

## Mayor's Substance Misuse Task Force Bios

Updated January 10, 2022



### **Britney Alexander**

Britney Alexander was born in Florida and moved to Apex, North Carolina when she was 14 years old. She started doing drugs at the age of 11, and for the next nine years, drugs took over every aspect of her life. In September of 2019, Britney made the decision to get sober, as she felt that she was no longer herself; she was her addiction. Britney is now in college to become a substance abuse counselor and volunteers with the Mayor's Substance Misuse Task Force to share her story in hopes of helping the community understand substance use disorders.

[Contact Britney.](#)



### **Erica Asbury**

Erica Asbury has been working within the mental health field for more than seventeen years. She began her career working in Maternal Child Health where she learned that very few places offered substance misuse treatment for pregnant women. After witnessing a woman successfully deliver her baby safely, and without being born addicted to a substance because of interventions and treatment, Erica decided to go back to school to become a counselor. Erica earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Pfeiffer University, is credentialed as an Addictions Specialist and is a Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor. She is currently employed by Alliance Health.

Erica is fueled by helping others and is committed to helping people recover and build greater lives. That desire comes from having watched members of her extended family battle with substances, lose everything and fight hard to gain it back. She places herself on the side of hope, where loving people where they are and providing resources can help reach others and heal them.

[Contact Erica.](#)

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**Ben Barras**

Ben Barras is very familiar with substance misuse disorder. His own journey began as a child, where he was raised in a home with a mother that struggled with alcoholism and eventually passed from alcohol related complications. Three of his four siblings are in long-term recovery after battling many years of substance misuse. Later in life, Ben developed his own pattern of misuse with alcohol. The challenge became especially disruptive during a period of his life filled with significant personal and professional complications. He was able to see early and mid-stage signs of where his addiction was leading him and entered a solid recovery program over seven years ago. He is blessed today with seven years of sobriety, a happy marriage, five beautiful children, and a successful professional career with a global technology company based out of the Triangle area.

Ben has joined the task force in hopes of extending his own blessing of sobriety to be of service to others in the community who struggle and want to find a pathway to freedom from addiction and a happy and contented life beyond.

[Contact Ben.](#)



**Officer Victoria Carter**

Officer Victoria Carter has been employed in Law Enforcement since October 2017 and has been with the Apex Police Department since 2019. After a year and a half on the streets as an Apex police officer, Victoria found her passion within the Community Policing department, where she hopes to use her position as a platform to strengthen relationships between the Apex Police Department and the communities they serve.

[Contact Victoria](#)

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**Brooke Cook**

Brooke Cook is a married mother of two young children and has experienced the impact of alcoholism in her childhood years, and in more recent years in her own life. She has worked as an executive in cyber security for twenty years and is known for her passion for networking and bringing people together for events and important causes. Her commitment to recovery is strong and she first-hand understands the impact of living with an alcoholic, as well as battling her own addiction for the past four years. She has retired from the private sector to lend her talents to The Mayor's Substance Misuse Task Force and hopes that by sharing her story she can help others to destigmatize what addiction and recovery look like. Brooke has a zest for life and wants others to know you do not need to live in guilt and shame, but can recover and help those who are still suffering.

[Contact Brooke.](#)



**Kristen Cox**

Kristen Cox grew up in a family that struggled with many different addictions, including opioids and she has seen firsthand how it affected both her loved ones, and herself. An Apex native, Kristen witnessed the growing drug and alcohol problem within middle school and high schools in Apex and Wake County. Kristen joined the task force to help others understand that they can choose a healthier lifestyle and be happy.

[Contact Kristen.](#)



**Mayor Jacques Gilbert**

Jacques Gilbert, a lifelong resident of Apex, NC has worked tirelessly for his hometown community for more than 33 years, including 29 years with the Apex Police Department, where he retired in 2019 as Captain Gilbert. In addition to graduating in the 220th FBI National Academy, Jacques has written three books, is a certified personal trainer, and is the founder of TheVine919. In 2015, Jacques was invited to the White House where he was recognized as a Champion of Change by President Obama for making the Rodgers Family Skate Plaza in downtown Apex a reality. In 2017, Jacques launched [Blue Lights College](#), a community college in Apex whose mission is to bridge the gap between community and police by approaching conflict with compassion.

[Contact Jacques](#)

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**Dr. Kiersten Johnson, PhD**

Kiersten Johnson is a public health scientist with a focus on community-based behavioral health services. She received her PhD in Psychology at North Carolina State University and joined RTI International in 2016. Dr. Johnson has served on multiple National Institutes of Health grants on the epidemiology and treatment of mental and substance use disorders, and recently led the national evaluation of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s assisted outpatient treatment grant program. In her present role, she engages in the most recent research on evidence-based practices and policies related to behavioral health, including opioid, stimulant, and substance misuse.

[Contact Kristen.](#)



**Tom Klatt**

Tom Klatt serves as the Executive Director of the WakeMed Behavioral Health Network and is leading a comprehensive strategy to help behavioral health and substance use disorder patients receive the right care, in the right environment, at the right time. Leveraging WakeMed as the convener, Tom is working with behavioral health and substance misuse leaders in Wake County and surrounding regions to develop a multi-disciplinary network of inpatient, outpatient and community-based organizations that provide enhanced access and compassionate care to patients and families in need. Tom has more than 30 years of experience providing leadership and program management in behavioral health and looks forward to partnering with the Apex community to increase awareness of available resources and ultimately provide hope for those struggling with substance use disorders.

[Contact Tom.](#)

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### **Georgeanna Murphy**

Georgeanna Murphy was born in Raleigh and grew up there. She started drinking and doing drugs in high school and it quickly took over her life – drug use became a daily habit. For 10 years Georgeanna struggled with addiction and it became evident to her that she could not drink without abusing the very substances she swore off. Every aspect of her life had become unmanageable, so she decided to take control of her own life, let go of alcohol and drugs, and leave an abusive relationship. Georgeanna was a hair stylist and makeup artist, but is taking time to put her recovery first and will be exploring a new career path soon. She is very dedicated to her recovery and thankful to be a part of the Mayor’s Substance Misuse Task Force of Apex, and hopes to help others struggling with addiction by sharing her experiences, strength, and hope. Recovery is possible, and you are more than worth it!

[Contact Georgeanna.](#)



### **Sara Schaefer, MSN, APRN, CPNP**

Sara Schaefer obtained her Master of Science in Nursing from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and is a co-founder and medical provider at Nourish Adolescent Wellness, PLLC in Apex, NC. She is passionate about adolescent wellness, specifically body image, contraceptive counseling, and mental wellness. She is eager to change the culture of mental health services and rebuild trust in medical professionals for our youth. Sara has over 10 years of experience in emergency and pediatric nursing where she saw how broken our healthcare system is for our youth experiencing challenges with mental wellness and addiction. Sara is excited to aid the task force by providing medical advice, sharing her vision of how to provide whole-family care, and aide in finding ways to prevent drug misuse, especially among our younger population.

[Contact Sara.](#)

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### **Nicole Singletary**

Nicole Singletary is a compassionate recovery advocate with years of experience working with individuals diagnosed with substance use and mental health disorders. As an Injury and Drug Prevention Manager for Wake County, she provides program management for the Wake County Drug Overdose Prevention Initiative, a comprehensive plan to prevent drug overdoses, support harm reduction efforts, and reduce risk taking behaviors. Nicole currently chairs the Wake County Drug Overdose Prevention Coalition and provides management and supervision for the Wake County Recovery Court program, a drug treatment court model, and its supervisor. Nicole joined the Mayor's Substance Misuse Task Force to help create awareness about stigma reduction, prevention strategies, treatment and recovery opportunities for substance use and mental health disorders. Nicole has over 20 years of program management experience including employee supervision, grant writing and management, contract and budget oversight, as well as community partnership and collaboration development.

[Contact Nicole.](#)



### **Brenda Steen**

Brenda Steen is Hollan's mother and has loved him unconditionally for more than 28 years. Substance misuse and its collateral damage is very personal and raw to the entire Steen family. After 10 years of living in turmoil and battling feelings of shame, Brenda is sharing her journey with other parents feeling alone and helpless and is honored to be part of the Mayor's Substance Misuse Task Force to help build a community of support for those desperately seeking hope.

[Contact Brenda](#)

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### **Hollan Steen**

For 10 years, the disease of addiction took control of Hollan's life and sent him on a path of destruction, which included multiple rehabilitation attempts, incarceration, subsequent probation, and ultimately, despair. In 2018, exhausted and ready for help, Hollan entered a residential treatment program in Asheville, NC. Through hard work, the will to change, and a loving, caring recovery community, he created a new life for himself. Today, Hollan works around the clock coaching and guiding men and women struggling with substance misuse, both at Asheville Recovery Center where he himself found recovery in 2018, and Rise Recovery sober living homes for men. The Mayor's Substance Misuse Task Force was Hollan's vision and he is determined to help create a community willing to embrace substance misuse in his hometown of Apex, NC.

[Contact Hollan](#)



### **Marla Wolf**

Marla Wolf is a mother that understands substance use disorders and mental health challenges. Struggling to find help for her teenage children's mental health and substance misuse issues, she spent hours and hours searching for resources. She navigated therapists, facilities, insurance, and hotlines – feeling alone and lost and wrestling with the frustration of wondering if the choices she made were the right ones, or simply 'the one for right now'. When a family lives in a constant state of stress and fear, a breakdown happens and you begin to parent in a fear-based state, which eventually becomes enabling. It is stressful, exhausting, and scary. The only way Marla can make sense of her journey as a mother, is to do everything possible to help other parents so they don't feel as alone and lost.

[Contact Marla.](#)