A young child with curly brown hair, wearing a blue t-shirt, is smiling and stacking colorful alphabet blocks. The child is holding a red block with the letter 'L' at the top of a stack. The stack includes blocks with letters 'I', 'D', 'U', 'D', 'F', 'W', 'B', 'E', and 'G'. The background is a blurred indoor setting, likely a classroom or playroom.

*The Work Ahead:  
Practice, Policy,  
and Possibility*



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## CWLA Membership

At CWLA, we know that collaboration is key to improving the lives of children and families. That's why we support and connect a diverse coalition of child-serving professionals who partner with us to fulfill our mission of advancing policies, strategies, and best practices that result in better outcomes for children, youth, and families.

CWLA provides members with the guidance and resources necessary to build on what works and invent what's needed. Members influence the direction of child welfare by connecting with federal lawmakers, serving on national committees, and sharing ideas with peers around the country. Staff at all levels of member organizations can fully participate in membership benefits, helping to ensure that the families they serve have a national voice.

CWLA invites everyone entrusted with the well-being of children to join us and create change that matters for those who need it most. Conference attendees can take advantage of a special membership sale: **30% off all new organizational memberships through the end of May!** Speak with a CWLA staff member or board member to learn more.



On behalf of the CWLA Board of Directors and staff, welcome to the 2026 CWLA National Conference!

This year's theme, *The Work Ahead: Practice, Policy, and Possibility*, reflects the conversations we have had with you—our members and partners—about what it takes to ensure that children, their families, and their communities have what they need to thrive. Over the past year, you have stood at the forefront of responding to shifting federal policies and significant disruptions in resources. Your persistence and creativity have helped sustain some of our nation's most essential supports for families, including child care, food and nutrition programs, and trauma treatment. You ensured that children did not bear the brunt of service cuts, even in the most challenging moments.

Yet we all know the work is not done. Since January 2025, CWLA has convened weekly CWLA Connect calls, engaging more than 1,600 people. These conversations have brought together members and partners from across the human services and advocacy community to share timely information and help protect critical supports for children, families, and communities. We are profoundly grateful for your partnership and for the strength of your collective voice.

History shows us that challenging times often spark extraordinary innovation. Today calls for fresh, creative approaches to practice and programs—approaches that are effective, responsive, and centered on helping children flourish within their families and communities. Achieving this vision requires a shared action agenda, one that unites all stakeholders in modeling the change we hope to see.

Whether you are speaking for your agency, your community, your family, or yourself, children and families need fellow champions in every space where decisions are made. Now is the moment to turn our vision for change into concrete action—within our communities, organizations, state capitals, and on Capitol Hill.

We invite you to join us on Tuesday, April 21, for Advocacy Day, when we head to Capitol Hill to help inform members of Congress about the real-world impact of federal policies. While the CWLA Legislative Agenda and state fact sheets will support your conversations, it is your experience, expertise, and stories that legislators rely on as they weigh policy and funding proposals.

Over the next three days, we will share innovative strategies to help us evolve in ways that meet the needs of those who depend on us most. You will hear about our work to strengthen the workforce, develop new practice standards, and outline a new National Family Policy Agenda—one that supports a future where every child grows up safe, supported, and connected.

We are glad you are here for the conversation. Your voice matters!



**Linda S. Spears, CWLA President and CEO**



# Schedule-at-a-Glance

## Sunday, April 19

- 12:30 pm – 4:30 pm Training Institute
- 5:00 pm – 6:00 pm Members-Only Reception

## Monday, April 20

- 7:45 am – 6:00 pm Registration and CWLA Bookstore
- 9:00 am – 10:00 am Coffee
- 8:15 am – 9:45 am Members-Only Meeting
- 10:05 am – 11:35 am Workshops A
- 11:55 am – 1:35 pm Lunch Plenary
- 1:55 pm – 3:10 pm Workshops B
- 3:30 pm – 4:45 pm Workshops C
- 5:00 pm – 6:00 pm Reception in Exhibit Hall



## Tuesday, April 21

### Advocacy Day!

- 8:00 am – 8:30 am Coffee & Snacks
- 8:30 am – 10:05 am Policy Plenary
- 10:25 am – 11:40 am Workshops D
- 11:45 am Buses to Capitol Hill
- 11:45 am – 1:15 pm Social Lunch
- 1:35 pm – 3:05 pm Workshops E
- 3:25 pm – 4:40 pm Roundtable Rooms
- 4:45 pm – 5:45 pm Reception in Exhibit Hall

## Wednesday, April 22

- 8:00 am – 8:30 am Coffee & Snacks
- 8:30 am – 9:45 am Workshops F
- 10:05 am – 11:35 am Closing Plenary

## CWLA Conference App

Make sure to download CWLA's conference event app for easy access to the schedule, workshop handouts, and session evaluation forms. For every evaluation form you fill out, your name will be entered into a drawing to win a free conference ticket for next year!

*Having trouble joining? Speak to the registration desk!*



# CWLA Conference Planning Committee

*A warm thank you to the following individuals for their contributions and assistance:*

Committee Chair:

**Yaridis Garcia**

*Juvenile Welfare Board  
of Pinellas County*

**Lashanda Baylor**

*Hope Village for Children*

**Nina Aliprandi-  
Bolley**

*Maryville Academy*

**Alison Blodgett**

*Parenting with Love and Limits*

**April Curtis**

*CWLA Fellow*

**Paul Dann**

*North American Family Institute*

**Paul DiLorenzo**

*CWLA Fellow*

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*Connecticut Alliance  
of Foster and Adoptive  
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**Arnold Eby**

*National Foster  
Parent Association*

**Lucille Echohawk**

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*Child Welfare League  
of Canada*

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and Family Services*

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## Conference Schedule

### Registration

7:45 am – 5:00 pm

*Location: Grand Foyer*

### CWLA Members-Only Session: Meeting the National Child Welfare Workforce Challenge!

8:15 am – 9:45 am

*Location: Salon B*

CWLA members are invited to join us for a focused two-hour discussion designed to directly shape CWLA's national workforce agenda. This year, presenters will share and discuss key findings from the recently completed CWLA national workforce survey, along with findings and recommendations from the work of the CWLA National Child Welfare Workforce Committee. This work reflects CWLA's recognition of the challenges public and private agencies are experiencing in recruiting and retaining qualified, diverse, and committed professionals. High caseloads, inadequate compensation, limited professional development opportunities, and systemic barriers have contributed to widespread burnout, high turnover, and a shrinking pipeline of future workers. These conditions carry serious consequences not only for the workforce, but also for the children and families served. In response, CWLA has prioritized workforce development as a critical national issue and created a Workforce Development Plan to drive meaningful, sustained change. This session will call on members to actively engage in advancing this work. Presenters will outline critical funding priorities and policy considerations needed to address the crisis and will seek member input to strengthen CWLA's recommendations. Participants will be asked to share feedback, as well as other innovative strategies, programs, and models that have proven effective in their own agencies or jurisdictions. Member input from this session will help shape CWLA's National Child Welfare Workforce Development Report and Action Plan.

### Coffee

9:00 am – 10:00 am

*Location: Sky View and Exhibit Hall*



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## Workshops A

10:05 am – 11:35 am

*Please note that some numbered workshops may be omitted due to scheduling conflicts.*

### A2 Leadership Touchstone: Trauma-Informed and Equity-Centered Leadership

*Location: Salon A*

As part of the Leadership Touchstones series for executive and senior leaders, this session will invite participants to reexamine leadership through a trauma-informed and equity-centered lens. Focused on racial equity and cultural humility, the session will explore how leaders can better support diverse families while strengthening their organizations from the inside out. Participants will reflect on their own leadership practices, learn how to assess decision-making through an equity lens, and explore strategies for building inclusive leadership teams. The session will also offer practical approaches to addressing secondary trauma, fostering resilient workplace cultures, and leading with compassion and purpose in complex child- and family-serving environments.

**Presenters:** Jodi Hill-Lily, Doris Duke Foundation; Anayra Túa-López, Proyecto Nacer, Inc.; Julie Springwater & Joe Costa, CWLA Senior Fellows

### **A3 Poverty and Practice: How Engaging with Staff Perspectives Can Impact Families' Access to Economic Resources**

**Location: Salon K**

Economic and concrete supports are increasingly incorporated into services for families involved with child welfare, but rarely are caseworker beliefs and attitudes incorporated into the implementation of these practices. Through the collaboration of research, policy, and practice institutions, this workshop will present practical strategies to examine and address staff perspectives that impact equitable distribution of economic assistance within family preservation services in Illinois. Strategies were shaped by implementing the EmPwR Study, a large-scale cash assistance pilot, including staff and family focus groups. Attendees will learn about implementing a CQI process to review discretionary funds (e.g., flex fund), engage in activities designed for staff to reflect on data and assumptions about providing economic assistance to families, and view demonstrations of coaching support to reduce risk by providing both services and economic support.

**Presenters:** Ashley Trospen & Ella Henry & Jaime Schmitz, Brightpoint; Alexis Kronos, Children & Family Research Center, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

### **A4 Fatherhood Engagement Defined: Fathers Cultivating Stronger Connections with Their Children**

**Location: National Landing I**

This workshop will provide participants with a better understanding of what it means to be committed, responsible, and involved fathers. The presenters will provide a working definition of fatherhood engagement, list the barriers to fatherhood engagement, and describe the paternal traits and duties that enable fathers to overcome these barriers. The presenters will also share insights gleaned from their in-person and virtual facilitation of the National Fatherhood Initiative's 24:7 Dad (for community fathers) and

Inside Out Dad (for incarcerated/formerly incarcerated fathers) curricula.

**Presenters:** Jeffery Faulkerson, Prince William County; Bennie Herron, Fairfax County Government; Chuck Dubbe, Harrisonburg Rockingham Social Services

### **A5 Cracking the Organizational Code: Disrupting with Neuroscience to Build Teams That Trust, Belong, and Deliver**

**Location: Salon H**

This session introduces a neuroscience-informed leadership capacity-building model designed to disrupt status quo systems and cultivate high-trust, high-performing teams. Grounded in neuroscience research on trust, psychological safety, emotional regulation, and belonging, the model equips leaders to navigate complexity, foster engagement, and lead with both courage and compassion. By integrating brain science with practical leadership practices, it challenges traditional compliance-driven approaches and instead centers trust as the engine of sustainable culture change. Designed for the "Now and Next" generation of leaders, this model transforms organizational dynamics through trust-building, disruption, and intentional cultural design.

**Presenters:** Angela Pittman-Vanderweide, Gregory Grier & Katie Swanson, Allies4Outcomes

### **A6 Strengthening Parent-Child Bonds: Training Caregivers to Foster Healthy Relationships and Prevent Psychological Maltreatment**

**Location: National Landing II**

This workshop will present information about a new, free curriculum for family service professionals to implement with parents and resource parents on the topic of psychological maltreatment and positive parenting. Individual-, family-, and community-level stress often increases in challenging sociocultural-political times. Unfortunately, caregiver stress significantly predicts problematic parenting behaviors such as yelling,

humiliating, and threatening. These behaviors, when severe or persistent, may escalate into psychological maltreatment, placing children at increased risk of negative outcomes. Family service agencies can interrupt this trajectory by providing enhanced knowledge and support to caregivers—especially resource parents who are caring for children with challenging behavioral issues. The presenters will review the topics covered in the training curriculum; discuss the evidence base for them; and provide a script, tips, and strategies for successful implementation.

**Presenters:** Amy Baker & Brittany Morris, *The New York Foundling*

## A7 **Dual Diagnosis: Mental Health in Children and Youth Who are Neurodivergent**

**Location: National Landing IV**

Children who are neurodivergent are overrepresented in child welfare systems, with autism and related

conditions appearing two to six times more frequently than in the general population, and with higher rates of referral and substantiated maltreatment. With 55–70% of these children having co-occurring mental health conditions, they face psychiatric hospitalization rates that are six times higher than their neurotypical peers. Yet specialized services remain critically limited, leading to prolonged emergency department boarding, missed treatment opportunities, and unnecessary medication or restraint use. This presentation will provide a best practices framework for delivering appropriate mental health care to children who are neurodivergent and in child welfare. Topics include transdiagnostic treatment planning, key components of neurodiversity-tailored care, and wraparound/crisis aftercare. Participants will learn evidence-based strategies to enhance care experiences and improve long-term outcomes for this population, addressing both their unique developmental needs and complex trauma histories.

**Presenters:** Steven Merahn & Shyanne Anthony, *Perimeter Healthcare*

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## A8 National Collaborative for Transition-Age Youth Playbook

**Location:** Salon J

This workshop will explore strategies to improve outcomes for young adults transitioning from foster care. It will feature the newly released *Improving Outcomes for Young Adults and the Systems that Serve Them: A Playbook of Best Practices from the National Collaborative for Transition-Age Youth*—a partnership among the American Public Human Services Association, Foster Club, and Youth Villages. Co-developed by young people, child welfare leaders, and policy-makers, the Playbook offers a roadmap to strengthen services for youth turning 18 in foster care. It provides best practices and strategies to improve outcomes in housing, health, education, employment, and permanency. Centering the voices of young people, the Playbook concludes with eight key priorities for state and federal policymakers, including expanding high-quality, federally reimbursable Extended Foster Care programs. Participants will explore actionable insights and system-level approaches to support young adults as they transition from foster care to independence.

**Presenters:** Shaquita Ogletree, Youth Villages; Jennifer Kerr, American Public Human Services Association; Sarah Goad, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

## A9 Building Trauma-informed Organizations to Support Effective Interventions for Children and Families

**Location:** Salon I

An increasing number of Americans experience severe weather events each year, yet they often lack the support necessary to fully recover. Extreme weather events leave more than physical destruction in their wake; survivors face the painful task of putting the pieces of their lives back together, worrying about meeting their basic needs and keeping businesses going while enduring stress and trauma. Those impacted by a disaster often struggle to comprehend the enormity of what has been lost—the tangible resources of food, shelter, and power, and the intangible sense of psychological safety. For frontline staff

and their community partners, the experience is also complex. Tasked with helping communities in crisis through a system designed for efficiency rather than empathy, staff (and their families) may also suffer loss during such events. Repeated exposure leads to additional collective trauma and secondary traumatic stress—a cumulative emotional toll that results in fatigue; emotional detachment; and a reduced ability to connect, empathize, and support others effectively. This workshop will present a trauma-informed model and approach to response and recovery designed to create organizations that can respond to severe weather events and crises effectively, with compassion, empathy, and humanity.

**Presenter:** Melinda Baldwin, Maryland Department of Human Services

## A10 Strategies for Utilizing Research Findings in Child and Family Social Services

**Location:** Salon II

There is a need to analyze and utilize the literature on strategies for research utilization in child and family social services. This workshop will use conceptual models and summarize ten strategies for maximizing the likelihood that research findings will be used to inform policy, program design, and practice. After reviewing these strategies, participants will gain tools to increase the likelihood that research findings are used to inform decision-making. The presenters will describe ten strategies to improve the use of research findings in decision-making and will engage participants in a discussion about which of these strategies have been used and with what kinds of success. Workshop handouts will be derived from a new journal article, *Strategies for Utilizing Research Findings for Policy, Program Design, and Practice in Child and Family Social Services: A Synthesis of the Literature*, published by the *Journal of Public Child Welfare*.

**Presenters:** Alexandria Maldonado, Foster Club; Peter Pecora, Casey Family Programs; Kim DuMont, William T. Grant Foundation

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## A11 Systems Partnerships Advancing Whole Family Housing and Services

**Location:** *Salon F*

Housing instability is a key driver of family involvement in the child welfare system and a barrier to reunification. Yet when families receive housing support alongside whole family services, the results can be transformative. This session will explore strategies to strengthen and sustain policies, practices, and funding to prevent unnecessary family separation and promote child and family stability. Learn how cross-system collaborative approaches can create more responsive and efficient systems that prevent homelessness and support family well-being. Presenters will share real-world examples of state, local, and Tribal partnerships that center families' needs flexibly and holistically to advance housing solutions for those at risk or involved with child welfare.

**Presenters:** *Andrew Johnson & Leah Lindstrom Rhea, Corporation for Supportive Housing; Mary Kramer, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin*

## A12 Hope as a Strategy: Building a Future- Focused Workforce in Child Welfare

**Location:** *Salon B*

This session will introduce the Science of Hope as an evidence-based framework for strengthening child welfare systems through workforce well-being, organizational resilience, and service innovation. Drawing on Hope Theory and applied research, this workshop will emphasize how hope—defined as the ability to set goals, develop pathways, and sustain motivation—serves as a protective factor for both staff and families. Leaders will examine how the Oklahoma Department of Human Services has integrated hope into policy, leadership, and culture to enhance

retention and impact. Participants will engage in small-group discussions and leave with flexible strategies and tools to incorporate hope-centered practices into their organizations, fostering capacity for meaningful, strengths-based, and sustainable change in child welfare.

**Presenters:** *Angela Pharris, University of Oklahoma; Debroah Shropshire, Human Services Group*

## A13 Co-Designing Data- Driven Residential Quality Improvement Strategies with Family Members and Youth

**Location:** *National Landing III*

Family members and youth with lived experience worked with providers, researchers, and policymakers to co-design a Theory of Change framework for residential programs, consisting of seven intersecting logic models aligned with System of Care principles and values. The logic models comprise a menu of research- and evidence-supported inputs, activities/programming, outputs, outcomes, and impacts from which programs can strategically develop and apply quality improvement initiatives aligned with measurement. The Principles to Outcomes Driven Practices demonstration project, with family and youth voice at all levels, is testing the framework's usability through a collaborative public-private partnership. This presentation, inclusive of provider, family, youth, and research voices, will review the project co-design, baseline assessment data, and preliminary results. Attendees will participate in an interactive exercise to experience working with the framework.

**Presenters:** *Robert Lieberman, ACRC/Building Bridges Initiative; Margaret McGladrey, University of Kentucky College of Public Health; Paulette Mader, Rutgers University; Paula Minske, Nexus Family Healing; Simon Fulford, Parrott Creek Child and Family Services*

# Opening Plenary and Lunch

11:55 am – 1:35 pm

**Location: Arlington Ballroom**



**Linda S. Spears**  
CWLA  
President & CEO



**Jodi Hill-Lilly**  
Doris Duke Foundation  
Child Well-Being Program Director



**Deborah Weinstein**  
Coalition on Human Needs  
Executive Director

**C**WLA President & CEO Linda Spears will open the conference by looking

ahead to what's next for the field—how we build on what's working and embrace new approaches to better engage communities, strengthen practice, and build responsive systems that help children and families thrive. The plenary will also feature Jodi Hill-Lilly, Program Director for Child Well-Being at the Doris Duke Foundation, who will discuss the Foundation's OPT-In for Families Initiative that is testing a community-driven alternative that invests in prevention to meet families' needs before abuse and neglect occurs.

Deborah Weinstein, Executive Director of the Coalition on Human Needs, will also offer reflections on the future of the fight to reduce poverty and meet basic needs. During the session, CWLA will present Deborah Weinstein with the CWLA Legacy of Leadership for Children & Families Award, recognizing her extraordinary career leading collaborative cross-sector advocacy impacting the well-being of children, women, families, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

## A15 Growing Strong Starts: Partnering for Young Children's Well-being in Child Welfare

**Location: Salon G**

Young children involved in the child welfare system have a unique opportunity to receive the care and support they need to thrive. While child welfare agencies across the U.S. share a core mission to keep children safe and support lasting family connections, they vary in how they identify needs, promote well-being, and connect families to vital services. Across the country, many agencies are making important strides in prioritizing the well-being of children ages 0-5. Yet families and providers still face ongoing challenges. In response, the Connecticut Department of Children and Families is expanding and testing several promising strategies such as enhanced staff training, clearer and more supportive policies, increased access to

services, and deeper partnerships with families, communities, and sister agencies to better meet the needs of our youngest children.

**Presenters:** *Inés Eaton, Connecticut Department of Children and Families; Karen Hensley, Advanced Behavioral Health; Heidi Maderia, Connecticut Association of Infant Mental Health*

## Workshops B

1:55 pm – 3:10 pm

### B1 Hot Topics in Child Welfare Policy: Immigration, Affordability, and Supporting Older Youth

**Location: Salon B**

This policy workshop explores pressing issues shaping the child welfare landscape today, with a focus on immigration, economic affordability, and the

unique needs of older youth transitioning out of care. Presenters will examine recent policy changes from Congress and the Administration, and proposed legislation to support children, families, and young adults. Attendees will gain insights into the ongoing policy debates and learn strategies for staying informed and engaged in advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill.

**Presenters:** *Wendy Cervantes, Center for Law and Social Policy; Whitney Pesek, National Women's Law Center; Gina Plata-Nino, Food Research and Action Center; Jennifer Pokempner, Youth Law Center; Kati Mapa, CWLA*

## B2 Navigating Funding Challenges: The Unsaid Realities of Financial Pressure

**Location: Salon A**

As part of the Navigating Financial Challenges series for senior leaders, this session will create a trusted environment for candid discussion about the financial pressures many organizations face but rarely discuss openly. Participants will explore the impact of federal policy and funding on operating in a constrained fiscal environment. The session will examine difficult trade-offs between sustainability and service delivery and identify shared priority challenges across the field. By surfacing common realities, the discussion will lay the groundwork for collaborative problem-solving and strategic leadership in uncertain financial conditions.

**Presenters:** *Linda Spears, CWLA; Paul Dann, NAFI; Joe Costa & Paul DiLorenzo, CWLA Senior Fellows*

## B3 Improving Child Well-being Through Health System Partnerships

**Location: Salon K**

Children impacted by the child welfare system deserve timely, coordinated, and trauma-informed health care. However, providers often face challenges

such as limited medical history and a lack of specialized training. This panel presentation will explore the Foster Care Center of Excellence (FCCOE) model, developed by Centene and grounded in American Academy of Pediatrics standards of care. First launched in Texas in 2017, the model has expanded across multiple Medicaid managed care markets through partnerships with local providers. Panelists, including health plan leaders and provider partners, will discuss how the FCCOE model bridges Medicaid managed care and child welfare systems to improve outcomes. Attendees will learn how criteria for FCCOE designation are established, how partners are selected, and how collaboration across sectors leads to measurable improvements in care. Real-world outcomes will be shared to demonstrate the model's effectiveness.

**Presenters:** *Karen Rogers, Centene Corporation; Nathan Hoover, Superior Health Plan; Craig Stevenson, Home State Health; Maureen Sorenson, Coordinated Care of Washington; Tessa Chesher, Oklahoma Complete Health; Valerie Smith, University of Texas at Tyler School of Medicine*

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## **B4 Parent Partner Programs: The Evolution**

**Location: Salon G**

This interactive session will explore the lessons learned through the growth and sustainability of Parent Partner Programs. Designed for agencies looking to launch or enhance their programs, the presentation will highlight real-world lessons learned, practical strategies for implementation, and insights into long-term viability. Participants will be introduced to essential tools and resources that support successful program development, including funding strategies such as braiding options and key findings from a recent cost-benefit analysis. The session will also cover technical assistance avenues to guide implementation efforts and improve outcomes. Participants will gain an understanding of the foundational components of Parent Partner Programs, learn from implementation experiences shared by the Parent Partner Learning Collaborative, and explore sustainability models and funding mechanisms. Attendees will leave empowered with actionable strategies, financial insights, and a toolkit to strengthen their parent engagement initiatives.

**Presenters:** *Kris Isom, Casey Family Programs; Meryl Levine, Children's Trust Fund Alliance; Christina Cagle, Stanford Sierra Youth & Families*

## **B5 Addressing Vicarious Trauma in Child Welfare Workers: Strategies for Supporting the Workforce**

**Location: Salon J**

Too few social services workers receive the support services they need to remain in the workforce after experiencing vicarious trauma. In Virginia, the annual turnover rate for entry-level child welfare workers is 40%, and research suggests that these rates are even



higher in rural areas. This turnover rate is well above the 10-12% rate agreed to be healthy and optimal by researchers. Over the last several years, the Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy (OTRP) at the

Virginia Department of Social Services has led research projects linking vicarious trauma to burnout, job dissatisfaction, and turnover among social services staff. This workshop will provide an overview of the research findings and recommendations and will describe the evidence-informed components of a statewide program that the OTRP will implement to better support the workforce in Virginia.

**Presenters:** *Laurie Crawford & Stacie Vecchietti, Virginia Department of Social Services*

## **B6 A New Capacity Building Tool for Teams Engaged in Transformative Research, Evaluation, and Program Development**

**Location: National Landing II**

With the help of staff from APHSA and CWLA, the National Research Agenda Steering Committee has modified the original Equity Assessment and Improvement Tool for Research Teams to ensure relevance across all sectors. The new tool includes language that is appropriate for an array of organizations and governments and allows teams to ask questions with clarity, openness, honesty, and accountability. The tool is designed to equip program planning, research, and evaluation teams as they drive transformative systems change through the enhancement of invaluable knowledge from a multifaceted approach. It encourages discussion among all team members, especially at key decision-making points. This tool will be offered encouraged to customize it for their organizations or projects.

**Presenters:** *Jessica Elm, Like the Tree Consulting; Sandra Killeit, We All Rise; Julie Collins, CWLA*

## **B7 Uncovering Bias in Child Welfare Case Notes: Leveraging Natural Language Processing to Transform Practice**

**Location: Salon II**

Drawing on real-world examples from Illinois DCFS data, this session will examine why identifying bias is vital to promoting justice and equity. Participants will explore how natural language processing tools enable agencies to review case notes systematically, highlight problematic language, and implement corrective measures. The presenters will discuss actionable steps agencies can take to foster fairer practices and ensure that case notes better reflect the realities and needs of families. This workshop will demonstrate how technology can drive meaningful change, helping child welfare agencies recognize and mitigate bias in real time for more equitable outcomes.

**Presenters:** *Dagené Brown, Illinois Department of Child and Family Services; Tracy Rohrdanz, Augintel; Kristine Creavy, Chapin Hall*

## **B8 Family First in Action: Rhode Island's Kinship Care Strategy to Achieve Over 70% Family-Based Placements**

**Location: National Landing IV**

Rhode Island has maintained over 70% kinship placements for more than three years, reflecting DCYF's commitment to family-centered care. This session will highlight Rhode Island's innovative kinship strategy aligned with the Family First Prevention Services Act, emphasizing kin as the preferred placement. Attendees will learn how DCYF has embraced

a customer-service approach that manages emotions first and recognizes the unique needs of kin caregivers. Key components include kinship navigator services, peer mentor supports, flexible licensing, and the work of the Family Search and Engagement team in strengthening connections. Participants will leave with actionable strategies to advance kin-first practices and promote relational permanency for children and families.

**Presenters:** *Brandi DiDino & Lori D'Alessio & Allie Detonnancourt, Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families*

## **B9 Together We Thrive: Supporting Migrant Families through Partnerships and Evidence-Based Services**

**Location: Salon F**

This workshop will explore the experiences of immigrant families in the current political and social climate in the United States, highlighting the impact on family relationships and child well-being. Presenters will share strategies for creating effective collaborations between child welfare systems, service providers, and community-based organizations. Drawing from frontline experience in New York City's child welfare system, the session will feature insights from clinical experts, including the Functional Family Therapy–Child Welfare (FFT-CW) model purveyor and preventive service providers implementing the model. Attendees will learn how this short-term, evidence-based intervention supports sustainable family change. The presentation will highlight how treatment providers can partner effectively with stakeholders to meet the unique needs of migrant families.

**Presenters:** *Maris Schwartz, Children's Aid; Annie Niermann, FFT LLC*



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## **B10** How Families in Child Welfare Improved Well-being by Adding a \$1,000 Unconditional Monthly Cash Transfer

**Location: Salon I**

Can \$1,000 per month in supplemental income prove helpful to families involved in the child welfare system? A program at Forestdale in New York City has provided more than 30 families, mostly Preventive Program participants, with \$1,000 monthly. An interim evaluation by a team from the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College indicates that families used this additional income to help with housing, clothing, food, and family outings. This workshop will describe the program, the population, the evaluation design, the interim report outcomes, and provide an up-to-date overview. After the initial presentation, the panel will engage attendees in small-group discussion on policy questions (e.g., how government policies that require living wages or workplace protections can help improve the income children need in a household for healthy development), evaluation design questions (e.g., how participants can help design the parameters of program evaluation), and practice questions (e.g., what methods casework practice can use to embrace and address client financial sustainability).

**Presenters:** *William Weisberg, Martha Bragin & Monique Francis, Forestdale Inc.; Ryan Savino, CUNY*

## **B13** Challenging the Mandate: Redesigning Reporting Through Equity, Lived Expertise, and Co-Creation

**Location: Salon H**

What if mandated reporting started not with a hotline call, but with a conversation rooted in support,

context, and community? Mandated reporting often triggers a system response that is disproportionately harmful to the very families it seeks to protect. This interactive workshop will offer a prevention-first roadmap to transform practice. Participants will be introduced to a framework driven by data, equity, lived expertise, and collaboration. They will explore the Community Prevention Coordinator model, which embeds cross-sector support before a report is made. Co-developed with parents and youth with lived experience, this session will provide replicable, data-backed tools (including action plan templates, job descriptions, and surveys) that participants can adapt to use in their jurisdictions. Attendees will leave with the momentum to shift from compliance to connection.

**Presenters:** *Michelle Samuels & Amber Blak & Allison Schild, Citrus Family Care Network*

## **B14** Developing a Service Paradigm for Children with Complex Behavioral Conditions

**Location: National Landing III**

The Link Center, a national resource hub funded by the Administration for Community Living (ACL) and managed by the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services, has published a report that analyzes the complexities of serving children with neurodevelopmental, genetic conditions who may have also experienced trauma. The report examines how children exhibit behaviors stemming from emotional dysregulation. Using neuroscience as a lens to understand the children, the report proposes a service paradigm that recognizes both the brain and body components of dysregulation. This workshop will review the report and offer strategies to help children gain greater control over their feelings and responses, including successful recovery from trauma.

**Presenters:** *Nancy Thaler & Stacy Nonnemacher, National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services*

## B15 Family Matters: Strategies to Improve Outcomes for Youth and Young Adults

**Location: National Landing I**

Each year, thousands of youth in foster care in Maryland transition out of care, facing the daunting task of navigating adulthood without the traditional support systems on which many of their peers rely. Research shows that without a stable network, these young adults are at higher risk of housing instability, unemployment, and poor mental health. The Maryland Department of Human Services' (DHS) Family Matters initiative is a department-wide effort to ensure every young person leaves care with lifelong well-being and lasting connections. In collaboration with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, we conducted a landscape analysis that revealed Maryland ages young people—especially Black teenage girls—out of care at a higher rate than the national average and neighboring states. In response, DHS launched a five-pronged strategy focused on leadership development, kinship, communications, emerging adults, data and performance, and legal engagement. This workshop will review the ways DHS is challenging policies, processes, and engagement at every level to create systemic change that fosters stability, resilience, and opportunity for all young people leaving care.

**Presenters:** *Angelique Salizan & Alger Studstill, Jr., Maryland Department of Human Services*



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## Workshops C

**3:30 pm – 4:45 pm**

### C1 Protecting Children and Families in Court: Legal Strategies for Challenging Federal Administrative Action

**Location: Salon B**

This workshop will highlight advocacy-driven litigation strategies to challenge federal administrative actions that are harming LGBTQIA+ youth and immigrant children and families. The presenters will discuss how legal advocates are successfully using the courts to defend access to safety, basic needs, and family unity while advancing vital protections for children and families.

**Presenters:** *Currey Cook & Rebecca Curtiss, Lambda Legal; Hilda Bonilla, National Immigration Law Center; Kati Mapa, CWLA*

### C2 Leadership Touchstones: Stakeholder Engagement and Community Partnership

**Location: Salon A**

Part of the Leadership Touchstones series focused on strengthening executive leadership, this session will examine how strong relationships drive stronger outcomes for children and families. Leaders will explore how to build authentic, mission-aligned partnerships with families, funders, and community stakeholders. Participants will discuss practical strategies for navigating complex systems while maintaining organizational values. The session will also address managing funder relationships, strengthening trust, and cultivating community partnerships that expand collaboration and impact.

**Presenters:** *Yaridis Garcia, Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County; Vicky Kelly, CWLA Board; Julie Springwater & Joe Costa, CWLA Senior Fellows*



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## C4 The Power of the Normative Community: The Secret Sauce for Ensuring Team and Organizational Success

**Location: National Landing I**

This high-energy workshop will explore organizational and team culture. Culture is ever-present, and the strength of the culture that surrounds a team will define its capacity for success. Participants will examine the foundational elements for creating and sustaining a positive normative community that becomes the “secret sauce” for success. Throughout the session, participants will learn about the core elements and strategies for ensuring the presence of a positive organizational culture, which in turn will support successful outcomes for team members and, most importantly, for the people they serve.

**Presenter:** Paul Dann, North American Family Institute

## C5 Creating Beloved Communities: How the Texas Family Well-being Initiative (TFWI) is Leading through Practice, Policy, and Possibility

**Location: National Landing III**

By rewriting the narrative of families caught in cycles of systemic failure, TFWI has become a beacon of proactive change across four Texas cities (Houston, Dallas, Tyler, and Austin). Dedicated to community-led and -centered prevention to improve child and family well-being, TFWI empowers communities through innovative strategies and resource structures, including frameworks for forging strategic alliances with diverse partners—from mutual aid and family healing to youth skill development, housing, employment, and civic



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engagement. This flexible, replicable model for national change is fueled by a belief in community power, embodies the transformative potential of grassroots action, and leverages business-driven solutions.

**Presenters:** *LaKeidru Blaylock, Texas Family Well-Being Initiative; Veola Green, Annie E. Casey Foundation*

## **C6 Supporting Young People Transitioning from Foster Care through Relational Permanency and Interdependent Living**

**Location: Salon H**

Each year, thousands of young people transition from foster care without permanent, supportive relationships, often confronting homelessness, unemployment, and social isolation. This session will offer a powerful paradigm shift from independence to interdependence, emphasizing the transformative role of caring adult connections in building resilience. Participants will explore the C.A.R.E. Program (Caring Adults “R” Everywhere), a trauma-informed, evidence-informed intervention that facilitates natural mentoring relationships. Through compelling narrative, practitioner insights, and applied research, attendees will learn to foster relational permanency in their professional contexts. This session will equip frontline workers, administrators, and advocates with tangible tools to improve outcomes for youth in transition and become the consistent, caring presence every young person deserves.

**Presenter:** *Johanna Greeson, University of Pennsylvania*

## **C7 Connected for Safety: Enhancing Child Protection Through Timely Data Sharing Across Systems**

**Location: National Landing II**

Nationally, more than half of all concerns reported to Child Protective Services are screened out. Mandated

reporters are trained to report concerns to Child Protective Services, but many families still fall through the cracks despite the best intentions of professionals trying to connect them. We may believe we are successfully passing the baton, but what if that baton is inadvertently dropped at the handoff? This session will present a data-driven, innovative partnership strategy between educators and child protection professionals that ensures the baton is picked up and families are connected to the support they need to keep children safer, sooner.

**Presenters:** *Lara LaRoche & Tanya McClanahan & Tanina Seagraves, Franklin County Children Services*

## **C9 The Best Kept EBT Secret: How AF-CBT is the Solution for Creating Safety for Families Experiencing Physical Abuse and Harsh Discipline**

**Location: Salon G**

Child welfare workers and mental health clinicians must partner to combat the generational cycle of violence and abuse in families demonstrating physical abuse and harsh discipline. Alternatives for Families: a Cognitive Behavioral Treatment (AF-CBT) has been shown to lead to better outcomes than routine community services for children, parents, and families, including less child-to-parent aggression, fewer externalizing behaviors in children, decreased child abuse potential, less psychological distress and drug use in parents, less overall family conflict, and increased family cohesion. Unfortunately, few communities across the country offer this treatment model, leaving families without access to this powerful intervention. Participants in this training will take part in an experiential activity to examine beliefs, discover ways to start an AF-CBT program, and leave equipped with resources to chart a new course for families in their communities, including a powerful engagement technique they can apply immediately.

**Presenter:** *Ashley Fiore, National Children’s Alliance*

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## **C10 IMPACT:** When Community Partners and Research Partners Come Together

**Location: Salon II**

Drawing on insights from the Quality Improvement Center on Helplines and Hotlines, presenters will share practical strategies for building trust, sharing power, and sustaining momentum in complex, equity-centered partnerships. They will discuss how shared values, psychological safety, and effective use of technical tools positively influence collaboration. The session's central theme, "before the data comes the people," will challenge community partners, researchers, and systems-level changemakers to rethink how partnerships form and thrive. Participants will acquire tools and strategies for managing complexity, conflict, and communication, along with insights to improve collaboration. This interactive session will guide attendees in moving beyond check-the-box partnerships toward true co-creation.

**Presenters:** *Dee Bonnick, Children's Trust Fund Alliance; Diego Quezada & Kisha Freeman, Evident Change*

## **C11 Reducing Out-of-Home Placements for Children Impacted by Parental Substance Use through the Family- Based Recovery Model**

**Location: Salon I**

Parenting is a powerful motivator for substance use recovery. For children, remaining in the family home while a parent engages in treatment can reduce exposure to adverse childhood events associated with out-of-home placement. Family-Based Recovery (FBR) builds on a parent's motivation to maintain

custody of their child to engage them in treatment. Participants will learn about the foundational principles of FBR, an in-home, intensive treatment model that provides reinforcement-based substance use treatment, psychotherapy, parent-child dyadic therapy, and assistance to build recovery capital. Benefits of FBR will be demonstrated through discussion of a randomized control trial comparing out-of-home placements for children whose parents with substance use disorders were assigned to FBR versus treatment as usual.

**Presenters:** *Karen Hanson, Yale Child Study Center; Maria Restrepo-Ruiz, UCONN Health*

## **C12 Caring for the Caregivers: Grandparents Raising Grandkids**

**Location: National Landing IV**

This presentation will help participants apply lessons learned from caregiver supports provided to grandparents raising grandchildren to caring for other caregivers in the child welfare community. Featuring a gerontologist with deep expertise in providing support to grandparents, and an expert in applying Medicaid and Older Americans Act-funded strategies to supporting family caregivers, this presentation will share data and trends from the Grandparents Raising Grandkids program and examine how that information can be leveraged to improve collaboration between providers and public agencies. The TCARE caregiver supports model discussed in this presentation will include lessons learned from serving caregivers across populations, including older adults, individuals with disabilities, and children with special health needs.

**Presenters:** *Katie Olse, Sellers Dorsey; Cheryl Fisher, Centene Corporation; Chelsea Gilchrist, TCARE*

## C13 **Creating a Community of Hope: Fueling the Next Generation through Creative Collaboration**

**Location: Salon F**

Hope means believing that the future will be brighter than today. Turbo Babies, an early childhood awareness campaign created by the Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County, fuels hope by investing in the future of the youngest learners, ages zero to three. This session will explore how Turbo Babies creates a community of hope while educating the public on the complex topic of early brain science with an engaging and easy-to-understand message. Participants will learn how to promote awareness of their own missions and build their own “Pit Crew” through creative collaboration with parents, caregivers, partner organizations, health centers, and community stakeholders.

**Presenters:** *Elicia Hinson, Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County; Sarah Kelley, Evara Health*

## C14 **Beyond Inclusion: Elevating Lived Experience in Policy and Practice**

**Location: Salon J**

As child welfare systems confront unprecedented change and uncertainty, the question is no longer if lived experience should be centered but how it can become embedded in every level of decision-making and organizational culture. Involving lived experience builds trust within communities and promotes meaningful reform. This interactive session will bring together young adults and parents with lived experience in foster care, adoption, and kinship care. The panelists will explore how they have partnered with agencies, influenced policy, and redesigned mental health and permanency supports to reflect real family needs. The session will equip participants with replicable strategies to embed lived expertise into workforce development and program implementation. It will also highlight how the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.) has advanced its longstanding commitment to centering lived experience not only in direct mental health services but also across training, technical assistance, and workforce development. Through candid discussion and practical examples, participants will leave with strategies to inspire similar transformation within their own work.

**Presenters:** *Ashley Garcia Rivera, LaShawnda Kilgore & Betty Rivers, C.A.S.E; Robert Parsons, Oakland Thrives; Arnie Eby, NFPA*

## C15 **Ensuring Quality Care in Residential Treatment Settings for Children and Youth: Aligning Oversight, Practice, and Lived Experience Across Systems**

**Location: Salon K**

High-quality residential care remains a critical component of the behavioral health continuum for

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children, youth, and young adults with complex needs. Recent Congressional investigations into Residential Treatment Facilities revealed systemic abuse and neglect, prompting urgent calls for action from Congress to both the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid and the Administration for Children and Families. These findings underscore the need for stronger, aligned oversight and consistent standards of care across residential settings. This session will focus on solutions—how states, providers, and families can work together to strengthen residential treatment by aligning FFPSA’s Qualified Residential Treatment Program requirements and Medicaid’s Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility standards. Panelists from Center for Health Care Strategies, UCONN’s Innovations Institute, and Association of Children’s Residential and Community Services will share practical

strategies to improve safety, quality, equity, and outcomes for youth and their families across systems.

**Presenters:** *Alan Vietze, CWLA Senior Fellow; Mark Nickell & Kyle Reece, Association of Children’s Residential & Community Services; Ruby Goyal Carkeek, Center for Health Care Strategies; Elizabeth Manley, Innovations Institute, University of Connecticut*

## Welcome Reception

5:00 pm – 6:00 pm

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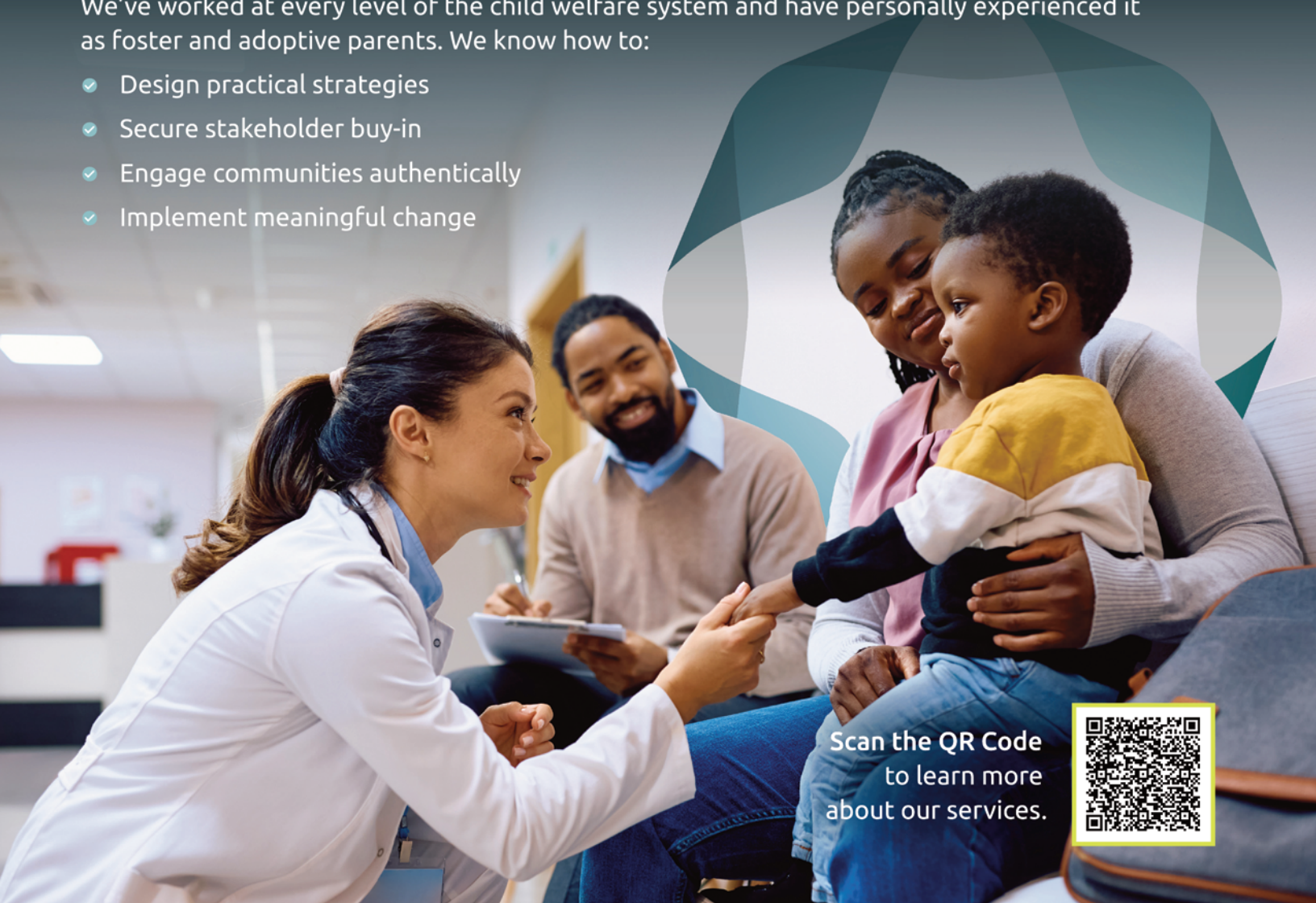
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**Alex J. Adams**

## Policy Plenary

8:30 am – 10:05 am

*Location: Arlington Ballroom*

CWLA is excited to welcome Alex J. Adams, Assistant Secretary for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), as the keynote speaker for our Policy Plenary. Assistant

Secretary Adams will outline his policy vision and priorities for ACF, examine critical challenges facing the child welfare field, and discuss strategies to strengthen systems and improve outcomes for children and families in the years ahead.



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Danny Davis**

CWLA is honored to present Representative Davis with the Congressional Champion for Children Award in recognition of his extraordinary legacy of advancing policies that have improved the lives of children and families nationwide.

# Workshops D

10:25 am – 11:40 am

## D1 Coping with Gun Violence and Work-Related Stress:

### Integrating Organizational Wellness and the Person of the Professional

*Location: National Landing II*

Rampant and incessant gun violence is devastating students, their families, and educational faculty daily. The soaring pressure and extraordinary demands confronting educational, healthcare, and human services workers are having a profound impact on all levels of the workforce, leaving many well-meaning professionals feeling overwhelmed, under-supervised, and highly susceptible to primary and secondary traumatic stress. CWLA and Teachers Unify to End Gun Violence will use this workshop to cultivate a safe and structured climate for interdisciplinary professionals and emphasize effective, respectful methods that reduce and minimize the harmful impact of gun violence and workforce stress, increase morale and productivity, and enhance professional alliances. The workshop will offer a Five-Step Approach that addresses the emotional labor educational and human services workers encounter every day by strengthening organizational resilience and school safety, establishing cohesive interdisciplinary teams within and across helping systems, and fostering trustworthy spaces for self-preservation and wellness on personal and professional dimensions.

**Presenters:** *Abbey Clements, Teachers Unify to End Gun Violence; Michael Schultz, CWLA Senior Fellow*

## D2 Navigating Financial Challenges: Strategic Financial Leadership

**Location: Salon A**

In this session of the Navigating Financial Challenges series, participants will move from identifying challenges to exploring strategies for stronger financial leadership. Executives who have navigated significant financial turning points will share insights and lessons learned. Participants will examine practical strategies across critical areas—including workforce sustainability, revenue diversification, data and advocacy, and operational efficiency—designed to help organizations move beyond survival toward long-term stability and resilience.

**Presenters:** John Damon, Canopy Children’s Solutions; Joe Costa & Paul DiLorenzo, CWLA Senior Fellows

## D4 Immersive Learning for Recruiting, Preparing, and Retaining the Child Welfare Workforce

**Location: Salon H**

This presentation will be an interactive session led by experts who have developed an award-winning immersive learning method. The discussion will focus on the major impacts observed: measurable reduction in turnover and lessons learned in implementation. The session will also turn a lens toward how immersive learning is being used to improve partnership with families, reduce bias in decision-making, and increase empathy in case work. Preparing the child welfare workforce is one of today’s most challenging needs. Most training is compliance-based, and most learning happens on the job, which means caseworkers are learning their craft while serving families. This new immersive learning method provides caseworkers and supervisors an opportunity to practice the complex interpersonal skills needed when working with complex families.

**Presenter:** Molly Tierney, Accenture

## D5 Shared Power, Shared Purpose: Reimagining Child Welfare Practice through True Collaborative Leadership

**Location: Salon I**

In a time when trust in systems is strained and the call for equity is urgent, this interactive workshop will highlight how a county child welfare agency and its community-based partners are leading with courage, connection, and co-creation. Together, they have embedded lived experience and cultural knowledge into core functions—creating new roles, challenging power dynamics, and transforming outcomes for families. Participants will gain practical tools, engage in interactive activities, and hear real-life reflections on how shared leadership elevates practice, deepens family engagement, and shapes system-level change. Whether you’re starting this journey or already deep in the work, this session will offer energy, structure, and strategy for the work ahead.

**Presenters:** Christina Cagle, Stanford Sierra Youth & Families; Rhonda Smith, Child Welfare Services Solano County

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## D7 Innovation and Equity in Systematically Addressing Developmental and Behavioral Health Needs of Children

**Location: Salon II**

Early identification of developmental and behavioral needs, coupled with family-centered case management, is essential for child and family well-being. This workshop will highlight the breadth and depth of the Developmental Screening and Enhancement Program (DSEP) at Rady Children's Hospital. DSEP is a successful, collaborative, community-responsive program that addresses the developmental and behavioral health needs of children who enter child welfare services. DSEP has reached more than 10,000 children and families, conducted more than 14,000 screenings, and equitably linked children to needed services at a rate of more than 90%. In this interactive session, the presenters will highlight learnings (i.e., unique challenges and needs) from DSEP's recent expansion to school-aged children. Participants will examine lessons learned, discuss implementation challenges, and consider how similar programs can be implemented and sustained in their service systems.

**Presenters:** *Danielle Fettes, UC San Diego; Julie McCormack, Rady Children's Health*

## D8 Building a Kin-First Culture: Practice, Policy, and Possibilities

**Location: Salon K**

Embracing the kin-first movement requires courage and clarity, with a willingness to challenge entrenched systems and champion family-centered solutions. This session will highlight effective strategies for ensuring that children remain with their families. The presenters, who represent both the public and private sectors, will share best practices from successful

programs, focusing on how kin-first mindsets create positive outcomes for children, families, and communities. Attendees will learn how policy and practice reforms can dismantle obstacles and promote equity, stability, and permanency for kinship families. The presentation will also examine innovative possibilities for reimagining child welfare systems where kin are prioritized, voices are centered, and sustainable support is the norm. Practical tools and actionable ideas will empower participants to advance a kin-first culture within their roles and organizations.

**Presenters:** *Jed Dews, HALOS; Mike Leach, Think of Us*

## D9 When the System Says 'No': How Peer Engagement Is Transforming Permanency and Challenging System Norms

**Location: Salon F**

This session will highlight how Citrus Family Care Network embeds parents with lived child welfare experience at critical decision points to disrupt harmful practices and improve outcomes for families. Presenters will explore how peer specialists who are trained, supported, and strategically placed are challenging punitive norms, reversing termination of parental rights filings, and reconnecting families even after systems have moved toward permanent separation. Rather than reinforce the illusion that the current system is working, this session will acknowledge that it is actively causing harm and will focus on actionable strategies that support families in real time. Participants will experience an engaging, interactive session that centers lived expertise, elevates family voice, and provides a replicable model for integrating peer roles that protect families, shift power, and challenge the status quo.

**Presenters:** *Allison Schild & Classi McDonald & Ronnita Waters, Citrus Family Care Network*

## D10 Fast Track to Reunification: Empowering Parents as Partners in Child Welfare

**Location:** *Salon J*

Too often, parents involved in the child welfare system feel unseen, overwhelmed, and powerless in the very process designed to reunify their families. Be Strong Families' Fast Track Workshops (FTW) are a trauma-responsive, experiential learning series that centers parents as active partners in the reunification journey. This workshop will begin with an overview and sample activities from the foundational four-hour Get on the Fast Track session—a psychodynamic experience that surfaces and validates the deep emotional impact of system involvement, helps parents process emotions, and equips them with practical tools to transform stress into action. Participants will also explore the 3-S Model (Strategy, Strength, Support), an empowering framework that helps parents claim agency in the reunification process.

**Presenters:** *Robyn Harvey, Be Strong Families; Gregory Cox, Cox Consulting*

## D11 Connecticut Alliance for Substance Exposed Children: Empowering Communities to Respond to Substance Exposure in Childhood

**Location:** *National Landing III*

This session will introduce the work of the Connecticut Alliance for Substance Exposed Children (CT SEC), an affiliate of National Drug Endangered Children. CT SEC is a multidisciplinary coalition committed to improving outcomes for children impacted by caregiver substance use and environmental exposure to substances. Participants will explore how substance exposure affects children from birth through adolescence and into emerging adulthood. The session will emphasize trauma-informed, cross-system collaboration to enhance prevention, identification, and intervention efforts. Attendees will learn about the Alliance's mission, statewide initiatives, and practical resources available to professionals across sectors. The presentation will also

highlight the importance of person-first language, coordinated care, and actionable strategies to support families and protect children. Participants will leave with tools to strengthen their community's response to SEC and promote safe, healthy, and substance-free environments for all children and families.

**Presenters:** *Kris Robles, Connecticut Department of Children and Families; Pamela Mautte, BHcare*

## D12 Strategies to Combat Family Separations for Immigrants in Child Welfare

**Location:** *National Landing I*

Recent updates to immigration processes and policy threaten the integrity of immigrant families and increase the likelihood that families will become involved in child welfare due to detention and deportation. The Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights operates a Technical Assistance Program for stakeholders, and Casey Family Programs provides strategic consulting to jurisdictions nationwide. This session will educate attendees on recent developments and their impacts on families, as well as lessons learned from real-life cases helping families at the intersection of immigration and child welfare. Participants will explore strategies for intervention that support safety, reunification, cultural connection, and permanency.

**Presenters:** *Rachel Konrad, Casey Family Programs; Shaina Simenas, The Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights; Tiffany Haynes, Aiden Anthony LLC*

## D13 Beyond Family First: Utilizing Backbone Organizations to Build Cross-System Collaboration to Support Well-being

**Location:** *Salon B*

Kentucky's Department for Community Based Services (DCBS) was an early implementer of the Family First

Prevention Services Act. Despite successful implementation, barriers to improving child and family well-being in meaningful ways remained. DCBS and CHES Solutions Group will share how engaging a non-profit to lead initiatives can foster inclusive approaches and support collaboration in a way that builds community trust and partner engagement—from early lessons learned to ultimately successful strategies to overcome fragmentation and apathy. Utilizing a nonprofit backbone organization to facilitate collaboration among public agencies, nonprofits, communities, and those with lived experience has resulted in significant strides toward the well-being of families and communities, especially in early childhood. Participants will have an opportunity to share their own successes and challenges for discussion.

**Presenters:** *Christa Bell & Rashmi Adi-Brown, CHES Solutions Group; Jennifer Thornhill, Kentucky Department for Community Based Services*

## D14 **Building Hope: Achieving Better Outcomes for Vermont’s Children and Families through Restorative Transformation**

**Location:** *National Landing IV*

Moving decision making closer to those impacted by the decisions is a proven strategy to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families and increase staff satisfaction. Vermont child welfare is undertaking a system-wide transformation to redefine itself as a restorative system. We are certain that engaging with children, youth, families, community partners, staff, and leadership in an authentic, relational way is the path forward to improving the lives of those we serve. This session will share how safety culture and racial justice work are foundational elements of the restorative approach, the research that supports it, the structures that have been built, and the progress made.

**Presenters:** *Heather McLain & Lindy Boudreau & Dan Evans, Vermont Department for Children and Families*

## D15 **Maximizing Housing and Services for Youth/ Young Adult Transitions**

**Location:** *Salon G*

Too many young people who transition out of foster care face homelessness—but it doesn’t need to be this way. This session will highlight policy and program opportunities to align and maximize housing vouchers as a powerful tool to support youth and young adults as they exit foster care. Participants will explore ideal timing and sequencing and how to align several key federal funding sources and programs that support youth transitions. This session will also review new federal flexibilities and examples for utilizing targeted housing vouchers and practical strategies for engaging housing authorities and other housing partners. Participants will leave this workshop with actionable insights to help young people achieve stable housing and successful transitions from care.

**Presenters:** *Leah Lindstrom Rhea & Andrew Johnson, Corporation for Supportive Housing*

**Get Grief-Informed for Youth in Foster Care**  
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## Buses to Capitol Hill

11:45 am – 12:00 pm



CWLA’s annual Advocacy Day is a crucial opportunity to educate our lawmakers about the work we do and the families we serve. Buses to Capitol Hill will pick up outside the lobby downstairs at 11:45am. Grab a bagged lunch and meet us there!

## Bagged Social Lunch

11:45 am – 1:15 pm

Join your colleagues for a mix-and-mingle social lunch in the ballroom. No programming is scheduled, so you can grab your lunch and take it with you to the Hill for congressional visits or relax in the ballroom before the next set of workshops.

## BRIDGES for Kids Act

3:00 pm

CWLA and the office of Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) invite you to join us at 3:00 pm on Capitol Hill to discuss the Senator’s proposed legislation, the “Better Results through In-community Delivery, Greater Enforcement, and Stronger Services (BRIDGES) for Kids Act,” which focuses on investing in community-centered solutions, increasing oversight of residential treatment facilities (RTFs) and improving conditions at RTFs.

## Workshops E

1:35 pm – 3:05 pm

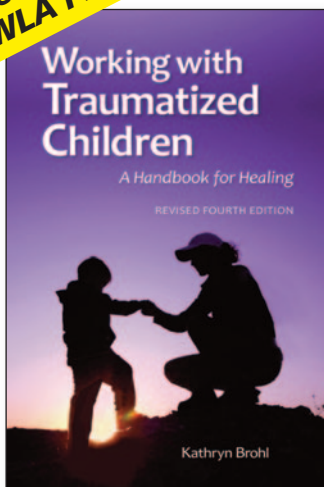
### E1 Partnering with Parents within the Child Welfare System

**Location: Salon I**

This workshop will examine how child welfare professionals assess caregiving capacity and determine when a caregiver or parent is considered “good enough,” while also exploring how personal values, assumptions, and projections can influence care planning and professional decision-making. Drawing from a chapter in the presenter’s newly released fourth edition of *Working with Traumatized Children* (CWLA Press, 2026), the session will integrate an understanding of parent trauma into discussions of engagement, assessment, and partnership. Participants will explore how trauma affects adult caregivers emotionally, physically, and neurologically, and how these impacts may shape parenting behaviors, interactions with systems, and responses to intervention. Through guided reflection and discussion, participants will have the opportunity to identify unintentional biases, deepen empathy, and strengthen collaborative approaches that support both child safety and family healing.

**Presenter:** Kathryn Brohl, Author

New from  
CWLA Press



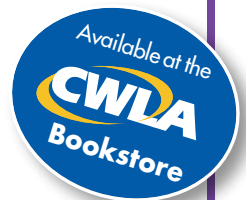
## Working with Traumatized Children

*A Handbook for Healing* REVISED FOURTH EDITION

by Kathryn Brohl, MA

This new edition of *Working with Traumatized Children* offers an effective, step-by-step process to understand, connect with, and assist children and youth who have experienced trauma. Updated chapters delve into functional brain-body changes following a traumatic experience, the role of the vagus nerve in trauma and subsequent emotional dysregulation, and how those in the helping professions can care for themselves amid experiencing secondary traumatic stress.

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## E2 Leadership Touchstones: Adaptive Leadership and Sustainable Impact

**Location: Salon A**

In this session of the Leadership Touchstones series for senior leaders, participants will explore how adaptive leadership can help organizations navigate change while sustaining long-term impact. Leaders will examine principles of adaptive leadership, explore strategies for organizational sustainability, and discuss approaches for measuring and communicating impact. Participants will leave better equipped to guide their organizations through complexity while advancing resilient, mission-driven growth.

**Presenters:** *Vannessa Dorantes, Casey Family Programs; Carl Ayers, Virginia Department of Social Services; Julie Springwater & Joe Costa, CWLA Senior Fellows*

## E3 Advancing Policy and Practice through Training and Education: The Benefits of CWLA's Compendium of Policy and Practice

**Location: Salon K**

CWLA's *Child and Family-Serving Systems: Compendium of Policy and Practice* provides a comprehensive resource that brings knowledge, methods and skills to agencies and schools. The expertise of practitioners, policy makers, educators, researchers and advocates across the country contributed to the development of a five-volume resource that highlights a broad spectrum of innovative approaches to responding to the compelling needs of children and families. As we contemplate the future of child welfare and our work ahead, the *Compendium* offers a collaborative model that integrates research, policy, practice and advocacy. It shows what can be accomplished through the

collective efforts of child welfare, health, mental health, educational, and legal systems. This is exactly the information and inspiration that is needed by agency-based practitioners and students who are on their way to fulfilling those essential roles. Understanding the interrelationship of policy and practice has value in creating a child welfare workforce with the knowledge, skills, and dedication to support family and child well-being. This workshop will demonstrate how the *Compendium* advances professional learning and development during these changing and challenging times.

**Presenters:** *Charlene Ingram & Ramona Denby-Brinson, Compendium Co-Editors; Dana Burdell Wilson & Eileen Mayers Pasztor, Compendium Authors*

## E4 Best Practices for Enhancing Child Welfare's Response to Perinatal Mental Health Conditions

**Location: National Landing IV**

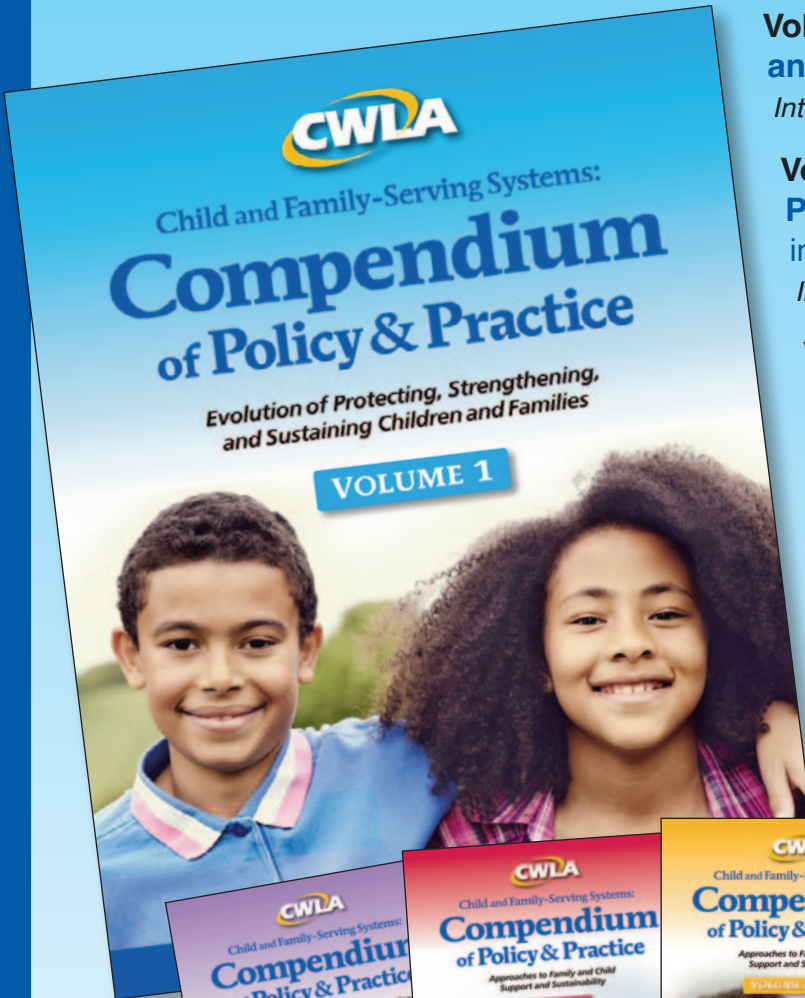
In 2022, a New York City mother with a history of child welfare involvement and mental illness was accused of drowning her three children. In response, the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) sought ways to prevent similar incidents by educating and equipping frontline staff, supervisors, trainers, and parents with best practices for maternal mental health, specifically addressing Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders (PMADs). This session will highlight the importance of recognizing and treating maternal and paternal mental health conditions to protect children from harm and ensure that new parents have the support they need and deserve to recover. Participants will learn about a partnership that provides NYC ACS and direct service staff with PMAD awareness, education, and resources. They will also hear from individuals with lived experiences of PMAD and SUD, as well as direct service providers who specialize in supporting and treating these conditions.

**Presenters:** *Jacqueline Martin, NYC Administration for Children's Services; Paige Bellenbaum, Perinatal Mental Health Consultant*

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# Child and Family-Serving Systems: Compendium of Policy & Practice



**Volume I: Evolution of Protecting, Strengthening, and Sustaining Children and Families**

*Introduction by Mark Testa*

**Volume II: Approaches to Child and Family Protection: Core Opportunities and Challenges in Child- and Family-Serving Systems**

*Introduction by Eun Koh*

**Volume III: Approaches to Family and Child Support and Sustainability**

*Part I: Introduction by Jim Gleeson*

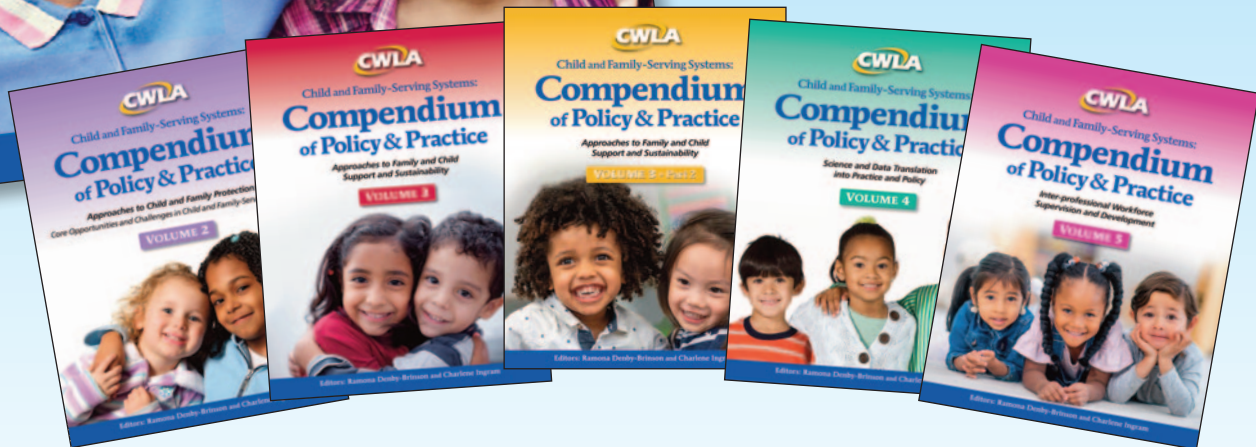
*Part II: Introduction by Charlene Ingram*

**Volume IV: Science and Data Translation into Practice and Policy**

*Introduction by Rick Barth*



**Volume V: Inter-Professional Workforce Supervision and Development**

*Introduction by Peter Pecora*



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## E6 Creating and Sustaining Systemic Change in Child Protection Through New and Innovative Policies and Partnerships

**Location:** Salon H

This session will provide an overview of the design, development, and delivery of new and innovative policies through an inclusive, collaborative, multi-institutional academic partnership between all seven accredited, state-supported institutions of higher

learning and the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services. It will also illustrate a six-component model for creating and sustaining systemic change. This model includes vision, data-driven decision-making, implementation and leadership, leveraging of resources, building capacity, and assessment and accountability. Data indicating significant shifts in the provision of services to children and families over a two-year span will be reviewed as evidence of systemic change.

**Presenters:** *Andrea Sanders & Devon Loggins, Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services; Jerome Kolbo, The University of Southern Mississippi; Kay Casey, Kay Casey Consulting LLC; Liz Edwards, Integrated Solutions*

## E7 Virginia's Approach to Addressing Placement Crises and Permanency Planning for Youth with High Acuity Needs

**Location: Salon II**

Challenged by severe emotional, behavioral, and psychological barriers, youth with high acuity needs in foster care are at risk of chronic placement disruption and instability. Yet the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) envisions a future in which these youth never spend a night displaced in an office or hotel. Targeted efforts to create this new reality began in early 2021. In just five years, VDSS's specialized High Acuity Team has developed successful, data-driven displacement prevention practices and unique pilot programs incorporating collaboration with public and private organizations. This presentation will showcase VDSS's "What Would It Take?" framework, the High Acuity Team's expertise in providing technical and direct placement assistance, valuable lessons learned, and transferrable ideas that may help other states and practitioners address similar issues.

**Presenters:** *Samantha Brooks & Lora Smith Hughes, Virginia Department of Social Services*

## E8 Changing Practice Through Data: A Measurement-Informed Strategy for What's Next in Mental Health Care

**Location: National Landing I**

This presentation will highlight how a child- and family-serving mental health agency implemented a forward-looking, measurement-informed strategy to support therapists in their clinical practice and improve service quality. Attendees will learn about practical tools to help therapists incorporate outcome data into their daily work. These tools include training, supervision, data monitoring systems, and

key performance indicators that not only increase therapist engagement but also foster a culture of data use that informs clinical decision-making and continuous quality improvement. Drawing from lessons learned during the implementation process, this presentation will offer strategies that agencies can adapt to support a culture of data use that is responsive to the evolving needs of systems, staff, and families by aligning clinical work with continuous quality improvement efforts.

**Presenters:** *Carmen Rickman, Center for Adoption Support and Education; Sarah Sullivan, Center for Adoption Support and Education*

## E9 Blueprint to Scaling Up Statewide: Expanding Statewide Access to Behavioral Health Treatments in Record Time

**Location: National Landing III**

Are you struggling to implement evidence-based programs that meet the needs of children and youth due to FFPSA funding criteria? This session will explore how the Family Centered Treatment (FCT) Foundation worked with the Arkansas Department of Human Services and its regional managed care organizations to expand the FCT service model to benefit children and youth, including those not traditionally served within the child welfare system, and to transition from a Title IV-E to a Medicaid funding model. Participants will hear what worked and lessons learned from expanding a growing behavioral health treatment model across multiple providers concurrently and engaging agencies, community partners, and families for successful implementation of this in-home service model.

**Presenters:** *Tim Wood, Family Centered Treatment Foundation, Inc.; Paula Stone, Arkansas Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health; Karen Hallenbeck, Public Consulting Group LLC*



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**E10 There's No "I" In Team: A New Staffing Blueprint to Rebuild Michigan's Child Welfare System**

**Location: Salon J**

Children in child welfare face staggering odds. In foster care alone, 80% experience behavioral health challenges, 50% report substance use, and children with multiple placements are 90% more likely to enter the justice system. In response, Michigan's Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) developed and piloted the Children Services Administration Teaming Model—a bold redesign of the child welfare workforce that centers both families and the frontline staff who support them. It replaces siloed casework with proactive, multidisciplinary teams that emphasize coordination, timely access to supports, and continuity. Early results show better outcomes for families and a more sustainable experience for staff. This session will explore how Michigan reimaged its staffing model to meet today's challenges and built a blueprint to support families and the frontline.

**Presenters:** *Tim Click & Emily Skrzypczak, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services*

**E11 How the Parents as Teachers Home Visiting Program Helps Families Navigate the Child Welfare System**

**Location: National Landing II**

Parents as Teachers (PAT), an early childhood home visiting program, provides parenting supports to families with young children. In recent years, the PAT National Center (PATNC) has worked to tailor services for families involved in the child welfare system (CWS), including those experiencing custody loss.

To support these efforts, Tufts Interdisciplinary Evaluation Research (TIER) has conducted a multi-year project to understand the experiences of families involved with CWS and enrolled in PAT, and to co-develop and evaluate PAT policy and practice revisions to better support this unique population and enhance PAT–CWS collaborations. In this session, TIER and PATNC representatives will describe key project findings, program improvements tailored to families involved with CWS, and implications for child welfare agencies.

**Presenters:** *Jessica Goldberg, Tufts Interdisciplinary Evaluation Research; Emma Posner, Tufts Interdisciplinary Evaluation Research; Sondra Horowitz, Parents as Teachers*

## E13 Systemic Change Driven by Youth in Foster Care Through a Public-Private-University Partnership

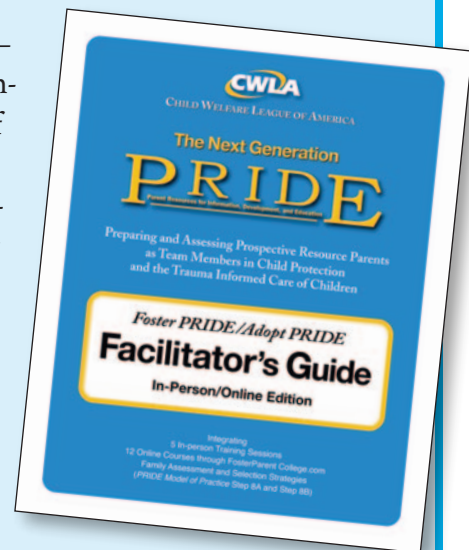
**Location:** *Salon G*

For almost 20 years, Illinois’ Statewide Youth Advisory Board and the ChildLaw Policy Institute at Loyola University Chicago’s School of Law have partnered with youth in care and law students under faculty supervision to build policy agendas and advance legislative initiatives driven by the goals of youth in care. More recently, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services has joined this partnership. Presenters representing these three entities will describe how they collaborate, challenges they have faced, and success stories. In addition to discussion, workshop attendees will participate in at least one of the interactive exercises the law students use with members of the Youth Advisory Board to introduce them to the legislative process.

**Presenters:** *Heidi Mueller, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services; Anita Weinberg, Loyola University Chicago School of Law; Kshawn Moore, Illinois Statewide Youth Advisory Board*

## The NEXT GENERATION PRIDE MODEL OF PRACTICE is here!

CWLA is thrilled with the release of *The Next Generation PRIDE Model of Practice* curriculum. This latest iteration of our evidence-informed, competency-based model of practice—focused on strengthening the quality of family foster care and adoption services by developing and supporting resource parents as team members in child protection and the trauma-informed care of children—now includes person-first language, strength-based words and expressions, and the lived experience perspective.



*The Next Generation PRIDE Model of Practice* is an expansion of the current training curriculum with numerous updates and additions, including new videos and new sections. It also features new topical areas, including the impact adverse childhood experiences have on trust and attachment, how compassion fatigue affects household stability, and the importance of safeguarding children who use social media and technology.

To learn more about the *Next Generation PRIDE Model of Practice*, visit: <https://www.cwla.org/pride-training/>

## E14 The ICWA Family Preservation Model: Strengthening Families and Centering Tribal Sovereignty in Prevention Services

**Location:** *Salon F*

This workshop will introduce North Dakota’s ICWA Family Preservation (IFP) Program—an innovative, culturally grounded prevention model designed in partnership with Tribal Nations. The IFP program, which has recently expanded statewide, centers Tribal sovereignty, early family engagement, and

holistic support to prevent family separation and uphold the spirit of the Indian Child Welfare Act. Presenters will share implementation lessons, measurable outcomes, and practical tools. Participants will engage in a facilitated Prevention Mapping exercise using a Liberating Structure activity (1-2-4-All) to reflect on how their own systems align with the IFP model’s core principles. Led by an interdisciplinary team including a former IFP, a state-Tribal systems facilitator, and an academic partner, this session will offer transferable practices for culturally responsive, family-led prevention.

**Presenters:** *Carenlee Barkdull & Harmony Bercier, University of North Dakota; Sloan Henry, Native American Training Institute*

## E15 Legislation as a Catalyst for Change: Minnesota’s African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionality Act

**Location:** *Salon B*

This workshop will review how Minnesota passed bold legislation to address the overrepresentation of African American children in its child welfare system. Presenters will explore the African American Family Preservation Act’s development, key provisions, and early implementation efforts. The session will highlight community advocacy, culturally responsive practices, and systemic accountability measures. Attendees will leave with practical insights to advance equity, preserve families, and promote better outcomes in their own jurisdictions.

**Presenters:** *Devon Gilchrist & Michelle Seymore; Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families*

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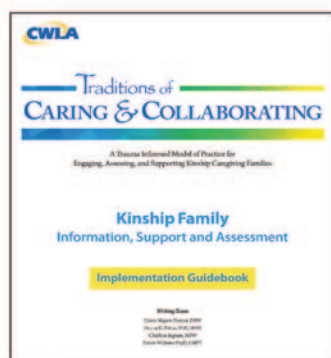
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# Traditions of CARING & COLLABORATING

## Kinship Family Information, Support, and Assessment Trauma-Informed Model of Practice



CWLA's *Traditions of Caring and Collaborating: Kinship Family Information, Support, and Assessment Trauma-Informed Model of Practice* provides public and nonprofit child welfare agencies with a standardized framework to help direct-service staff use a strength-based approach to working with relatives who are caring for their younger family members. *TCC* has a research-based conceptual framework that identifies nine issues of concern for kinship caregivers and agency staff who work with them, *five competencies* needed to address those issues, and *four phases* of working together to address all aspects of child development and family support.

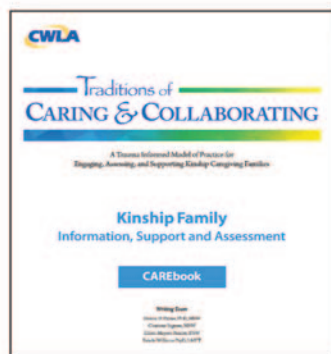
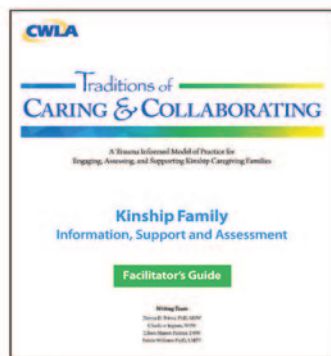
The *TCC* Model of Practice differentiates between kinship caregivers and foster parents based on the different dynamics between the inherited role of being someone's relative and the acquired role of volunteering to foster. It includes a supportive assessment process, and has guiding principles and common definitions, grounded in a caring and collaborating approach to working together to protect and nurture children and strengthen families.

Resources include:

***Implementation Guide***, providing the foundation for agency staff—from direct services to administrators—to know roles and responsibilities for collaborating with kinship caregivers.

***Facilitator's Guide***, conducting nine information, support, and assessment meetings for kinship caregivers that can be shared in-person or virtually.

***CAREbook***, including all the information, support, and assessment resources (i.e. handouts), for participating kinship caregiving families.



To learn more about bringing  
the *TCC* Model of Practice  
to your agency visit:  
<https://www.cwla.org/kinship-care/>

# ROUNDTABLE ROOMS

3:25 pm – 4:40 pm

Intimate group conversations facilitated by CWLA partners

## Reframing Permanency

**Location:** *Salon G*

This roundtable will explore the work of the CWLA National Permanency Standards of Excellence Advisory Committee as it develops a new volume of the *CWLA Standards of Excellence* focused on permanency. As the field continues to face challenges in achieving lasting permanency for children—both in preventing child welfare involvement and in supporting families once systems become involved—the committee is examining how language, frameworks, and practice approaches may need to evolve to better support children and families. Participants will hear about the committee’s work to date and engage in discussion about emerging ideas, challenges, and opportunities for strengthening permanency practice. The session will also invite participant perspectives and examples from the field to help inform the development of the new standards and surface promising approaches that can advance more effective and lasting permanency outcomes.

**Facilitators:** *Chip Spinner & Kamilah Bunn, CWLA National Permanency Standards of Excellence Advisory Committee; Tori Russell, CWLA Consultant*

## Navigating the Insurance Crisis: Protecting Access to Care for Children and Youth

**Location:** *Salon B*

California’s children- and youth-serving organizations are facing a mounting insurance crisis that threatens



the stability of critical services. Rising liability costs and limited coverage options are leaving many providers unable to secure affordable insurance, which is causing these organizations to close their doors. In this roundtable, we will provide an overview of the current insurance landscape, outline who is most affected, and discuss how this instability risks limiting placement options and access to care for children and youth. The conversation will also explore potential solutions and policy strategies to balance accountability and consumer protection with the urgent need to maintain a viable provider network that can safely and effectively serve children and families. Participants will share their experiences with the insurance crisis and the solutions they are exploring.

**Facilitators:** *Elizabeth Oseguera, California Alliance of Child and Family Services; Andrea Durbin, Illinois Collaboration on Youth; Lisette Burton, Association of Children’s Residential & Community Services*

## Optimizing Care: A Roundtable on a Service Paradigm to Support Children with Complex Behavioral Support Needs

**Location:** *Salon I*

This roundtable discusses a newly published service framework for treating children with complex behavioral health needs. Grounded in neuroscience,

trauma-informed care, and family-centered practice, this paradigm offers a comprehensive approach to serving one of the most vulnerable populations in our service systems. The discussion will explore the unique characteristics and needs of these children, how the framework translates into practice across service settings, evidence-based treatment and support modalities, and system-level implications for coordination and financing.

**Facilitators:** *Nancy Thaler & Stacy Nonnemacher, National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services*

## Residential Treatment: Risks, Benefits, and Alternatives

**Location:** *Salon II*

This roundtable will explore the benefits and risks of residential treatment alongside community-based approaches that may be equally or more effective for youth currently served in residential care. Participants will consider whether existing residential providers could adapt their models—offering similar levels of intensity and frequency of intervention in community-based settings—so youth can remain connected to their families and communities. This session will be guided by participant priorities and experience. Attendees will be encouraged to share perspectives on barriers to shifting toward intensive community-based systems of care, emerging practices, and promising alternatives. The discussion will emphasize practical considerations, real-world challenges, and innovative pathways for improving outcomes while potentially reducing reliance on residential placement.

**Facilitator:** *Alan Vietze, CWLA Senior Fellow*

## Trauma-Informed Training for the Frontline

**Location:** *Salon J*

This interactive roundtable will focus on strengthening the child welfare workforce through trauma-informed

simulation training and evidence-informed decision-making tools. Drawing on CWLA best practices for simulation training and the *CWLA Standards of Excellence*, participants will explore how simulation can support workforce competency and readiness. The discussion will center on common challenges in training frontline staff, developing and sustaining workforce development programs, and building capacity over time, with a particular focus on how simulation-based approaches can help address these barriers. Participants will also examine the role of pre-service training that begins in undergraduate programs as a strategy for improving practice and strengthening the workforce pipeline. Facilitators will share insights from their extensive experience training frontline professionals and from their work as authors of CWLA’s forthcoming *Best Practice Guidelines for Simulation Training in Child Welfare* (working title).

**Facilitators:** *Amy Wheeler, Founder and Experiential Learning Specialist, Mountain Heart Learning, LLC; Betsy Goulet, CWLA Senior Fellow*

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**ROUNDTABLE ROOMS** continued**A Home for Every Child:  
Developing a New Child  
and Family Service Review Model  
to Drive Better Outcomes  
for Children****Location:** *Salon H*

This interactive session will invite state child welfare leaders into a thoughtful, forward-looking conversation about how to make the most of recent federal guidance as a catalyst for real improvement. Together, participants will explore the kinds of questions experienced leaders naturally ask when long-standing processes evolve—examining opportunities to rethink strategy, measurement, and collaboration in ways that better support children and families. Through shared reflection and peer exchange, the session will surface practical insights, promising approaches, and lessons learned across states, with a focus on using this moment to strengthen outcomes, not just compliance. Attendees will leave with new perspectives, sharper questions, and ideas they can adapt within their own systems.

**Facilitator:** *Molly Tierney, Accenture***Breaking the Bottleneck:  
Practical Approaches to  
Reduce FFPSA Implementation  
Burdens on States****Location:** *Salon K*

This roundtable will tackle the fundamental challenge hindering Family First implementation—the gap between federal policy expectations and states' capacity to fulfill them. While funding and guidelines exist, many jurisdictions struggle to independently develop the necessary infrastructure to qualify for funding. Using Minnesota's experience with Motivational Interviewing implementation as one example, this

conversation will explore practical solutions that can be adapted across diverse systems. Discussion will explore innovative approaches to evidence-based practice training, technology solutions for fidelity monitoring, state-local collaboration models, and lessons from early adopters. Participants will share implementation challenges and creative workarounds, with focus on solutions that leverage existing resources rather than building entirely new systems—helping all participants discover actionable strategies to move from policy to practice.

**Facilitators:** *Emily Smith Goering, Lyssn; Amber Forrester & Michelle Ndely; Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families***Making Medicaid Matter  
in Child Welfare****Location:** *Salon A*

Child welfare and Medicaid were not designed to work seamlessly together, yet today's realities demand closer alignment. Rising behavioral health needs, placement instability, and an overstretched provider workforce are exposing gaps between these systems—especially for children and families with complex needs. This interactive roundtable will explore how Medicaid can move beyond a parallel system to become a more effective partner in prevention and in stabilizing outcomes for children involved with child welfare. Participants will discuss how Medicaid policy, managed care structures, specialty health plans, and financing strategies can be leveraged to support trauma-informed care, behavioral health access, and community-based services. Grounded in real-world experience, the conversation will highlight emerging policy shifts, waiver opportunities, and practical approaches states can act on now. By engaging in dialogue together, we can bring together diverse perspectives to surface actionable ideas participants can apply in their own systems.

**Facilitator:** *Katie Olse, Sellers Dorsey*

## Rural Realities: Implementing FFPSA Beyond Urban Systems

**Location: National Landing IV**

Rural communities face persistent challenges in implementing and sustaining evidence-based practices under FFPSA. Limited workforce capacity, long travel distances, and staff turnover can make it difficult to sustain evidence-based practices and maintain model fidelity over time. Even when services exist, referral pathways, candidacy decisions, and billing structures may unintentionally limit access. This roundtable will invite participants to share how rural realities are shaping FFPSA implementation across states. Participants will discuss what is working, where implementation has stalled, and how collaboration can be strengthened in low-capacity environments. CWLA will use themes and insights from this discussion to inform recommendations to the Administration, helping ensure that rural needs are meaningfully reflected in future policy and guidance.

**Facilitators:** CWLA Rural Child Welfare Services Committee

## Kinship Care: Strengthening Family Connections for Children

**Location: National Landing I**

When children are separated from their parents, agencies work to maintain connections to existing relationships— often with relatives. Living with family members can help ease the trauma of separation and provide children with familiarity and a greater sense of safety. At the same time, shifts in family roles can create new challenges. Questions around decision-making authority, parental responsibilities, and confidentiality are common, and kinship caregivers must also navigate the requirements and limitations of the child welfare system. This roundtable will explore both the opportunities and complexities of kinship care. Participants will discuss how kinship placements differ from traditional foster care, share common challenges and promising practices, and learn about resources CWLA has developed to support agencies working with relative caregivers.

**Facilitators:** Marcus Stallworth & Deborah Wilson Gadsden, CWLA

### IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

Binti's modern, mobile-friendly modules can function independently, or integrate seamlessly with other systems.



#### OUR IMPACT

**30% more families approved**

30% more foster and kinship caregivers are approved per year, in 18% fewer days to approval.

**20-40% social worker time savings**

Recruitment and licensing case workers save an average of 8 hours each week. Family finding workers save an average of 10.5 hours per kin search.

**3-10x return on investment**

Reduced labor costs, quicker placements, fewer children in group homes, reduced time on paperwork, and higher federal reimbursement.

#### Approvals

Binti's first-of-its-kind Family Portal allows prospective community and kinship foster parents to fill out their paperwork and complete all of their requirements online. Social workers and supervisors log into the Staff Portal to see applicant progress in real time, log background checks and training, and access data and reporting to track progress towards team licensing goals.



#### Binti AI

Binti AI reduces administrative burden, giving workers more time with children and families. By streamlining documentation, translation, and information retrieval, it helps staff work faster and more effectively. Built with strict safeguards and leveraging industry best practice AI models, Binti AI is fully HIPAA-compliant and always guided by human oversight. The result: less case worker burnout and stronger outcomes for communities.



#### Family Finding & Engagement

Binti's Family Engagement module allows workers across teams to easily track family engagement workflows - identifying, contacting, and engaging with relatives and fictive kin - in order to build the largest possible support network for the child or youth and make informed placement decisions.



#### Service Referrals

Binti's Prevention Module empowers agencies to keep families together by allowing states to refer prevention services to a network of private providers. Providers then give prevention services to families and track their work in the system as well as track key metrics. Those metrics are fed up to the state who can then automatically generate reports to claim federal dollars for those services, unlocking more prevention dollars for future families.



Learn more at [www.binti.com](http://www.binti.com) or mail us at [info@binti.com](mailto:info@binti.com)

## ROUNDTABLE ROOMS continued

### Learning from Our Experiences

**Location:** *National Landing II*

This roundtable by Leaders United for Change will be grounded in a new CWLA-aligned book project featuring case studies from leaders of color across the child welfare, behavioral health, and youth justice fields. Centering themes such as navigating white emotionality, supporting the mental health and resilience of men of color, and advancing Black feminist leadership and transformation, authors and editors will share resonant incidents, challenges, and pivotal moments that have shaped their leadership journeys. This session will intentionally blend brief provocations from contributors with guided small-group dialogue, reflective prompts, and accessible mindfulness practices designed to support emotional safety and shared learning. Participants will leave with concrete strategies for leading with equity, courage, and care, along with tools for cultivating inclusive organizational cultures that honor lived experience and collective resilience.

**Facilitators:** *Donte Abram, Promise Rose Residential Care Home; Latesha Fussell, UMass Boston*

### Rest & Recharge: A Conference Relaxation Space

**Location:** *National Landing II*

This roundtable room will serve as a relaxation space for conference attendees to pause, unwind, and recharge. Designed as an alternative to a traditional roundtable, the space will emphasize mindfulness and rejuvenation in a calm environment. Attendees will be invited to step away from the pace of the conference and engage in low-pressure, restorative activities such as coloring and other sensory-based creative practices. A curated playlist will provide gentle background music to support relaxation and reflection. Located near the Leaders United for Change Learning from Our Experiences roundtable, this area is intended to

foster moments of grounding, creativity, and informal connection. All materials are provided, and participants are welcome to come and go as needed throughout the session.

*Hosted by the CWLA Member Equity Committee*

### Under Pressure: How Technology Could Reshape Child Welfare Workflows and Strengthen Care for Families

**Location:** *Salon F*

Child welfare teams across the country are navigating a period of profound pressure. Caseloads are rising, workforce shortages persist, and documentation and compliance demands continue to grow. Many agencies report that administrative work is taking increasing time away from direct engagement with children and families. This roundtable will begin with a brief opening conversation led by Beam, reflecting on lessons from implementing technology across a range of human services settings to help with key hurdles faced across teams—administrative burdens, missed information, poor documentation, diminishing quality of care. Together, participants will explore how child welfare systems can respond to rising administrative pressure while protecting the quality of care, and how emerging tools and practices, particularly AI and technology, may help reduce key barriers and enhance quality of care.

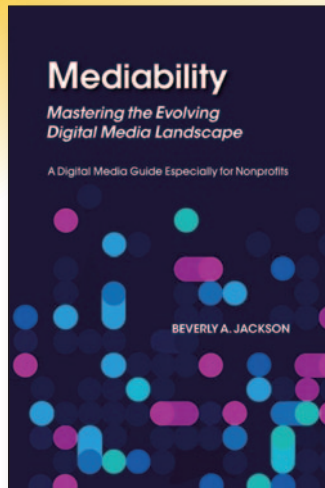
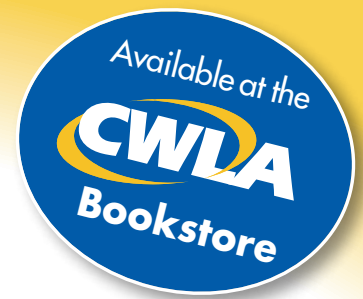
**Facilitators:** *Alex Stephany & Mike Cheney, Beam*

## Reception

**4:45 pm – 5:45 pm**

**Location:** *Sky View and Exhibit Hall*

Last chance to connect with our vendors! Be sure you don't miss the announcement of the lucky winners of our fabulous Booth Bingo prizes!



# Mediability:

## Mastering the Evolving Digital Media Landscape

by BEVERLY A. JACKSON

*This new publication covers essential topics such as:*

- Creating user-friendly websites
- Mastering the art of digital storytelling
- Understanding the role of citizen journalism
- Vital strategies for managing contemporary media relations

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## *Living with Purpose and Hope*

VOICES AND VISIONS OF YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

Edited by Dr. Monique B. Mitchell

This inspirational book, highlights the voices and visions of youth in foster care, who share their hopes and dreams for each and every day of the calendar year.

**Item #2665 • Price \$17.95**



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## *Faith Communities*

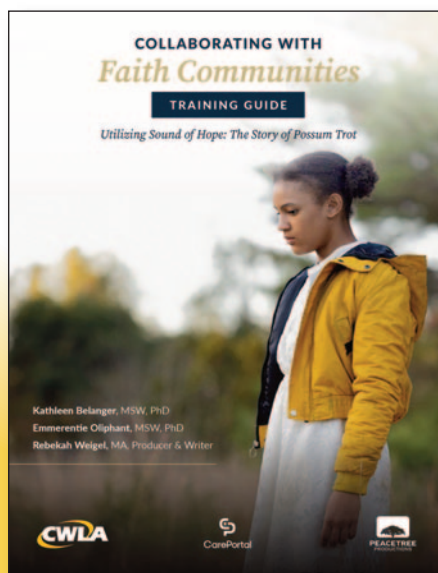
TRAINING GUIDE

*Utilizing Sound of Hope: The Story of Possum Trot*

By Kathleen Belanger, Emmerentie Oliphant, and Rebekah Weigel

This training guide utilizes the film *Sound of Hope: The Story of Possum Trot*—a true story of a church community that adopted 77 children from the child welfare system. Providing scenarios and case studies that demonstrate the struggles and joys recognized by members of child welfare including children; resource families; staff; administrators; and faith communities.

**Item #2689 • Price \$19.95**



## Coffee & Snacks

8:00 am – 8:30 am

*Location: Hallway*



## Workshops F

8:30 am – 9:45 am

### F1 Transforming Foster Care: One Hope United's Hope House Model

*Location: National Landing II*

This interactive session will explore the Hope House Model, a trauma-informed, community-based alternative to traditional foster care and residential treatment, designed specifically for youth with high-acuity needs. These youth often have complex mental health needs, histories of trauma, disrupted placements, and crossover involvement with juvenile justice. Participants will learn how the Hope House Model stabilizes these youth by offering consistent caregiving in a home setting, integrated clinical supports, and evidence-based strategies like Trust-Based Relational Intervention. The session will highlight promising outcomes and provide actionable strategies for implementing similar programs. Through real-world case studies and voices with lived experience, attendees will gain insight into how the model meets the urgent needs of youth too often underserved in current systems.

**Presenters:** *Trakisha Slaughter & Charles Mettelus, One Hope United*

### F3 Compassion Satisfaction: Finding Joy in Service of Children and Youth

*Location: Salon B*

Social services have appropriately focused on the devastating impacts of trauma on children, youth, and families. Helpers who are determined to offer support may experience vicarious trauma as they confront the unmitigated challenges and barriers faced by children, youth, and families. This presentation will acknowledge these common experiences while introducing compassion satisfaction and vicarious resilience. Research indicates that vicarious resilience can serve as a protective factor against compassion fatigue and burnout. It is a positive phenomenon that highlights the reciprocal benefit of helping relationships. Witnessing families overcome adversity—often through helpers' positive interventions—creates opportunities for professionals to cultivate an optimistic outlook.

**Presenter:** *Kelli McKnight, McKnight Community Solutions*



## Conference Survey

Can you spare a few minutes to take our conference survey?

Your insights on conference topics, speakers, and pathways to move the field forward will help CWLA shape its direction over the next year.



## F5 Will this Marriage Work? MCOs and EBP Models

**Location: Salon II**

This session will use the analogy of marriage to describe cross-system partnerships between private providers, managed care organizations (MCOs), and state agencies that have successfully removed barriers to build sustainable, high-quality, evidence-based care. In this “marriage,” presenters will identify keys to successful collaboration, including assessing readiness, understanding competing goals, recognizing communication styles, and celebrating shared achievements that advance child and family well-being. Participants will explore strategies for creating partnerships, navigating differences, building on collective strengths, and achieving shared missions. Reflections will be shared from providers, community supporters, and managed care leaders.

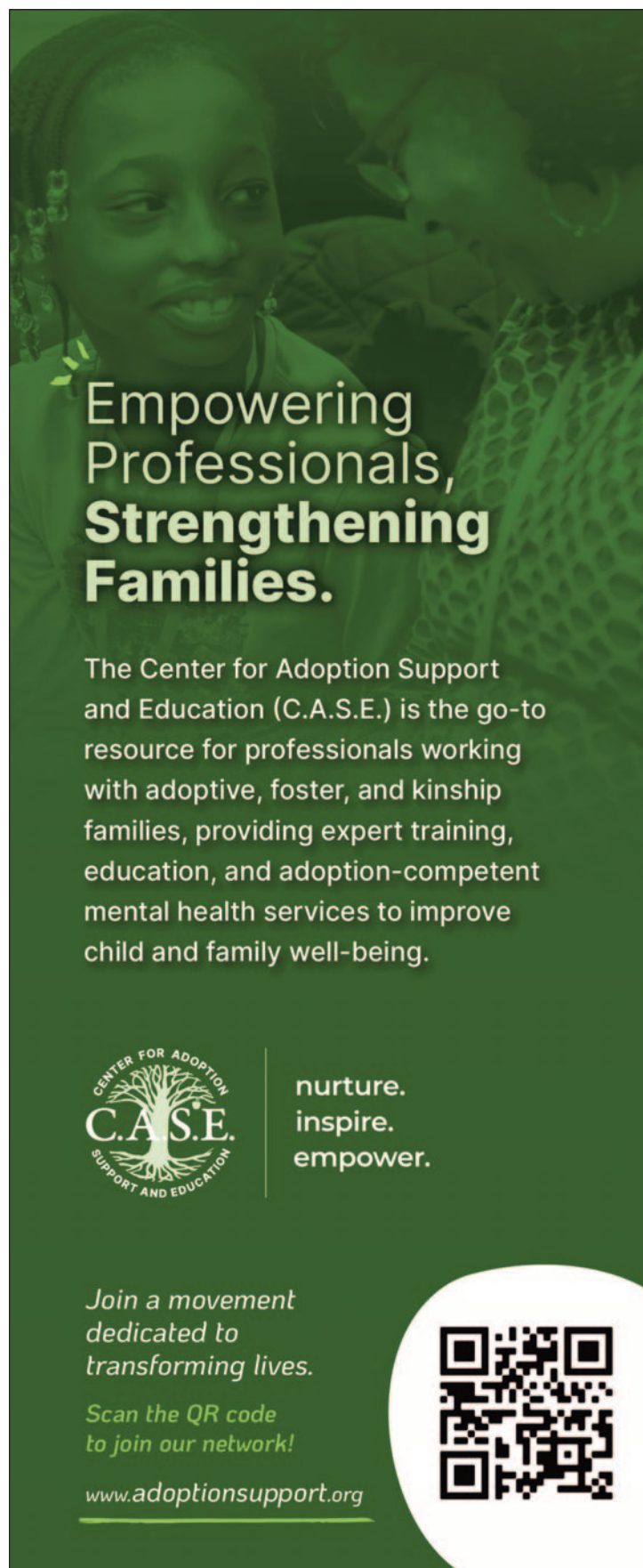
**Presenters:** *Laura Boyd, Family Centered Treatment Foundation; Kathy Szafran, Aetna Better Health West Virginia; Kimberly Young, Pressley Ridge*

## F6 Supporting Adoptee Identity, Permanency, and Post-Adoption Belonging

**Location: Salon K**


Adoption is not a single event—it is a lifelong process that shapes identity, belonging, and connection. This workshop will invite participants to explore practical, trauma-informed strategies to support adoptees beyond placement. Drawing from the Adoptee Consciousness Model and current research, Angela Tucker, author of *You Should Be Grateful* and founder of the Adoptee Mentoring Society, will share evidence-based practices to strengthen permanency and post-adoption well-being. Participants will learn how to center adoptee identity in family, educational, and professional settings, identify gaps between therapy and mentorship, and foster authentic, lasting belonging. Through real-world examples and reflective activities, attendees will leave with actionable tools to better support adoptees and their families across their lifespans.

**Presenter:** *Angela Tucker, Adoptee Mentoring Society*



### Empowering Professionals, Strengthening Families.

The Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.) is the go-to resource for professionals working with adoptive, foster, and kinship families, providing expert training, education, and adoption-competent mental health services to improve child and family well-being.




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inspire.  
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[www.adoptionsupport.org](http://www.adoptionsupport.org)



## **F7 Strategic Innovation in Foster Care: Building a Family-Centered System of Support**

**Location: Salon J**

This presentation will highlight Heartland for Children’s (HFC) strategic redesign of Florida’s Circuit 10 Foster Care system. By partnering with the North American Family Institute and implementing the evidence-based Functional Family Therapy Foster Care model, HFC has developed a family-centered systems approach to support youth in current placements while simultaneously advancing permanency planning and managing costs. The effort extended beyond model implementation – it required deep organizational collaboration among funders, providers, model developers, and foster parent networks. Together, partners created a unified, data-driven strategy emphasizing relational care, cross-system alignment, and fiscal accountability. Participants will learn how strategic planning, shared leadership, and family-centered design can transform outcomes for youth in care and drive measurable improvements in permanency, stability, and cost efficiency.

**Presenters:** *Thomas Sexton & Marta Anderson, Functional Family Therapy; Fawn Moore, Heartland for Children*

## **F8 Creativity and Complexity: Creating a Cutting-Edge Psychological Evaluation Service for Child Welfare Agencies**

**Location: National Landing I**

This session will present a unique public-private partnership model that uses private funding to provide specialized psychological evaluations for children in or entering foster care who exhibit high-risk behaviors, such as fire setting or sexually harmful behaviors. Presenters will outline tailored evaluation methods, describe relationships with community partners, and share strategies for replicating this model in other jurisdictions. Case studies and data will illustrate how these evaluations improve placement and treatment outcomes for youth with complex mental health needs and high-risk behaviors involved in the child welfare system.

**Presenters:** *Victoria Phillips & Michael Feder, NYC Administration for Children’s Services*

## **F9 Performance and Quality Improvement (QI) Made Simple: What is QI Really, and How Does it Improve Performance?**

**Location: Salon J**

Human service professionals are often expected to wear many hats and deliver high-quality services with limited resources. While quality assurance and improvement are essential to operational success, most providers lack formal training or access to professional evaluators. This interactive session will introduce core Quality Improvement (QI) principles through engaging discussion and exercises designed to demystify the process. Participants will learn how to implement practical QI tools within their teams, inspire staff engagement, and cultivate a culture of learning and accountability that leads to measurable improvement.

**Presenters:** *Mairin Schreiber & Melissa Petrone & Ben Orzechowski, NAFI*

**Save the Date!**

**CWLA**

**2027 National Conference**  
**April 5-7**

**Crystal Gateway Marriott**  
**Arlington, VA**

## F10 Foster Parents as Mentors: A Transformative Approach to Strengthen Families

**Location:** Salon H

This session will introduce an innovative model that empowers foster parents to serve as mentors to biological parents. While co-care focuses on collaboration, mentoring goes further by intentionally modeling parenting skills, building confidence, and fostering growth in biological parents. This approach emphasizes relationship-building, skill transfer, and mutual respect to support reunification and improve outcomes for children. Using case studies, group discussions, and interactive exercises, participants will learn how to address safety and boundary concerns, implement mentoring in home and neutral settings, and collaborate effectively with stakeholders. Attendees will leave with actionable tools, including training templates and program guidelines, to develop mentoring programs in their agencies.

**Presenters:** *Nicollette Love & Julie Villarreal, The Villages of Indiana*

## F11 From Innovation to Impact: Scaling the START Model in Child Welfare

**Location:** Salon G

Child welfare leaders often say that START should be the standard of practice in the field. This session will explore why—and how. Participants will be introduced to Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Teams (START), an evidence-based service delivery model proven to enhance child safety and parental recovery. Presenters will share strategies for increasing family-centered collaboration and systems-level change among child welfare, behavioral health, and judicial partners; highlight the benefits of integrating peer recovery support into service delivery; and discuss lessons from large-scale implementations. Participants will gain insights into how START can strengthen engagement, retention, and outcomes for families affected by substance use.

**Presenters:** *Tina Willauer, Children and Family Futures; Fawn Gadel, Public Children Services Association of Ohio; Aimee Clemson-Rich, Ashtabula County Children Service*

## F12 Rooted in Connection: Advancing Early Relational Health in Child Welfare

**Location:** National Landing III

This session will explore how early relational health—defined by the quality of emotional connections between infants, young children, and their caregivers—can transform child welfare practice. Drawing from research and real-world examples, presenters will highlight how nurturing relationships from the start can buffer trauma, promote resilience, and support long-term well-being. When relational health is woven into assessment, planning, and daily engagement, it can shift the trajectory for children and families. Participants will leave with practical tools and a deeper appreciation for how relationship-centered approaches can improve outcomes across systems.

**Presenters:** *Amy Kendal & Joanne Deuter, Maryville Academy*



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## F13 From Insight to Action: The “My Journey” Experience for Youth in Foster Care

**Location: Salon F**

This session will explore My Journey, an evidence-informed group curriculum designed to support youth aging out of foster care. Grounded in Parenting Journey’s NEST philosophy—non-didactic, evidence-based, strengths-focused, and trauma-informed—the model uses experiential activities to help participants connect past experiences with current behaviors. Through guided reflection, youth build insight, nurture relationships, and prioritize self-care. Evaluation results will highlight youth perspectives, lived experiences, and feedback that inform program growth and direction. Attendees will gain an understanding of the

curriculum’s structure, outcomes, and transformative impact on participants’ emotional growth, interpersonal skills, and overall well-being.

**Presenters:** *Monica Zeno-Martin & Kathryn Wilson, Parenting Journey*

## F15 Developing the Next Generation: Distributive Leadership for a Stronger Child Welfare Workforce

**Location: Salon A**

The future child welfare workforce will require flexible, modern approaches to talent development. CWLA’s Emerging Leaders Committee is committed to helping organizations identify, cultivate, and support emerging leaders by creating environments where new and existing talent can thrive. Distributive Leadership offers a powerful framework for this work, replacing a scarcity mindset with intentional investment in individuals across all levels of proximity to children and families. This leadership model emphasizes that leadership is not confined to formal titles but can function as a collective process shared across teams. By elevating diverse voices and supporting shared decision-making, organizations can strengthen recruitment, retention, effectiveness, and staff engagement. A distributive approach helps build a workforce that is passionate, effective, and appreciated. This session will explore the principles of Distributive Leadership for workforce development, collaborative practice, accountability, and goal setting. Participants will learn how the model works, identify key opportunities and challenges, and gain practical strategies teams can use to implement Distributive Leadership and support the next generation of child welfare leaders.

**Presenters:** *Jacqueline Martin, NYC Administration for Children’s Services; Grey Hilliard-Koshinsky, The Advocacy Bridge; Dimple Patel, Casey Family Programs; Bacall Hincks, University of Utah; Kristyn “KT” Sherrod, Florida Institute for Child Welfare*

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David Ambroz

## Closing Plenary

10:05 am – 11:35 am

*Arlington Ballroom*

CWLA is pleased to host David Ambroz as the keynote speaker for our closing plenary. A nationally recognized child welfare advocate, bestselling author, and leader in philanthropy, David brings both professional expertise and lived experience to his work advancing equity and opportunity for children and families. His closing remarks will invite us to reflect on our collective impact and look ahead to the future of child welfare with purpose and resolve.

Attendees at the plenary session will receive a free copy of his book, *A Place Called Home: A Memoir!*

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- ✓ Reduced turnover and stress



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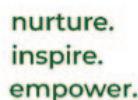
[www.teamnorthwoods.com](http://www.teamnorthwoods.com)

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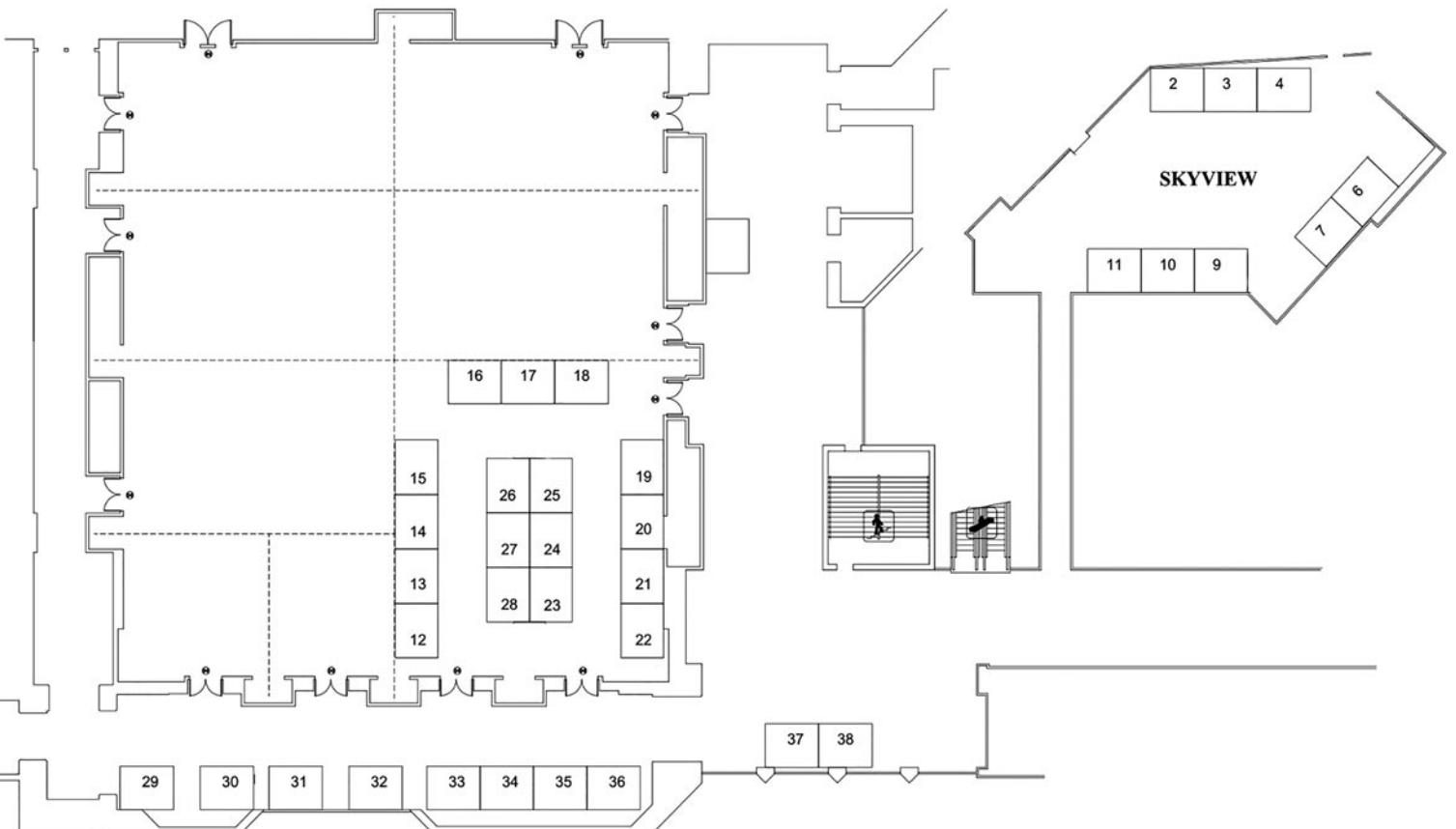


# Conference Exhibitors & Floorplan

## *A Heartfelt Thanks to Our 2026 Vendors*

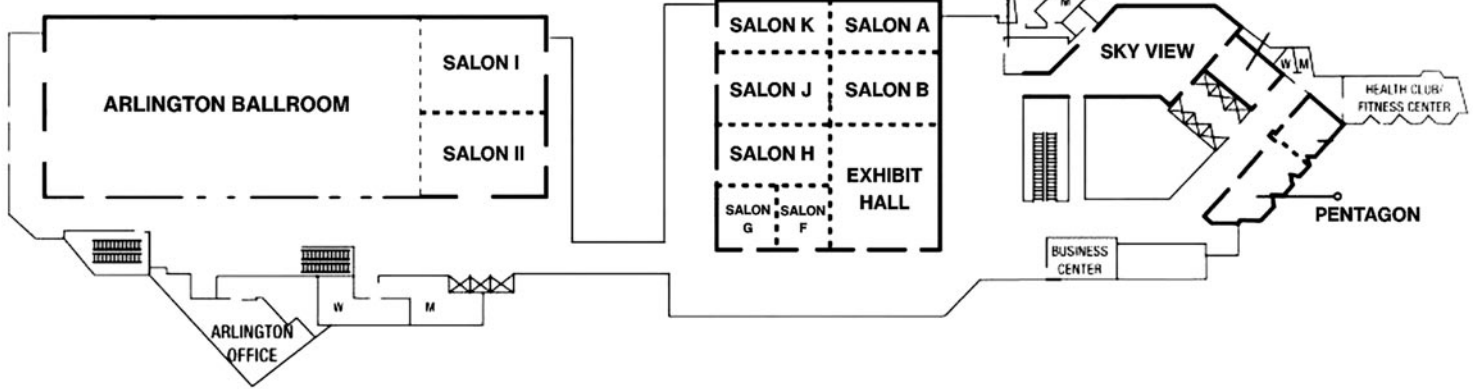
<b>Exhibitor</b>	<b>Booth #</b>	<b>Exhibitor</b>	<b>Booth #</b>	<b>Exhibitor</b>	<b>Booth #</b>
Centene	2	The Quality Improvement	17	Cúram by Merative	28
Accenture	3	Center on Engaging Youth in Finding Permanency	18	vimo®	29
Public Knowledge®	4	TCARE	19	Sivic Solutions Group	30
Casey Family Programs	6	Florida Institute for Child Welfare	20	SafeCare	31
Lyssn	7	FosterParentCollege	21	Empower Community Care	32
Sellers Dorsey	9	Augintel	22	Youth Advocate Programs, Inc.	33
Beam	10	Kinnect	23	CARF International	34
Center for Adoption Support & Education (C.A.S.E.)	12	CGI	24	Human Services Group	35
Alia	13	ThriveWell	25	Child Welfare	36
Be Strong Families	14	Northwoods	26	Information Gateway	37
BTQ Financial	15	Sunlight	27	Dougy Center's #GetGrief-Informed Campaign	38
Binti	16	The Bonadio Group	28	Social Current	38

***Play Booth Bingo for a chance to win great prizes!***

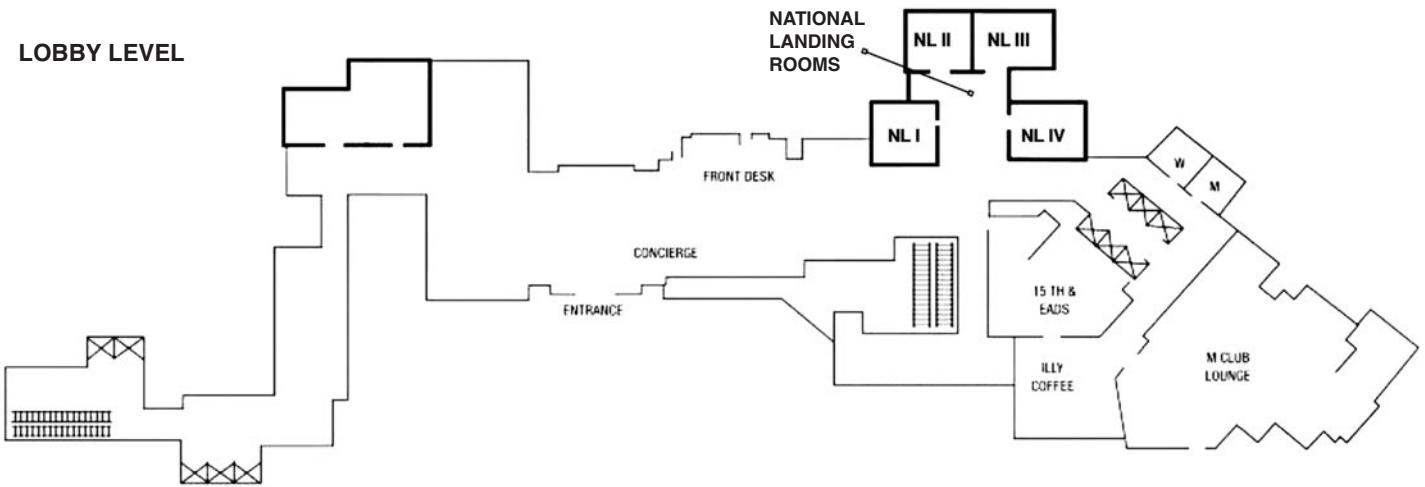


# Meeting Rooms Floorplan

## FIRST LEVEL



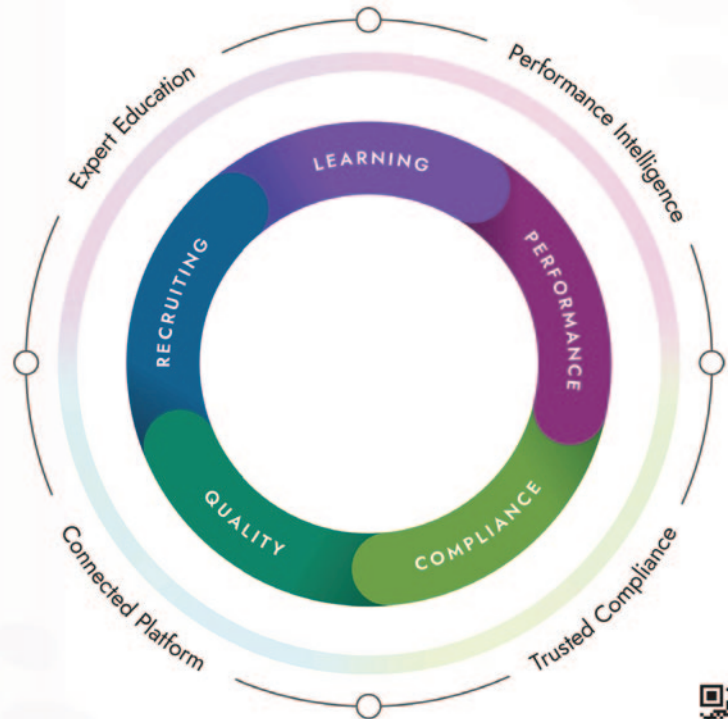
## LOBBY LEVEL



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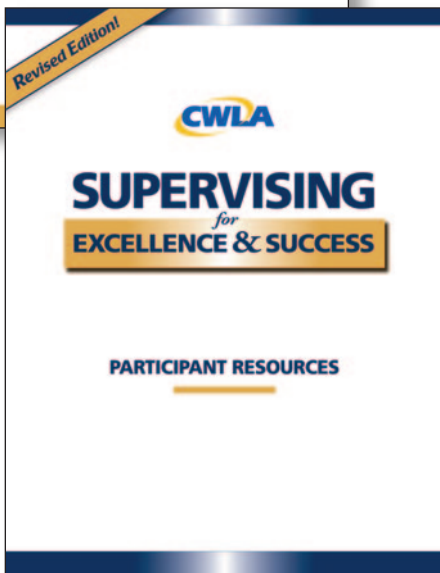
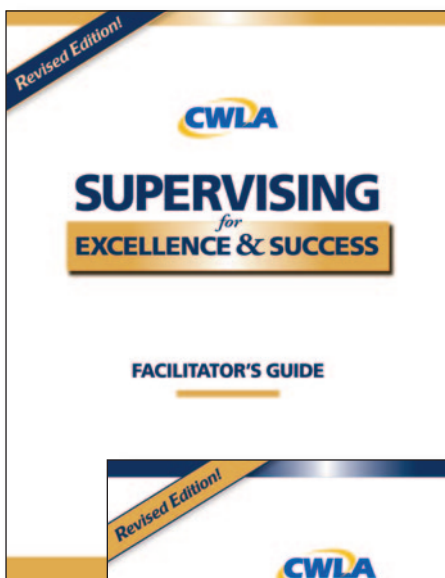
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# SUPERVISING *for* EXCELLENCE & SUCCESS

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CWLA's *Supervising for Excellence and Success* is an interactive training course that focuses on the essential practice elements and functions that are foundational to successful supervision.

The quality of supervision is recognized as a significant factor in an organization's overall capacity and ability to provide services that achieve operational goals and desired outcomes for children, youth, and families. Quality supervision is also an important factor associated with a positive work environment, staff retention, and professional development.

*Supervising for Excellence and Success* focuses in depth on the essential practice elements and functions of supervision—Leading, Planning, Organizing, Teaching, Supporting, and Evaluating—framed through discussion, self-reflection, and group exercises. Practice elements critical to supporting professional engagement, partnership, and team building in supervision are highlighted to align with research and best practices. The training course also touches on supporting theoretical concepts related to the supervisory role and related skills and competencies.

***Resources include:***

The *Facilitator's Guide* explores supervisory functions interactively through discussion of literature, participant experiences, group exercises, and role play based on case and situational examples.

The *Participant Resources* contain self-assessment tools, reference material, informative handouts, and links to supportive material and other best practice content.

To learn more about bringing  
*Supervising for Excellence and Success* to your agency, visit:  
<https://www.cwla.org/supervision/>

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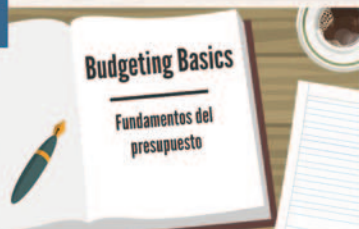
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