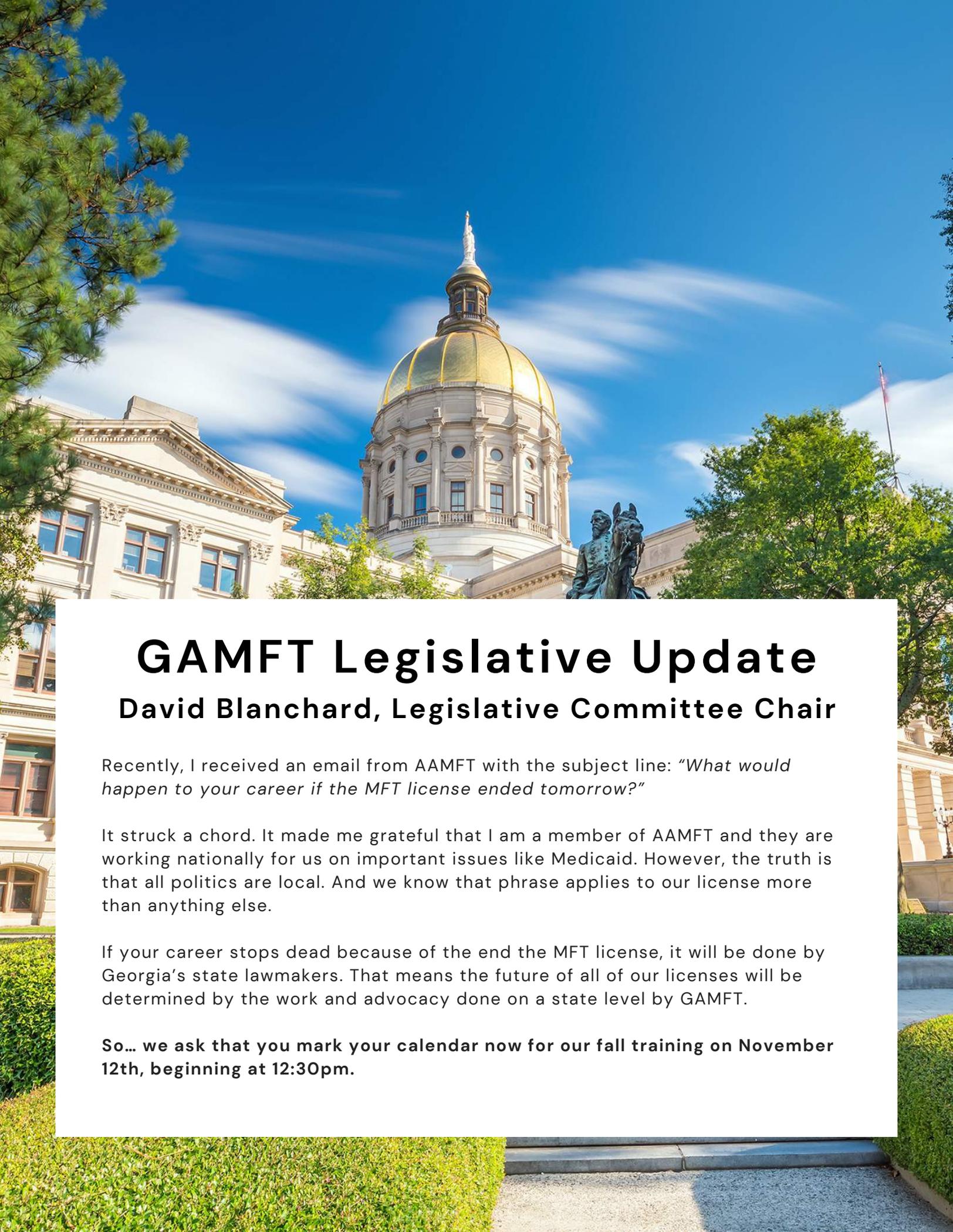


## October Virtual Town Hall *Hosted by the Communications Committee*

- Date: Friday, October 29
- Time: 12:00pm to 1:30pm, EST
- Location: Zoom

More details coming soon!

[Click here to register!](#)



# GAMFT Legislative Update

## David Blanchard, Legislative Committee Chair

Recently, I received an email from AAMFT with the subject line: *“What would happen to your career if the MFT license ended tomorrow?”*

It struck a chord. It made me grateful that I am a member of AAMFT and they are working nationally for us on important issues like Medicaid. However, the truth is that all politics are local. And we know that phrase applies to our license more than anything else.

If your career stops dead because of the end the MFT license, it will be done by Georgia’s state lawmakers. That means the future of all of our licenses will be determined by the work and advocacy done on a state level by GAMFT.

**So... we ask that you mark your calendar now for our fall training on November 12th, beginning at 12:30pm.**

# SAVE THE DATE

## GAMFT Legislative Advocacy Virtual Townhall November 12th 12:30pm

### CEs pending approval

During this townhall, we will focus on chapter and grassroots advocacy. You will find out and how you can help us continue the momentum created during the last legislative session with passage of HB 590.

Your help will be very important. By joining us on the 12th, you can learn more about GAMFT's upcoming legislative agenda for 2022. Most importantly, you can find out how you help protect and strengthen our MFT license in Georgia.

#### State Legislative Issues for 2022

Many of us know first-hand that there is a desperate need for additional mental health supports throughout our state. Other important leaders are now seeing these last two years as a testimony to the importance our state's mental health system places in our communities. For example, House Speaker David Ralston is proposing a \$7 million boost in the state's mental health crisis system.

He was recently quoted as saying, "I have said many times that for us to continue to be a great state, we must also focus on being a good state — one that cares for those who need it." He went on to say that "mental health is something that touches almost every family in this state, so investing in mental health services and our accountability courts is not just good business — it is also a way of helping people recover and reunite with their families."

Source: [GPB Online](#)

According to the [Georgia Budget and Policy Institute](#), our state will receive \$4.9 billion in

federal emergency relief and infrastructure funding as part of the American Rescue Plan. This money is meant to be used to support Georgians as they recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Gov. Brian Kemp is overseeing how the state will spend this money. Some have called for the Governor to consider using some of these funds to bolster behavioral health services. You also know that many Georgians, with insurance, fall through the cracks, unable to access needed mental health supports. Insured Georgians have more difficulty accessing behavioral health treatment — treatment for mental illnesses and substance use disorders — than they do accessing other medical care. The Georgia Mental Health Policy Partnership is working to advocate for mental health parity. Parity means that health insurance barriers to access mental health and substance use disorder treatment cannot be more stringent than those for medical/surgical treatment.

In addition to tracking these initiatives, GAMFT also continues to follow important issues and bills that were introduced during

the last legislative session. These include bills such as [HB 752](#), [HB 717](#), [HB 702](#), and [HB 590](#).

We are also tracking the work that the Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission continues to offer toward a proposal for the 2022 legislative session for improvements in our state's network of supports. We expect further consideration of past recommendations from the [Commission's report](#) to include issues related to mental health parity, access via telehealth, standards related to involuntary commitment, mental health courts, and service cancellation of student loans for mental health clinicians.

### **National Legislative Issues for 2022**

Nationally, AAMFT continues to advocate for Congress to pass legislation that would allow LMFTs to be recognized as Medicare providers. Earlier this year, legislation to finally add LMFTs as Medicare providers — the Mental Health Access Improvement Act of 2021 — was introduced in the House of Representatives as [H.R. 432](#) and in the Senate as [S. 828](#). So far, 41 members of the House of Representatives have agreed to cosponsor H.R. 432 and 14 Senators have agreed to cosponsor S. 828. AAMFT and its allies supporting H.R. 432 and S. 828 continue to seek additional cosponsors for this legislation. This summer, there are a few things that you can do to persuade your Members of Congress to support the MFTs in Medicare legislation and to move this legislation forward. Find out more detailed information here: [The AAMFT Blog: Advocate for MFTs in Medicare this Summer](#)

We are only as strong as the number of GAMFT members that join our efforts. Please join us November 12th. ■



# Welcome new Board Members!



## **Ronda Shirley, Membership Committee Chair**

Ronda Shirley is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. She secured her Masters of Family Therapy from Mercer University School of Medicine and completed her Master of Business Administration degree from Wesleyan College. She spent 17+ years in corporate where she served in multiple positions of management which included customer service and litigation. Ronda has a group practice that focuses on developing safe environments while reducing fear responses rooted in fight, flight, freezing and fawning. Additionally, she is a Prepare/Enrich Facilitator. Ronda is an AAMFT Supervisor candidate who is reveling in being an empty nester with her husband of 21 years.



## **Michael Williamson, Personnel Committee Chair**

After working in the corporate world for GEICO for a number of years, Michael recognized that he was not fulfilling his potential. He graduated from Mercer University in Macon GA in 2018 and began working in an integrative healthcare setting with a diverse range of clients. He currently works in private practice in Warner Robins at Southern Bridge Counseling with a great team of colleagues. Michael works with families, and couples, but hopes to specialize in working with the LGBT+ community and eco-minded therapeutic approaches



## **S. Anni Skurja, Social Media Committee Chair**

Anni Skurja received her Master of Family Therapy from Mercer University and attended Gordon University and Fort Valley State University for her undergraduate years. She has experience working within a community agency and in private practice. She has recently begun building her own practice in Senoia, GA and is working towards Play Therapy certification in Peachtree City. Within her own practice, she specializes in working with adolescents and with trauma, grief and loss. Additionally, she has presented on the ethics of telehealth and on treatment methods for adolescent substance use. Anni is excited about being able to be a part of the change for MFT's in Georgia.

# GAMFT Board Elections

Please cast your ballot in the 2021 Board of Directors election for Vice-President, Treasurer, and Election Committee Member.

**Voting officially closes on September 12, 2021.**

## Vote online today!

Your online vote is secure, private and confidential. All precautions have been taken to ensure a fair and efficient online election.

[Click here to vote online](#)

If you prefer to vote with a traditional paper ballot, [please click here to download your paper ballot](#). To be counted, your paper ballot must reach the GAMFT office no later than September 12, 2021. Mail your paper ballot to GAMFT, P.O. Box 29745, Atlanta, GA 30359.



# Selected CE Opportunities

See a full list of all continuing education events at [gamft.org/upcoming-ce-events/](https://gamft.org/upcoming-ce-events/)

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**8/28** **1013/2013 Protocol Training and Best Practices**

Hosted by Cornerstone Family Services  
3 Ethics Hours; Live webinar  
Call 770-910-2753

**9/25** **Suicide Ideation and Treatment**

Hosted by Cornerstone Family Services  
2 Core Hours; Live webinar  
Call 770-910-2753

**9/17** **Self Care for the Clinician: Cultivating Tools to Combat Multi-Layer Trauma and Burnout**

Hosted by Mindful Life Services, LLC  
2.5 Ethics Hours; Live webinar  
Call 404-337-8239

**10/6-10/8** **DBHDD 2021 Behavioral Health Symposium**

Hosted by Carl Vinson Institute of Government, UGA on behalf of Ga. DBHDD  
8.75 Core Hours; Live webinar  
Call 404-735-6138

**9/23** **Tech Addiction and Digital Health in Children, Adolescents and Young Adults: Level 1 Certification for Clinicians and Educators**

Hosted by Pesi, Inc.  
6.25 Core Hours; Live webinar  
Call 715-855-8107

**10/15** **Oppositional, Defiant & Disruptive Children and Adolescents: Non-medication Approaches to the Most Challenging Behaviors**

Hosted by Pesi, Inc.  
6.25 Core Hours; Live webinar  
Call 715-855-8131

**9/24** **High Conflict Divorce: A Model for Child-Centered Reunification Therapy**

Hosted by Building Blocks Family Counseling  
6 Core Hours; Live webinar  
Call 912-349-8043, ext: 708

**10/22** **Polyvagal Interventions to Reshape the Nervous System: Moving from Theory to Practice**

Hosted by The Knowledge Tree  
12 Core Hours; Live webinar  
Call 404-913-2005

# Classifieds

***Opportunities posted with GAMFT for employment, supervision, and more.***

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## **Employment Opportunity**

Successful counseling practice in Alpharetta looking to add a skilled couples counselor. Experience working with couples in graduate school and/or clinical settings required. Marriage and Family Therapy license an advantage. Must have scheduling flexibility to be willing to see some clients on Fridays and Saturdays. Please send cover letter and resume to [andrew@mconaghiecounseling.com](mailto:andrew@mconaghiecounseling.com).

## **Supervision Opportunity**

New post graduate supervision group forming this spring. Meets the 2nd Friday of the month 9-11am in Roswell. Cost is \$60. Consultation prior to group start is required. Led by Jennifer Vann, LMFT, AAMFT Approved Supervisor.  
<https://www.cornerstonefamilyservices.com/copy-of-jennifer-vann-lmft>.

## **Employment Opportunity**

Thriving private practice in Woodstock, Georgia seeking licensed clinician to perform intake, therapy, and possible assessment/testing responsibilities. Clinician must be willing to join major insurance panels if not already a participating provider. Warm, friendly work environment with administrative and collegial support. Significant independence and ability to plan own work hours. Please contact office manager, Teresa Ingram, if interested at 770-592-0150.

## **Employment Opportunity**

Accelerated Recovery Centers is seeking experienced LMFTs for Full-Time and Contract openings in our Family Systems Program. For more information, please contact Scott Ferguson at 678-429-3958 or at [sferguson@iwanttostopnow.com](mailto:sferguson@iwanttostopnow.com). Days, Nights and Weekends.

## **Office Space**

BEAUTIFUL OFFICE SPACE NEAR CLAIRMONT AND I-85. Amenities include office supplies, equipment, free parking and handicap access. Reasonably priced. Contact Jeanne Montgomery MA, LMFT 404-633-3347.

# Submit to an upcoming issue

In addition to sharing relevant information with our members, the goal of the GAMFT newsletter is to strengthen our MFT community by supporting and promoting connection and inclusiveness through sharing our collective wisdom, resiliency and enthusiasm. Therefore, the more of us who contribute our knowledge, experience, and ideas, the richer our GAMFT family becomes.

Therefore, the more of us who contribute our knowledge, experience, and ideas, the richer our GAMFT family becomes. We encourage members to make submissions including clinically related articles



*S. Anni Skurja*

that offer educational and/or inspirational insights to your colleagues, reviews such as books or movies that may be valuable to MFT's, or any relevant information on issues involving the GAMFT community.

Please note that this does not include advertisements for workshops, employment or office space so please refer to the protocol for these submissions in the advertisement section. All submissions will be printed in full as received whenever possible but are subject to editing for length, clarity, readability, grammar, spelling, biased language, and appropriateness. Opinions expressed in the GAMFT newsletter do not necessarily reflect the opinions of GAMFT. Submission of an article does not guarantee its publication.

## Submission Guidelines:

- Articles can include a maximum word count of 920 for full page; recommend maximum 750-word count with photo. Approximate word counts also include: 690 for 3/4 page; 460 for 1/2 page; 230 for 1/4 page.
- We encourage including a professional photo of the author. Please also provide your name and credentials as they should appear in the article. Please submit a 1-2 line biography of the author as well to be added at the end of the article. The Newsletter is published quarterly, in February, May, August, and November.
- Submissions need to be received by noon on the 20th of the month prior to the newsletter going out that you would like your submission included in.
- Articles can be submitted in Word or PDF format to [socialmediagamft@gmail.com](mailto:socialmediagamft@gmail.com) and any questions can be directed to our Communications Chair and Newsletter Editor, S. Anni Skurja, at the above email address.

**We look forward to hearing from you and including your voice in this process. Thank you!**

# Advertise with us

Looking to announce an upcoming workshop, employment opportunity or available office space? The GAMFT newsletter is released quarterly in February, May, August, and November and provides a great option to reach our active members.

**Rates:**

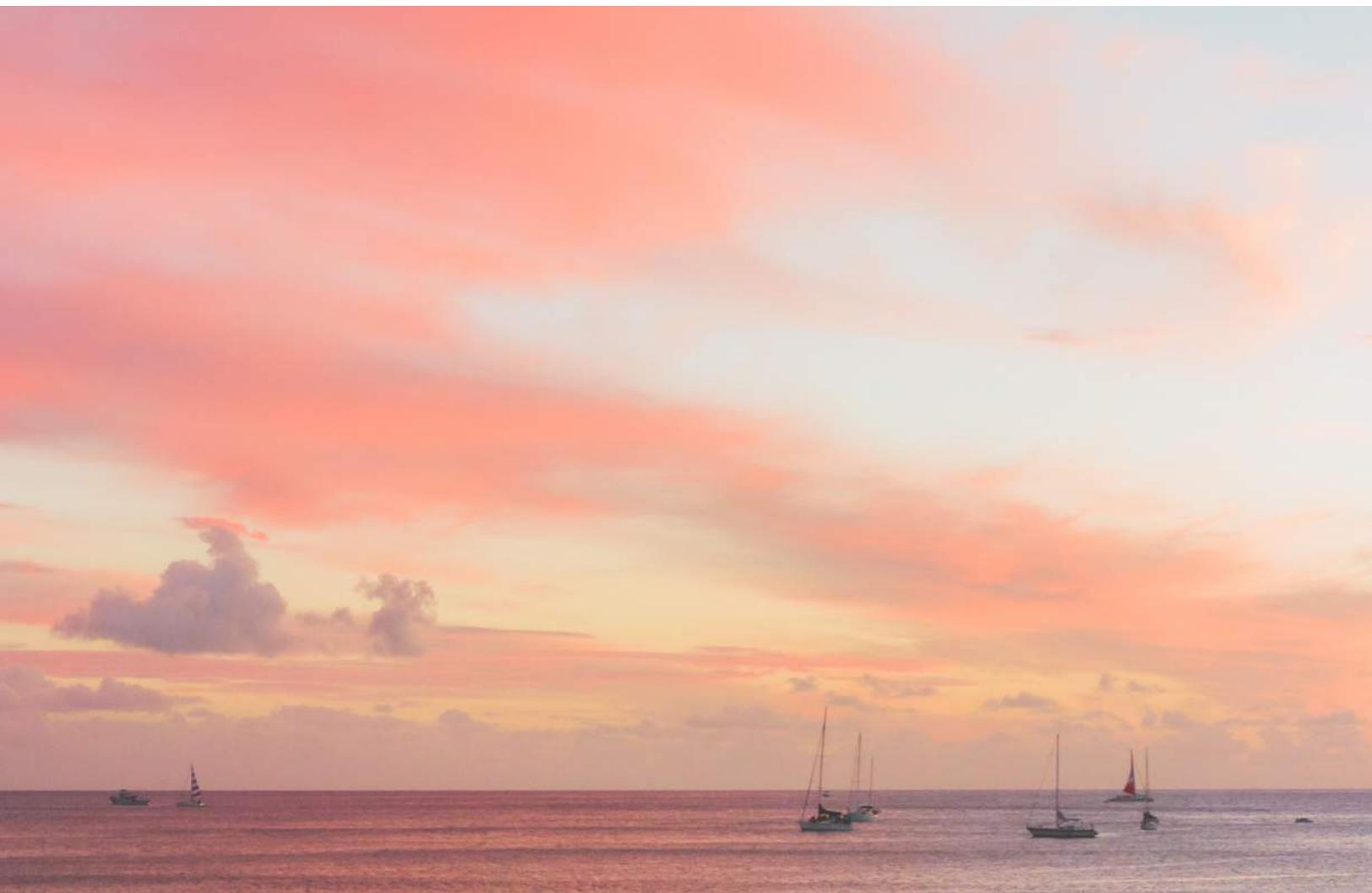
- Classified listing \$35.00
- 1/4 page (3 1/2 x 4 5/8) \$70.00
- 1/2 page (7 5/8 x 4 5/8) \$140.00
- Full page (7 5/8 x 9 7/8) \$280.00

★ 20% Discount for GAMFT Members

**Submission Deadlines:**

- January 15
- April 15
- July 15
- October 15

To inquire about advertising with us, email [saskurja@phoenixrisingga.com](mailto:saskurja@phoenixrisingga.com)



# Board of Directors

## Executive Committee

President: Andrea Meyer Stinson, Ph.D., LMFT, 478-301-4098

President-Elect: Kara McDaniel, Ph.D., LPC, 678-430-8089

Vice President: Adam Albrite, Ph.D., LMFT, 404-804-0218

Secretary: Jennifer Vann, LMFT, 770-910-2753

Treasurer: Jennifer Lambert-Shute, Ph.D., LMFT, 229-245-4323

## Committee Leadership

Approved Supervisors: Elizabeth Bizzell, LMFT, 478-952-8736

Continuing Education: Jeff Bickers, LMFT, 229-244-4200

Elections:

Tiana Teague, LAMFT, 470-354-0239

Adam Froerer, Ph.D., LMFT, 678-547-6787

Tabitha McCoy, ABD, LMFT, 229-921-7761

Ethics: Meg McLeroy, LMFT, 404-721-3596

Legislative: David Blanchard, LAMFT, 770-876-0639

Membership: Ronda Shirley, LMFT, 478-922-2700

Multicultural Issues: Cecil Walker, LAMFT, 470-231-9640

Personnel: Michael Williamson, LMFT, 478-227-4189

Public Relations: Abby Culin, LAMFT, 678-329-7009

Student Representation: Shirley Shani Ben-Zvi, LAMFT, 770-846-2595

Communications: S. Anni Skurja, LMFT, 404-907-3958

## Chapter Leadership

Coastal GA (Savannah): OPEN

East GA (Augusta): Ashley Quamme, LMFT, 919-218-8697

Metro Atlanta: Dan Upshaw, LMFT, 404-585-1404

North Metro Atlanta: Ken Cross, LMFT, 770-429-9293

Middle GA (Macon): Andrew Benesh, Ph.D., LMFT, 478-301-4078

Northeast GA (Athens): Jennifer Gonyea, Ph.D., LMFT, 762-499-6700

Northwest GA (Roswell): OPEN

South GA (Valdosta): Leah McMillan, DPA, LMFT, 229-262-1000

South Atlanta: OPEN

Southwest GA (Albany): OPEN

West GA (Columbus): OPEN

## Georgia Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

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