

The UCLA Nathanson Family Resilience Center is Excited to Welcome our New UCLA/VAGLAHS Veteran Family Wellness Center (VFWC) Team!

A unique partnership between the University of California, Los Angeles and the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System (VAGLAHS), the new **Veteran Family Wellness Center** will promote the well-being of veterans and their family members through the delivery of educational, recreational and prevention services on the VAGLAHS West Los Angeles campus. In partnership with the VAGLAHS patient-centered care team, the VFWC strengthens veterans and their families by providing coordinated, high-quality family-centered education and prevention services designed to enhance resilience and well-being.



Tess Banko, MSW/MPA, ACSW serves as the Executive Director of the VFWC. A Marine Corps veteran, she has held leadership roles in the military, veteran and wider civilian communities for over fifteen years. Tess has a background in social work and public administration including mental health and wellness, community development, organizational leadership and management. Tess is a strong supporter of collaborative, consensus-based initiatives and believes in accessible, preventive, strength-based approaches that span the continuum of veteran and family member needs.



Angel Barrios, MFT serves as a Family Trainer for the VFWC. Prior to joining UCLA, Angel worked at the VAGLAHS West Los Angeles campus with the Salvation Army where he managed a homeless program for Vietnam and Korean War veterans. Angel received his Master's degree from Pepperdine University where he studied Marriage and Family Therapy. As a U.S. Army Veteran, Angel was stationed within the U.S. at both Marine and Army bases. His deployments included a one-year tour to Iraq with the 101st Airborne Division where he earned a Purple Heart.



Gabriela Alejos, MSW serves as a Family Trainer at the VFWC. Gabriela earned her Master's Degree in Social Work at the University of Southern California, with a concentration in children, youth and families. Gabriela has worked closely with military and veteran families, including the UCLA FOCUS for Early Childhood research study. She is passionate about supporting this incredibly resilient population.



Melissa Wasserman, PsyD is a Postdoctoral Fellow specializing in tele-services for veteran families. Dr. Wasserman received her doctorate from Pepperdine University, where she studied clinical psychology. She completed her internship at the UCLA Semel Institute, where she received specialized training in assessment and intervention for families who have overcome traumatic experiences. Her research interests include intergenerational trauma and resilience with a special focus on military and veteran populations.



Melissa Lee serves as the Family Resource Coordinator for the VFWC. She served as a Ground Supply Officer in the USMC from 2000-2004. She was stationed at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Camp Lejeune, and Camp Hansen, Okinawa. She did Veteran Outreach for Habitat for Humanity in the San Fernando/Santa Clarita Valleys, and for the last 2 years has volunteered with *22 Until None*, a non-profit dedicated to ending Veteran suicide. She is married to a former Marine Corps Infantry Officer, and was stationed with him at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton and 29 Palms.



Tom Babayan, MS, LMFT serves as a model supervisor for the VFWC. He has delivered prevention services to active duty military families and veterans for over nine years. He currently acts as Model Supervisor for staff delivering the FOCUS suite of services at military installations in the U.S. and abroad. Mr. Babayan pioneered the tele-delivery model, an innovative platform that uses video conferencing technology to deliver psychoeducation and training to veterans and their families.



Terri Morgan, LMFT serves as the Women Veteran Family Program Director. Terri has experience training active duty and veteran families in resilience and family closeness strategies as well as providing prevention, intervention and education services for families and children across a wide range of issues and concerns. Her clinical acumen also includes child development education, parenting classes, play therapy interventions, group facilitation, separation, loss, trauma, grief, adoption, and foster-care services.

The VFWC is a place where veterans and their family members receive services in a supportive, welcoming, family-friendly environment. The center provides a range of wellness services including, family and couples resilience programs, parenting workshops, and recreational activities designed to promote family and child well-being.

For more information, contact familycenter@nfrc.ucla.edu.

Read more about this partnership on the [UCLA Newsroom](#).