

Building for the Future

NEBRASKA

— Young Child Institute —

www.NeYoungChildInstitute.com

A statewide conference for multidisciplinary professionals to connect on issues to improve the outcomes of young children.

2026 CONFERENCE PROGRAM

June 16 & 17, 2026 | Kearney, NE

Follow us on X to stay connected during the conference!

#NYCI2026



AGENDA AT-A-GLANCE

Day 1 | Tuesday, **June 16**, 2026

8:00-9:00 am	Conference Check-In
9:00-9:30 am	Welcome Address
9:30-10:00 am	Opening Remarks with Dr. Walter S. Gilliam
10:00-10:20 am	<i>Break & Networking</i>
10:20-11:20 am	Breakout Session A
11:20 am-12:40 pm	Lunch & <i>Networking</i>
12:40-1:40 pm	Breakout Session B
1:40-2:00 pm	<i>Break & Networking</i>
2:00-3:00 pm	Breakout Session C
3:00-3:30 pm	<i>Break & Networking with Snacks</i>
3:30-4:30 pm	Breakout Session D

Day 2 | Wednesday, **June 17**, 2026








8:30-9:00 am	Start of Day 2: Visit Exhibitors & <i>Networking</i>
9:00-10:00 am	Breakout Session E
10:00-10:20 am	<i>Break & Networking</i>
10:20-11:20 am	Breakout Session F
11:20 am-12:10 pm	Lunch & <i>Networking</i>
12:10-1:10 pm	Closing Plenary with Christina Meredith <i>“CinderGirl: My Journey Out of the Ashes to a Life of Hope”</i>
1:10-1:30 pm	Closing Remarks
1:30 pm	Conference Adjourns
1:30-2:30 pm	<i>(Optional)</i> Book Signing with Christina Meredith

VENUE MAP

younes
HOSPITALITY

NORTH
YOUNES CONFERENCE CENTER



 General Assembly	 Help Desk & CLEs	 Book Sales & Signing June 17 in Pre-Function Area (moves to Gold Ballroom after lunch)
 Breakout Rooms	 Exhibitors & Snack Area	
 Speaker Check-In (day 1)	 Speaker's Room	

WELCOME TO #NYCI2026!

We are excited to welcome you to the Nebraska Young Child Institute as we come together for #NYCI2026 and this year's theme, *Building for the Future*. Over the next two days, you will connect with professionals from across disciplines, explore new ideas, and engage in learning that strengthens systems and supports Nebraska's youngest children and the families who care for them.

NEBRASKA

— Young Child Institute —

www.NeYoungChildInstitute.com

This year marks a special milestone as we celebrate *10 Years of Impact. A Future of Possibility*. For a decade, NYCI has brought together thousands of dedicated professionals committed to improving outcomes for young children and families. As we reflect on how far we have come, we are also focused on what lies ahead. New partnerships, fresh perspectives, and shared momentum will help us build an even stronger future together.

Thank you for being part of NYCI 2026. We are glad you are here and can't wait to learn, connect, and build the future with you.

Celebrating

10 YEARS

*10 Years of Impact.
A Future of Possibilities.*



CONFERENCE ESSENTIALS



Get Social

Snap photos throughout the conference and stop by our photo banners, including the large banner in the Gold Ballroom. Share your NYCI experience on social media using #NYCI2026, and follow NYCI on X for conference updates and highlights.

#NYCI2026

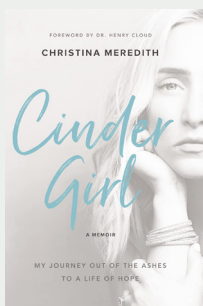
Wi-Fi is available during this conference. No password required.

Help Desk

For seamless support at NYCI, visit our help desk. We're here to assist with registration, program info, and speaker guidance. Tech issues, lost something, need accessibility support? We've got you covered.

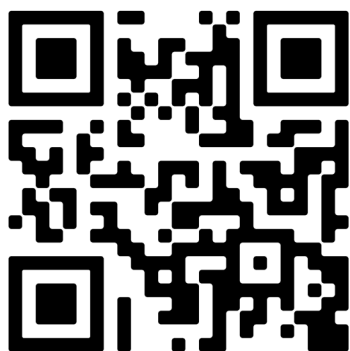
Mother's Room

Should you require access to the mother's room or have any specific requests, please don't hesitate to reach out to our onsite staff or visit the help desk. Your comfort and well-being are of utmost importance to us.



Book Sales & Signing

The Sequel Bookshop has Christina Meredith's book for purchase on Tuesday & Wednesday in the pre-function area starting at 8:30 am. Book signing on Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. in the Gold Ballroom!



Feedback & Resources

Scan the QR code to **share feedback** after each breakout session and complete the conference survey. You'll also find **session slides and handouts** (when available), along with session details and speaker bios. Printed materials will not be provided onsite.

PLENARY & OPENING SPEAKERS



Plenary Speaker

Wednesday, June 17 at 12:10 pm

CHRISTINA MEREDITH

*Abuse & Homelessness Survivor,
Youth Advocate & Author of CinderGirl*

Christina Meredith is an abuse and homelessness survivor, youth advocate, and author of the bestselling memoir *CinderGirl: My Journey Out of the Ashes to a Life of Hope*. After enduring years of abuse, aging out of foster care, and experiencing homelessness, Christina forged a life dedicated to advocacy and service through faith, hard work, and

resilience. Her journey took her from living in her car to becoming Miss California, founding a nonprofit focused on foster care reform and mental health advocacy, and serving as a commissioned Signal Intelligence Officer in the U.S. Army. A nationally sought-after speaker, Christina has shared her story on the Today Show and other major media outlets, spoken before Congress and audiences across the country, and received numerous honors for her work in child welfare reform. Her story, now in development as a major motion picture, inspires hope and highlights the power of perseverance, possibility, and purpose.



Opening Remarks

Tuesday, June 16 at 9:30 am

DR. WALTER S. GILLIAM, PHD

*Executive Director of the Buffett Early
Childhood Institute*

Walter S. Gilliam, Ph.D., is the executive director of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute and holds the Richard D. Holland Presidential Chair in Early Childhood Development, with a tenured faculty appointment at the University of Nebraska Medical Center's Munroe-Meyer Institute. Formerly at Yale University, where he served as a professor at the Yale Child Study Center and directed the Edward Zigler Center, Dr. Gilliam is a nationally recognized leader in early childhood policy, research, and practice. His work focuses on improving the quality of early care and education, reducing preschool expulsion, and strengthening policies that support children's school readiness and well-being. A frequent advisor to policymakers and a recipient of the Grawemeyer Award in Education, his research and commentary have been featured widely in major national media outlets.

CONFERENCE CONTRIBUTORS

Exhibitors

We invite you to visit our exhibit tables that are located in the Pre-Function Area of the Younes Center North. **Vendors include:**

- Alliance for CACs
- Answers4Families
- Buffett Early Childhood Institute
- Early Development Network/Childfind
- Guide by Your Side (NE Hands and Voices)
- NDE Assistive Technology Partnership (ATP)
- Nebraska Association for Infant Mental Health
- Nebraska CDA
- Nebraska CASA
- Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
- Nebraska Department of Education
- Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services – MHCP (Mentally Handicapped Children’s Program)
- Nebraska Family Helpline
- Nebraska Growing Readers
- Nebraska Head Start Collaboration Offices
- Nebraska Lifespan Respite Network Central Service Area
- Nebraska Partnership for Mental Health Care Access in Pediatrics (NEP-MAP)
- Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children
- PTI Nebraska
- Step Up to Quality
- UNK Counseling School Psychology and Family Science Department



I loved this conference. There was a wide range of topics and great speakers! I look forward to the next one!

-Previous attendee



Planning Committee

- Kelli Hauptman, Cassandra Roberts, and Ashtyn Beck, **Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children**
- Machaela Hackendahl, **Project Harmony**
- Samantha Bradley, Tyson Wessels, and, Nikki Roseberry-Keiser **Nebraska Children and Families Foundation**
- The Honorable Doug Johnson, **Retired from the Douglas County Separate Juvenile Court**
- Stephanie Knust, **Nebraska Head Start State Collaboration Office**
- Amy Bunnell and Jessica Anthony, **Early Development Network**
- Jessica Cook, Allison Jones, and Charlie Lewis, **UNL-Center on Children, Families and the Law**
- Tammi Ohmstede, **UNK-Counseling & School Psychology and Family Science**

AGENDA

Day 1 | Tuesday, June 16

7:30-8:30 am	Exhibitor Setup	Pre-Function Area
8:00-9:00 am	Conference Check-In	Pre-Function Area
9:00-9:30 am	Welcome Address	Gold Ballroom
9:30-10:00 am	Opening Remarks with Dr. Walter S. Gilliam	Gold Ballroom
10:00-10:20 am	Break & Networking	Pre-Function Area

10:20 - 11:20 am BREAKOUT SESSION A	Advocating for Young Children	Early Childhood Services	Early Education	Strengthening Partnerships to Support Children	Provider Mental Health and Well Being	Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child
Shining a Light on Domestic Violence and Family Dynamics Sarah Kirkwood, Lindsey Turner <i>Silver 1</i>	✔					
From Stuck to Thriving: A Guide to Understanding, Connecting, and Empowering Neurodivergent Children Shelby Czarnick <i>Silver 8</i>		✔				
Caring for the Most Vulnerable: Prioritizing the Health of Children in Foster Care Melissa Coffin, Laurie Berglund <i>Silver 9</i>		✔				
A Compassionate Approach to Problem Behavior in Young Children: Including Quick Tips to Implement Annette Wragge <i>Silver 7</i>			✔			
Outdoor Learning and Experiential Education in Practice Erin Kampbell, Lisa Poppe, LaDonna Werth, Jackie Steffen <i>Silver 4</i>			✔			
Building Early Literacy Through Assistive Technology Brian Wojcik, Jeri Johnson <i>Silver 11</i>			✔			
Early Childhood Coaching: Tools for Building Collaboration and Partnerships With Educators Dr. Lisa Knoche, Christina Kilgore, Andrea Nelson <i>Silver 12</i>				✔		
Strengthening Systems: The Power of Family-Centered Treatment in Healing & Behavior Change Jasmine Platt <i>Silver 5</i>				✔		
Reflective Supervision: Cultivating Self-Awareness in Supervision Krista Roebke, Tracey Kock <i>Silver 3</i>					✔	

Foundational

Enhanced

Repeats

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AGENDA

Day 1 | Tuesday, June 16

10:20 - 11:20 am BREAKOUT SESSION A (CONT)	Advocating for Young Children	Early Childhood Services	Early Education	Strengthening Partnerships to Support Children	Provider Mental Health and Well Being	Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child
Resilient Beginnings: Understanding ACEs, Behavior, and Brain Development in Early Childhood Libby Valerio-Boster, Sarah Dankenbring <i>Silver 6</i>						
Forever Shaken: Understanding the Lifelong Impact of Abusive Head Trauma Peggy Reisher <i>Silver 2</i>						

11:20 am-12:40 pm	Lunch & Networking	Gold Ballroom
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12:40 - 1:40 pm BREAKOUT SESSION B	Advocating for Young Children	Early Childhood Services	Early Education	Strengthening Partnerships to Support Children	Provider Mental Health and Well Being	Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child
The Enhanced Resource Guidelines: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases Judge Douglas Johnson <i>Silver 11</i>						
Unspoken Struggles: Navigating Trauma, ADHD, Autism, and Sensory Needs in Families Shelby Czarnick <i>Silver 8</i>						
Caring for the Most Vulnerable: Prioritizing the Health of Children in Foster Care Melissa Coffin, Laurie Berglund <i>Silver 9</i>						
A Foundation for All: Strengthening Your Work with Young Children Through IMH Endorsement Sami Bradley, Tana Goosic <i>Silver 12</i>						
Language Assessment Strategies for Dual Language Learners: Insights from an Evaluation Team Sebastian Marin-Hine, Dr. Clarielle Gabas, Fotima Turdalieva <i>Silver 6</i>						
Full STEAM Ahead: Inspiring Learning with Imagination Storybook Guides Jackie Steffen, Ingrid Lindal <i>Silver 4</i>						
Growing in the Good Life: Lessons from Immigrant and Refugee Caregivers on Child Development Dr. Kerry Miller, Dr. Lorey Wheeler <i>Silver 7</i>						

Foundational

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Repeats

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Day 1 | Tuesday, June 16

12:40 - 1:40 pm BREAKOUT SESSION B (CON'T)	Advocating for Young Children	Early Childhood Services	Early Education	Strengthening Partnerships to Support Children	Provider Mental Health and Well Being	Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child
Building Parent Power: Strategies to Recruit, Engage, and Sustain Parent Involvement Connie Shockley, Mark Smith <i>Silver 1</i>				✓		
Beyond Management: The Art of Reflective and Relational Supervision Krista Roebke, Tracey Kock <i>Silver 3</i>					✓	
Healing in the Home: Using Family-Centered Treatment to Support Young Children Through Trauma and Relationship Repair Jasmine Platt <i>Silver 5</i>						✓
Forever Shaken: Understanding the Lifelong Impact of Abusive Head Trauma Peggy Reisher <i>Silver 2</i>						✓

 Foundational
 Enhanced
 Repeats

1:40-2:00 pm	Break & Networking	Pre-Function Area
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2:00 - 3:00 pm BREAKOUT SESSION C	Advocating for Young Children	Early Childhood Services	Early Education	Strengthening Partnerships to Support Children	Provider Mental Health and Well Being	Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child
Domestic Violence in Child Welfare: Confronting the Elephants in the Room Jamie Bahm, Michelle Paxton, Christopher Reid <i>Silver 2</i>	✓					
DC: 0-5 Overview Lindsey Ondrak <i>Silver 5</i>		✓				
One Size Does Not Fit All: How Early Decisions Influence Lifelong Outcomes for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Children Michael Brummer <i>Silver 8</i>		✓				
Embedding Assistive Technology in Everyday Routines: Supporting Young Children's Participation Brian Wojcik, Kim Bowen <i>Silver 11</i>			✓			
Enhancing Early Autism Support Through Routines-Based Early Intervention Jamie Lewis, Mikki Bohling, Christina Kilgore <i>Silver 7</i>			✓			
Together We Thrive: Shifting from "Just" Paperwork to Powerful Partnerships with Families Katie Zabel, Dr. Lisa Knoche, Dr. Tammi Hechtner-Galvin <i>Room 12</i>				✓		

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Day 1 | Tuesday, June 16

2:00 - 3:00 pm BREAKOUT SESSION C <small>(CON'T)</small>	Advocating for Young Children	Early Childhood Services	Early Education	Strengthening Partnerships to Support Children	Provider Mental Health and Well Being	Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child
Exploring the Impact of ACEs: How MDTs Can Support Healing and Prevention Libby Valerio-Boster, Maja Cartwright <i>Silver 6</i>						
Reclaiming our Joy in Early Childhood Hayley Jackson Perez <i>Silver 3</i>						
Understanding Family Hardship, Staff Well-Being, and Family Engagement in Educare Lincoln in the Context of Risk and Protective Factors to Trauma Exposure Peter Dossen, Ni Ketut Wilmayani, Dr. Soo-Young Hong, Deb Buck <i>Silver 4</i>						
The Intergenerational Impact: Understanding Parental Development, Attachment, and Trauma-Informed Co-Regulation Dr. Mark Hald <i>Silver 1</i>						

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 Repeats






3:00-3:30 pm	Break & Networking with Snacks	Pre-Function Area
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3:30 - 4:30 pm BREAKOUT SESSION D	Advocating for Young Children	Early Childhood Services	Early Education	Strengthening Partnerships to Support Children	Provider Mental Health and Well Being	Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child
Domestic Violence in Child Welfare: Understanding and Holding Abusers Accountable Jamie Bahm, Michelle Paxton, Christopher Reid <i>Silver 2</i>						
Unspoken Struggles: Navigating Trauma, ADHD, Autism, and Sensory Needs in Families Shelby Czarnick <i>Silver 8</i>						
Early Childhood Services: Connecting Families for Lifelong Success Stacy Scholten, Jamie Kramer <i>Silver 12</i>						
Full STEAM Ahead: Inspiring Learning with Imagination Storybook Guides Jackie Steffen, Ingrid Lindal <i>Silver 4</i>						
Turning Priorities Into Practice: How the Children's Foster Care Program Provides High-Quality Health Care Melissa Coffin, Laurie Berglund <i>Silver 5</i>						

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AGENDA

Day 1 | Tuesday, June 16

3:30 - 4:30 pm BREAKOUT SESSION D <small>(CON'T)</small>	Advocating for Young Children	Early Childhood Services	Early Education	Strengthening Partnerships to Support Children	Provider Mental Health and Well Being	Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child	
Regulate to Relate: Emotional Regulation as a Foundation for Connection Dayna Goff <i>Silver 6</i>					✓		 Foundational  Enhanced  Repeats
Reclaiming our Joy in Early Childhood Hayley Jackson Perez <i>Silver 3</i> 					✓		
Puppetry as Empowerment: Providing Opportunity for Every Child's Voice to Be Heard Alexandra Ashworth <i>Silver 7</i>						✓	
The Intergenerational Impact: Understanding Parental Development, Attachment, and Trauma-Informed Co-Regulation Dr. Mark Hald <i>Silver 1</i> 						✓	
4:30 pm	End of Day 1						

Day 2 | Wednesday, June 17

8:30-9:00 am	Start of Day 2: Visiting Exhibitors & Networking	Pre-Function Area
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9:00 - 10:00 am BREAKOUT SESSION E	Advocating for Young Children	Early Childhood Services	Early Education	Strengthening Partnerships to Support Children	Provider Mental Health and Well Being	Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child
Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA): Amplifying Children's Voices in Child Welfare Dawn Rockey, Corrie Kielty <i>Silver 11</i>	✓					
It's Time for Some PPP-Prep, Plan and Preschool Kristine Ray, Ginny Howard <i>Silver 1</i>		✓				
The Case for PIWI: How to Successfully Engage the Parents of Infants and Toddlers Nikki Roseberry, Christen Million <i>Silver 3</i>		✓				
Navigating a Successful Transition from Preschool to Kindergarten Kelsey Dayan, Dr. Patti Drewes-Hynek <i>Silver 7</i>			✓			

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AGENDA

Day 2 | Wednesday, June 17

9:00 - 10:00 am BREAKOUT SESSION E (CONT)	Advocating for Young Children	Early Childhood Services	Early Education	Strengthening Partnerships to Support Children	Provider Mental Health and Well Being	Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child
Imitation Skills in Action: Equipping EC Providers and Parents to Enhance Toddler Development Teri McGill <i>Silver 6</i>			✓			
Bridges, Not Barriers: Communication as a Pathway to Family and Community Partnerships for Holistic Support Ingrid Lindal, Lelynda Briggs-Linstadt, Becky Morton <i>Silver 4</i>				✓		
Tools, Not Just Talk: CE-CERT and the Skills of Sustaining a Career in the Helping Profession Jamie Bahm <i>Silver 2</i>					✓	
Trauma and Resilience Dr. Suzi Yokley-Busby <i>Silver 12</i>						✓
Supporting Parent-Child Relationships: How Dyadic Interventions Help Families in Protective Services Samantha Byrns, Joanna Halbur <i>Silver 5</i>						✓

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 Repeats

10:00-10:20 am	Break & Networking	Pre-Function Area
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10:20 - 11:20 am BREAKOUT SESSION F	Advocating for Young Children	Early Childhood Services	Early Education	Strengthening Partnerships to Support Children	Provider Mental Health and Well Being	Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child
Reasonable Efforts: Practical Application for Judges, Lawyers, Caseworkers, CASAs, and All Involved in Child Welfare Judge Douglas Johnson <i>Silver 11</i>	✓					
IECMH Services in Nebraska Lindsey Ondrak <i>Silver 5</i>		✓				
Neurodiversity in Young Children: Supporting the Development of Neurodivergent Children Dr. Lynne Clure <i>Silver 7</i>		✓				

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Day 2 | Wednesday, June 17

10:20 - 11:20 am BREAKOUT SESSION F (CON'T)	Advocating for Young Children	Early Childhood Services	Early Education	Strengthening Partnerships to Support Children	Provider Mental Health and Well Being	Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child
Listening to Nebraskans: Community-Based Research for Creating New Pathways in Early Childhood Simin Kazemi, Natalie Hanna, Tierra Harper, Amy LaPointe, Itzeni Nayeli Lopez, Brittnie Snyder <i>Silver 6</i>			✓			
Strengthening Prevention Through Relationship-Based Parenting: Evaluation of Circle of Security Parenting (COSP) in Nebraska's Child Welfare System Dr. Julie McCrae, Sami Bradley <i>Silver 4</i>				✓		
Nebraska Growing Readers: Lessons Learned in Increasing Book Access and Reading Habits Steven Cain, Greta Carlson <i>Silver 2</i>				✓		
10 Creative Tools for Building and Maintaining Your Resiliency Kay Glidden <i>Silver 3</i>					✓	
Building Hope in Yourself and Others Dr. Suzi Yokley-Busby <i>Silver 12</i>					✓	
Restoring Connection: Attachment-Based Interventions for Young Children and Parents Impacted by Trauma Debra Wesselmann <i>Silver 1</i>						✓
Strengthening Attachment Through Expressive Arts in Parent-Child Therapy Jea Theis <i>Silver 10</i>						✓

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11:20 am-12:10 pm	Lunch & Networking	Gold Ballroom
12:10-1:10 pm	Closing Plenary with Christina Meredith "CinderGirl: My Journey out of the Ashes to a Life of Hope"	Gold Ballroom
1:10-1:30 pm	Closing Remarks	Gold Ballroom
1:30 pm	Conference Adjourns	Gold Ballroom
1:30-2:30 pm	(Optional) Book signing with Christina Meredith	Gold Ballroom

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

10 Creative Tools for Building and Maintaining Your Resiliency

Kay Glidden

Track: Provider Mental Health and Well-Being

Audience Level: Foundational | Intended Audience: All

Description: You hear difficult stories daily and are frequently exposed to traumatic details from the families you are working with. Using the most recent research in the field, this interactive, evidence-based, and trauma informed presentation will explore assumptions about compassion fatigue, secondary trauma, burnout, and resiliency. Ten creative and hands-on tools will be discussed for building and maintaining your health and resiliency.

Learning Objectives:

- Define and discuss the impact of emotional trauma, compassion fatigue, secondary trauma, and burnout on personal and professional well-being.
- Identify compassion fatigue, secondary trauma, and burnout warning signs and symptoms.
- Review 10 tools for building and maintaining resiliency including mindfulness, grounding, and debriefing skills.

A Compassionate Approach to Problem Behavior in Young Children: Including Quick Tips to Implement

Annette Wragge

Track: Early Education

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, early childhood educators, early childhood mental health professionals, EDN providers, educators, foster parents, Head Start personnel, home visitors, parents/caregivers, service providers

Description: This presentation moves beyond the traditional methods of identifying behaviors and conducting behavioral assessments. It aims to give attendees a deeper understanding of how to respond with compassion and curiosity to young children exhibiting emerging or established problem behaviors. Participants will learn how to support and coach others in addressing challenging behaviors, focusing on building connection, trust, joy, and rapport. The presentation will emphasize the importance of a values-based, trauma-informed, and compassionate approach to responding to young children with behavioral needs through engaging content and real life examples. This training is grounded in the latest research in behavior analysis and related fields. Attendees will have the opportunity to consider a coaching intervention plan that prioritizes a compassionate approach to behavior.

Learning Objectives:

- Describe the Values of a Compassionate Approach to Behavior
- Identify the 3 steps for creating a connected relationship
- Explain at least two strategies for adults to engage young learners in effective child-led play
- Describe sustainable methods to incorporate a compassionate approach to behavior in coaching sessions

A Foundation for All: Strengthening Your Work With Young Children Through IMH Endorsement

Sami Bradley, Tana Goosic

Track: Early Childhood Services

Audience Level: Foundational | Intended Audience: All

Description: Are you an early childhood professional dedicated to fostering the well-being of our youngest citizens? Whether you're a home visitor, educator, social worker, healthcare provider, or therapist, your impact on the foundational years of life is profound. This dynamic

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

session will demystify Infant Mental Health Endorsement (IMH-E®), an internationally recognized credential that elevates the standard of care for infants, young children, and their families. We'll explore what IMH-E® truly means: a commitment to relationship-focused practice. Discover how endorsement provides a robust framework for professional growth, enhancing your skills in observation, assessment, and reflective practice. This isn't just for clinicians! Learn how IMH-E® strengthens the entire early childhood system, from promoting healthy social-emotional development to preventing challenges through early intervention. Join us to gain a clear understanding of the different IMH-E® categories, including Infant Family Associate (Promotion), Infant Family Specialist (Prevention), Infant Mental Health Specialist (Clinical Intervention/Treatment), and Infant Mental Health Mentor (Leadership). Through engaging discussion, we'll help you identify which category aligns best with your current role, empowering you to take the next step in becoming an endorsed professional and an even more impactful advocate for young children and families.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will be able to connect to the Nebraska Association for Infant Mental Health's mission and activities to their work.
- Participants will be able to explain how the IMH-E® is relevant to the infant and early childhood workforce.
- Participants will be able to distinguish between the four main IMH-E® categories (Infant Family Associate, Infant Family Specialist, Infant Mental Health Specialist, Infant Mental Health Mentor) and identify the category best suited for their individual professional pathway

Beyond Management: The Art of Reflective and Relational Supervision

Krista Roebke, Tracey Kock

Track: Provider Mental Health and Well-Being

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** All - This is designed for individuals who currently serve in a supervisory role or have interest in becoming a supervisor in the future in any area of practice.

Description: Research shows that more than half of employees leave their jobs because of their relationship with their supervisor. In helping professions, supervision is a delicate balance—requiring both skill and empathy to provide meaningful support. Reflective supervision offers a framework that reduces burnout, strengthens emotional resilience, and enhances effectiveness in human-centered work. By supporting the whole person—not just the professional role—it acknowledges that who we are shapes how we lead, support, and connect with others.

Learning Objectives:

- Explain why supporting the whole person is essential in supervision
- Describe the key features of reflective supervision
- Discuss the concept of responsible vulnerability and its relevance to supervisory practice
- Recognize the role of repair in strengthening supervisory relationships

Bridges, Not Barriers: Communication as a Pathway to Family and Community Partnerships for Holistic Support

Ingrid Lindal, LeLynda Briggs-Linstadt, Becky Morton

Track: Strengthening Partnerships to Support Young Children

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** All

Description: In early education settings, educators and caregivers play a critical role in shaping positive outcomes for children and their families. This presentation explores strategies for navigating difficult conversations with families in ways that are culturally responsive, empathetic, and grounded in community partnerships. Participants will learn how to approach these conversations with sensitivity, identify barriers families may face, and connect them

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

to relevant resources within their local communities. By fostering trust and collaboration, educators can help create inclusive environments that honor diverse experiences and support the holistic development of every child.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the importance of using a strengths-based approach to counter bias and power dynamics in partnerships with others.
- Recognize ways to engage in culturally responsive conversations that center the unique needs of children and families.
- Increase awareness of community resources to respond to the individual needs of children and families.

Building Early Literacy Through Assistive Technology

Brian Wojcik, Jeri Johnson

Track: Early Education

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in the juvenile court system, anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, CASA volunteers, childcare providers, child welfare professionals, early childhood educators, Early Head Start personnel, EDN providers, educators, family support workers, foster care support workers, foster parents, guardians ad litem, Head Start personnel, home visitors, medical providers, parents/caregivers, service providers

Description: Early literacy skills including listening, speaking, print awareness, and beginning writing, form the foundation for lifelong learning. For young children with disabilities, assistive technology (AT) can open doors to participation and engagement in meaningful literacy experiences. This session will focus on practical ways to use AT to support early literacy development in inclusive early childhood settings. Participants will explore how a range of tools can help children access stories, build vocabulary, and develop early reading and writing skills. Emphasis will be placed on embedding AT naturally into literacy routines such as circle time, shared reading, songs, and writing centers, ensuring that every child can actively participate alongside peers. Through examples, demonstrations, and discussion, attendees will gain strategies for selecting and adapting AT to meet individual needs, while also collaborating with families and teams to promote consistent use across environments. Participants will leave with ideas and resources they can implement to make literacy experiences more engaging, accessible, and inclusive for all young learners.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify ways assistive technology can support early literacy skills such as listening, vocabulary, print awareness, and beginning writing in young children with disabilities.
- Describe examples of low-tech and high-tech tools that can be embedded into early literacy routines.
- How to work with families and early childhood teams to use assistive technology in helpful and consistent ways that support children's literacy and communication in different settings.

Building Hope in Yourself and Others

Dr. Suzi Yokley-Busby

Track: Provider Mental Health and Well-Being

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** All

Description: Did you know hopeful people are likely to be happier and healthier in their jobs, and more fulfilled in life than their lower-hope peers? Over 2000 research studies confirm that hope – yes, hope – is the #1 predictor of future well-being outcomes! We believe hope is the antidote to adverse childhood experiences and can't wait to share the secrets of its

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untapped power to change outcomes. Join us as we define, teach, and learn to measure hope in ourselves and others.

Learning Objectives:

- Define hope.
- Measure hope in yourself and others.
- Apply hope science in a measurable way to increase positive outcomes for yourself and those you serve.

Building Parent Power: Strategies to Recruit, Engage, and Sustain Parent Involvement

Connie Shockley, Mark Smith

Track: Strengthening Partnerships to Support Young Children

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, early childhood educators, Early Head Start personnel, EDN providers, family support workers, foster care support workers, foster parents, Head Start personnel, parents/caregivers, service providers, school administrators, school representatives

Description: When parents serve as effective partners on early childhood teams, programs are stronger. Parents bring lived experience, expertise, and essential perspectives to early childhood teams, councils, task forces and other stakeholder groups. This session will explore how to recruit parents including those from different backgrounds, equip them for effective participation and potential leadership roles, and create the supports needed to sustain their involvement. Participants will learn strategies for overcoming common barriers, hear examples from Nebraska and national practices (OSEP/DEC/ECTA), and walk away with resources, action steps, and ideas for embedding the parent voice into early childhood systems.

Learning Objectives:

- Explain the value of parent partnership in strengthening early childhood teams and improving program outcomes.
- Identify strategies and supports for recruiting parents, sustaining their involvement, and reducing barriers—drawing on Nebraska and national models (OSEP/DEC/ECTA).
- Develop action steps to embed meaningful parent voices into early childhood systems.

Caring for the Most Vulnerable: Prioritizing the Health of Children in Foster Care

Melissa Coffin, Laurie Berglund

Track: Early Childhood Services

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** All

Description: Children in foster care face disproportionately high rates of physical, developmental, and mental health challenges—often compounded by trauma, system fragmentation, and inconsistent access to care. This session will provide an overview of the unique health needs of children in foster care and explore why prioritizing their medical and psychosocial well-being is imperative.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the unique physical, mental, and developmental health needs of children in foster care.
- Describe the impact of trauma, system involvement, and care disruptions on health outcomes for foster youth.
- Recognize common barriers to accessing timely, high-quality, and coordinated healthcare for this population.
- Discuss key components of trauma-informed and multidisciplinary approaches to caring for

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children in foster care.

- Apply best practices to improve health care delivery within their own professional roles or systems

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA): Amplifying Children’s Voices in Child Welfare

Dawn Rockey, Corrie Kielty

Track: Advocating for Young Children

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in the juvenile court system, attorneys, childcare providers, child welfare professionals, early childhood educators, early childhood mental health professionals, Early Head Start personnel, EDN providers, educators, family support workers, foster care support workers, foster parents, guardians ad litem, Head Start personnel, home visitors, judges, medical providers, mental health providers, parents/caregivers, service providers, school administrators

Description: Children in the child welfare system often face overwhelming challenges—frequent moves, disrupted education, and uncertainty about their future. Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) are trained community volunteers appointed by judges to speak up for a child’s best interests in court. With more than 800 CASA volunteers serving children across 55 Nebraska counties, CASA provides consistent advocacy that can be life-changing for children experiencing the juvenile court system and foster care. This session will explore how the CASA model works in Nebraska, including the extensive training of CASA staff and volunteers. Presenters will highlight the unique role CASA plays in learning about the child’s circumstances, how CASA complements the work of caseworkers and attorneys, and how community partnerships strengthen outcomes. Participants will also learn about current statewide data, success stories, and opportunities to collaborate with CASA programs to advance child well-being.

Learning Objectives:

- Describe the mission, structure, and impact of the CASA program in Nebraska.
- Explain how CASA volunteers contribute to better outcomes for children in foster care.
- Identify opportunities to partner with CASA at the local and statewide level.
- Recognize the importance of consistent, trauma-informed advocacy in supporting young children involved in the court system.

DC: 0-5 Overview

Lindsey Ondrak

Track: Early Childhood Services

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** All

Description: This session will be an overview and general introduction to DC:0-5™ Diagnosis and classification of mental health and developmental disorders of infancy and early childhood (DC:0-5™) to provide a foundation of this revised diagnostic classification system for professionals who need to understand how mental health and developmental disorders may be identified and diagnosed in infancy and early childhood. This will promote familiarity with the background, approach, and content areas of the DC: 0-5 for infant and early childhood professionals.

Learning Objectives:

- Explore how DC:0-5 reflects core elements of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health.
- Gain knowledge of the DC: 0-5 approach toward diagnosing infants and young children.
- Become familiar with the DC:0-5 multiaxial approach and clinical disorders.

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Domestic Violence in Child Welfare: Confronting the Elephants in the Room

Jamie Bahm, Michelle Paxton, Christopher Reid

Track: Advocating for Young Children

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who works with young children in the juvenile court system, attorneys, CASA volunteers, child welfare professionals, early childhood mental health professionals, family support workers, guardians ad litem, judges, mental health providers

Description: Domestic violence is rarely a single-issue concern. It often intersects with mental health, substance misuse, trauma histories, poverty, and child abuse or neglect. These complexities create unique challenges for professionals within the child welfare system who are tasked with ensuring safety and well-being while supporting families. Beyond these challenges, there are also the “elephants in the room”, the difficult, often unspoken issues and biases that can quietly shape decision-making and impact the quality of services provided. This session brings together experienced juvenile court professionals, including a county attorney, guardian ad litem, and former caseworker, to address those elephants directly. The discussion will focus on the barriers, blind spots, and systemic pressures that frequently arise when working on cases involving domestic violence. Too often, these unacknowledged factors can derail otherwise well-intentioned efforts and prevent professionals from fully engaging in domestic violence-informed practice. Presenters will guide participants in reflecting on the questions that matter most when confronted with a DV case: What assumptions are being made? Which biases may influence decisions or responses? How do competing demands within the system create obstacles to best practice? By bringing these questions to the forefront, the session encourages participants to recognize and navigate the unseen dynamics that affect case outcomes. The goal of this session is to equip professionals with a clearer lens for identifying and addressing the “elephants in the room,” thereby strengthening their ability to respond in ways that are both effective and DV-informed.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify common “elephants in the room”, such as unspoken assumptions, implicit biases, and systemic pressures, that can shape decision-making and undermine domestic violence-informed practice.
- Reflect on personal and systemic blind spots by examining key questions that arise in DV cases, and apply strategies to navigate competing demands while strengthening DV-informed responses.

Domestic Violence in Child Welfare: Understanding and Holding Abusers Accountable

Jamie Bahm, Michelle Paxton, Christopher Reid

Track: Advocating for Young Children

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who works with young children in the juvenile court system, attorneys, CASA volunteers, Child welfare professionals, Early childhood mental health professionals, family support workers, guardians ad litem, Judges, Mental Health Providers

Description: Working with families who experience domestic violence is both difficult and complex. Domestic violence rarely occurs in isolation as it can intersect with poverty, substance misuse, mental health challenges, and child abuse/neglect within the child welfare system. For professionals, this intersection raises critical questions about how to best work with people who perpetrate abuse. Domestic violence is not simply another case type; it requires a specialized knowledge base and skill set. This session will primarily focus on working with abusers and exploring strategies to hold them accountable within the juvenile

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court system. Accountability is often complicated by the rehabilitative nature of child welfare systems. Evidence demonstrates, however, that accountability and rehabilitation are not mutually exclusive. Both can be pursued simultaneously to enhance safety for children and survivors. The question of “Why do they do that?” is often asked when confronted with the actions of abusers. This session will address that question directly by examining the profile of abusers, common myths, and contributing factors to domestic violence. Participants will also hear perspectives from experienced juvenile court professionals, including a county attorney, guardian ad litem, and former caseworker, on approaches that balance child welfare’s rehabilitative goals with meaningful accountability for those who perpetrate harm. Through these discussions, attendees will gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of domestic violence and the tools available to address it effectively within juvenile court.

Learning Objectives:

- Examine the profiles of individuals who perpetrate abuse by challenging common myths and exploring underlying factors.
- Identify how domestic violence intersects with factors such as poverty, mental health, trauma, and substance misuse.
- Evaluate approaches that balance accountability and rehabilitation to apply domestic violence-informed strategies for the safety and well-being of children and survivors.

Early Childhood Coaching: Tools for Building Collaboration and Partnerships With Educators

Dr. Lisa Knoche, Christina Kilgore, Andrea Nelson

Track: Strengthening Partnerships to Support Young Children

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** Early Head Start personnel, EDN providers, Head Start personnel, school administrators, early childhood coaches

Description: Intentional planning and meaningful collaboration are at the heart of effective early childhood coaching. In this session, we’ll explore practical tools that coaches can use to strengthen their partnerships with early childhood educators in any setting (i.e., home visitation, center-based programming, early intervention). These include a coaching agenda, an action planning template, and an observation tool—all designed to support collaboration and partnership-oriented work. We’ll share real-world examples from one Nebraska coaching initiative, but the tools and strategies are relevant across a variety of early childhood initiatives. Coaches who are using these tools in practice will share their perspectives. Whether you’re new to coaching or looking to enhance your current practices, we invite you to join us and discover new ways to support early childhood educators.

Learning Objectives:

- Discover practical coaching tools that promote collaboration between coaches and early childhood educators.
- Explore how using these tools can help coaches plan more intentionally and engage more effectively during coaching conversations.
- Reflect on current coaching practices and create a personalized plan for integrating new tools into future coaching work.
- Learn from other coaches who have used tools in practice.

Early Childhood Services: Connecting Families for Lifelong Success

Stacy Scholten, Jamie Kramer

Track: Early Childhood Services

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** attorneys, CASA volunteers, child welfare professionals, family support workers, home visitors, judges, anyone who makes referrals or recommendations for services on behalf of families

Description: In this breakout session, families will share their experience with early childhood

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services, specifically kinship navigation, home visiting, and Circle of Security-Parenting. Attendees will gain a firsthand look at the positive impact these services can have and will take away practical steps for referring additional families. A thoughtful discussion will explore why services tailored specifically to young children are not only helpful, but crucial to healthy development and long-term outcomes. Join us for a session full of compelling perspectives and practical next steps!

Learning Objectives:

- Attendees will hear from families who accessed early childhood services and gain a firsthand understanding of how these services can benefit more families.
- The early childhood service continuum and how to refer families will be presented
- Discussion will take place on why services specifically for young children are important.

Embedding Assistive Technology in Everyday Routines: Supporting Young Children's Participation

Brian Wojcik, Kim Bowen

Track: Early Education

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in the juvenile court system, anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, CASA volunteers, childcare providers, child welfare professionals, early childhood educators, Early Head Start personnel, EDN providers, educators, family support workers, foster care support workers, foster parents, Head Start personnel, home visitors, medical providers, parents/caregivers, service providers, school administrators

Description: Early childhood is filled with meaningful routines—arrival, play, snack, story time, transitions—that provide natural opportunities for learning, communication, and independence. This session will explore how assistive technology (AT) can be seamlessly integrated into daily routines to support the participation and development of young children with disabilities. Participants will learn practical strategies for using both low-tech and high-tech tools to promote access, communication, mobility, and engagement in inclusive environments. Through real-world examples and hands-on demonstrations, we will highlight how AT can empower children to actively take part in classroom activities, build social connections, and express themselves throughout the day. Emphasis will be placed on collaboration with families and early childhood teams to identify routines where AT can make the most impact, and to ensure consistent use across home, school, and community settings. Attendees will leave with ideas, and strategies they can use to foster independence and inclusion for young children in their daily routines.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify opportunities within daily early childhood routines where assistive technology can support participation, communication, and independence for young children with disabilities.
- Describe strategies for embedding both low-tech and high-tech assistive technology tools into natural classroom and home activities.
- Apply collaborative approaches with families and early childhood teams to ensure consistent and meaningful use of assistive technology across environments.

Enhancing Early Autism Support Through Routines-Based Early Intervention

Jamie Lewis, Mikki Bohling, Christina Kilgore

Track: Early Education

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, early childhood educators, EDN providers, home visitors, parents/

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caregivers, service providers, school administrators

Description: This session explores how Routines-Based Early Intervention (RBEI) practices can be effectively used to support young children with autism and their families. Participants will learn how to use everyday routines as the foundation for individualized, functional intervention that promotes meaningful skill development. The session will highlight two key practices within the RBEI framework: the Routines-Based Interview (RBI) and the Getting Ready home visiting approach. Through video demonstrations and real-life examples, participants will observe how these practices can identify a child's strengths and needs, reveal autism-related traits in context, and guide the development of family-centered goals. Emphasis will be placed on how collaboration between families and providers during home visits enhances child and family outcomes, supports consistent skill-building opportunities, and fosters family confidence and capacity. This session is ideal for early intervention professionals seeking to strengthen their practices in alignment with Part C and evidence-based strategies for young children on the autism spectrum.

Learning Objectives:

- Describe the core components of Routines-Based Early Intervention (RBEI), including the Routines-Based Interview (RBI) and the Getting Ready home visiting approach.
- Identify ways in which autism-related traits can be observed within daily routines to inform goal-setting and support planning.
- View video examples to recognize effective family-provider collaboration during home visits that supports skill-building and family empowerment.
- Apply principles of RBEI to enhance alignment with IDEA Part C requirements and improve outcomes for children and families.

Exploring the Impact of ACEs: How MDTs Can Support Healing and Prevention

Libby Valerio-Boster, Maja Cartwright

Track: Strengthening Partnerships to Support Young Children

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, early childhood educators, early childhood mental health professionals, Early Head Start personnel, EDN providers, parents/caregivers, school administrators

Description: Join Brave fACEs, a prevention program at BraveBe Child Advocacy Center, for an insightful session designed for professionals and community members dedicated to understanding and mitigating the profound effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). This presentation will delve into the critical topic of how trauma impacts the development and behavior of the people we serve. Through a strengths-based and trauma-informed lens, participants will gain valuable insights into recognizing the signs of trauma and responding with empathy and effectiveness. A core component of this training will be the exploration of a case-specific example, offering a concrete illustration of trauma-related outcomes in families that BraveBe Child Advocacy Center works with daily. This real-world scenario will allow attendees to connect theoretical knowledge to practical application, fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities faced by those affected by ACEs. Furthermore, a significant portion of the session will be dedicated to identifying actionable strategies for multidisciplinary teams (MDTs). This training will highlight how MDTs can effectively integrate Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) and protective factors into their work. We will discuss methods for building resilience in children and families and creating environments that promote well-being.

Learning Objectives:

- Explain Adverse Childhood Experiences and their impact.
- Develop an understanding of trauma-related behaviors and reactions.
- Explore a case specific example of trauma-related outcomes in the families we work with.

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- Identify strategies for MDTs to effectively integrate positive childhood experiences, protective factors, and trauma-informed care into their work with families.

Forever Shaken: Understanding the Lifelong Impact of Abusive Head Trauma

Peggy Reisher

Track: Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child

Audience Level: Foundational | Intended Audience: All

Description: This session features Forever Shaken, a Nebraska-based documentary developed by the Brain Injury Association of Nebraska (BIA-NE) that shares powerful stories of individuals and families impacted by Abusive Head Trauma (AHT), also known as shaken baby syndrome. Through these firsthand accounts, participants will gain insight into the lifelong physical, cognitive, and emotional effects of AHT and the critical need for early identification, prevention, and ongoing support. The session will explore how AHT is both a preventable act of violence and a lifelong brain injury. Participants will learn about BIA-NE's efforts to raise awareness, strengthen community response systems, and provide resources for survivors and families. Practical strategies will be shared to help professionals integrate trauma-informed, brain injury-responsive approaches into their work and community outreach.

Learning Objectives:

- Define Abusive Head Trauma (AHT) and its long-term effects on the developing brain.
- Recognize signs of AHT and the ongoing needs of survivors and families.
- Apply trauma-informed, brain injury-responsive strategies to prevention and support.

From Stuck to Thriving: A Guide to Understanding, Connecting, and Empowering Neurodivergent Children

Shelby Czarnick

Track: Early Childhood Services

Audience Level: Foundational | Intended Audience: All

Description: Do you ever feel stuck or unheard when supporting a neurodivergent child? This session offers a fresh perspective on navigating the challenges parents, caregivers and professionals face when traditional strategies fall short. Combining personal experience with research in ADHD, sensory processing, and trauma, you'll gain practical tools to foster connection, regulate the nervous system, and help children thrive. We'll explore three key challenges: first, shifting our perspective to view struggles as opportunities for growth, uncovering hidden strengths and missing skills. Second, we'll dive into the power of relationships and how building trust through play, humor, and body-based techniques can create emotional safety and meaningful progress. Finally, we'll discuss body-based interventions like MNRI, the Wilbarger Brushing Protocol, and other therapies that regulate the nervous system, allowing the mind to engage in coping strategies and resilience-building. This session will also address how to build strong support systems, providing parents and professionals with resources to create effective networks for the child. By reframing struggles, prioritizing connection, and using body-based tools, we can create transformational change. If you're ready to break free from frustration and embrace new possibilities, this session will equip you with the tools and confidence to move forward.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the neurodivergent brain's unique needs and processes to effectively meet children where they are and tailor support strategies accordingly
- Apply strategies to reframe neurodivergent children's struggles, uncovering hidden strengths and skills
- Evaluate the effectiveness of body-based interventions, such as MNRI and the Wilbarger Brushing Protocol, in regulating the nervous system and supporting resilience-building

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Full STEAM Ahead: Inspiring Learning with Imagination Storybook Guides

Jackie Steffen, Ingrid Lindal

Track: Early Education

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, childcare providers, early childhood educators, Early Head Start personnel, Head Start personnel, parents/caregivers

Description: Children are naturally curious about the world. Full STEAM Ahead introduces participants to Nebraska Extension's STEAM Imagination Guides which corresponds to the yearly Collaborative Summer Reading Program. These guides combine picture books with hands-on activities to inspire early learning through play and discovery. Each guide is aligned with the Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines and designed to spark curiosity, encourage exploration, and enhance relationships. Participants will discover how these guides promote early literacy and lay a strong foundation for STEAM thinking in everyday settings. Check out these resources at: go.unl.edu/imagination

Learning Objectives:

- Identify and understand the key components of the STEAM Imagination Guides
- Explore ways to integrate STEAM and literacy through the guides
- Develop an implementation plan tailored to your early childhood setting

Growing in the Good Life: Lessons from Immigrant and Refugee Caregivers on Child Development

Dr. Kerry Miller, Dr. Lorey Wheeler

Track: Strengthening Partnerships to Support Young Children

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in early childhood education

Description: Immigrant and refugee families bring unique perspectives on child development, resilience, and help-seeking, yet they often face systemic barriers in accessing early childhood services. This session will present findings from a community-engaged qualitative evaluation conducted with 84 immigrant and refugee caregivers across Nebraska. This session will explore how families view and experience their children's development, and how their perspectives can inform and strengthen professional practice. Participants will consider the ways in which families support their children while navigating challenges and accessing resources. The discussion will highlight the value of culturally responsive approaches, meaningful partnerships, and supports that help families engage with complex systems. Designed for intermediate to advanced practitioners, the session will provide opportunities to reflect on strategies for integrating family perspectives into early childhood, healthcare, and family support settings, with a focus on advancing equity and responsiveness across systems.

Learning Objectives:

- Describe how caregivers understand and support children's developmental milestones across physical, social-emotional, cognitive, and language domains.
- Identify common barriers families face (e.g., language access, transportation, insurance) and facilitators (e.g., trusted providers, schools, community liaisons) that shape child and family outcomes.
- Reflect on culturally responsive practices and strategies to strengthen partnerships with families and support their navigation of complex service systems.
- Consider ways to integrate caregiver perspectives into early childhood, healthcare, and family support services to promote more equitable systems of care.

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Healing in the Home: Using Family-Centered Treatment to Support Young Children Through Trauma and Relationship Repair

Jasmine Platt

Track: Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in the juvenile court system, CASA volunteers, child welfare professionals, family support workers, foster care support workers, foster parents, guardians ad litem, home visitors, judges, mental health providers, parents/caregivers, service providers

Description: This session introduces Family-Centered Treatment (FCT), a trauma-informed, evidence-based, home-based model designed to support families with young children who are experiencing behavioral, emotional, or relational difficulties. Often utilized in child welfare and juvenile justice settings, FCT aims to strengthen family relationships, stabilize placement, and promote long-term healing within the family system. Participants will gain an understanding of how FCT integrates trauma theory, attachment work, and family systems therapy into a single model that empowers caregivers and centers the child's developmental needs. The session will include case examples, discussion of implementation in early childhood settings, and practical strategies for engaging families who may be resistant or overwhelmed. The presenter will also highlight how this model aligns with child welfare goals such as permanency, placement stability, and family reunification.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the four phases of Family-Centered Treatment (Joining, Reframing, Value Change, Generalization).
- Explain how FCT addresses trauma and builds resiliency in young children through family systems.
- Apply basic strategies for engaging caregivers in early childhood mental health interventions.
- Understand the intersection of FCT with court-involved or child welfare-involved families.

IECMH Services in Nebraska

Lindsey Ondrak

Track: Early Childhood Services

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** All

Description: The Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children (NRPVYC) created a resource to learn more about Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Services in Nebraska. This overview will provide the resource while helping attendees understand each of these four services: Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP), Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), and Circle of Security™-Parenting (COS™-P).

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will analyze the importance of dyadic treatment for young children.
- This session will help you understand the core treatment process for CPP, PCIT, EMDR and components of COSP classes.
- Participants will be able to identify when to make a referral and how to connect with providers in NE.

Imitation Skills in Action: Equipping EC Providers and Parents to Enhance Toddler Development

Terri McGill

Track: Early Education

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young

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children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in the juvenile court system, anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, childcare providers, early childhood educators, Early Head Start personnel, educators, family support workers, foster care support workers, foster parents, Head Start personnel, home visitors, parents/caregivers, service providers, school administrators, school representatives

Description: Some young children with autism may not observe others or acquire new skills, such as using a variety of actions with objects or engaging in gestures during play. These challenges can reflect a missing foundational skill—imitation. This training provides Early Childhood (EC) providers, parents and others with an in-depth understanding of the critical role imitation plays in comprehensive intervention programs for young children with autism. Reciprocal Imitation Training (RIT) is a naturalistic developmental behavioral intervention (NDBI) and has demonstrated improvement in social communication by teaching imitation through play-based, child-led interactions (Ingersoll, 2006). The goal of RIT is to teach children to imitate as a means of social interaction (Ingersoll, 2022). In RIT, adults model and reinforce imitation within natural contexts, supporting children’s engagement and learning. Participants will learn the systematic steps for implementing RIT, as well as strategies to plan, model, and coach parents and other professionals in its use. Ingersoll, B. (2006). Teaching reciprocal imitation skills to young children with autism using a naturalistic behavioral approach: Effects on language, pretend play, and joint attention. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 36(4), 487–505. Ingersoll, B. (2022). *Reciprocal Imitation Training Manual*. Michigan State University.

Learning Objectives:

- Explain the importance of imitation as a foundational skill for social communication and learning in young children with autism
- Describe the procedures/steps of Reciprocal Imitation Training (RIT) as a naturalistic developmental behavioral intervention (NDBI)
- Implement systematic, play-based, child-led steps of RIT in early childhood settings
- Plan, model, and coach parents and other professionals in applying RIT strategies within natural contexts to support skill development

It’s Time for Some PPP-Prep, Plan and Preschool

Kristine Ray, Ginny Howard

Track: Early Childhood Services

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, early childhood educators, EDN providers, educators, service providers, school administrators, school representatives

Description: Participants will engage with effective transition strategies to help prepare and plan for preschoolers with a focus on exiting early intervention and entering into special education. Considerations for planning, applicable resources and a quick look at statewide transition data will be shared.

Learning Objectives:

- Explore transition to preschool resources
- Understand best practices for supporting transition to preschool
- Overview of statewide transition data from Indicator B12

Language Assessment Strategies for Dual Language Learners: Insights from an Evaluation Team

Sebastian Marin-Hine, Dr. Clariebelle Gabas, Fotima Turdalieva

Track: Early Education

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with

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young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, childcare providers, early childhood educators, early childhood mental health professionals, educators, Head Start personnel, parents/caregivers, service providers, school administrators, school representatives

Description: Supporting the language development of dual language learners (DLLs) in early childhood (EC) is crucial given that language is foundational to children's literacy development and overall academic success (CITE). The use of comprehensive and equitable methods of assessing DLLs' language development is an essential first step towards providing DLLs with the appropriate supports to facilitate their language learning at home and at school. The goal of this session is to share insights from an evaluation team for the comprehensive language assessment of DLLs in an EC program serving families from linguistically diverse backgrounds. We will begin by describing the importance of supporting DLLs' language development and how comprehensive assessment practices may help to reduce the risk of misidentification of DLLs for special education services. Next, we will discuss the practical challenges that EC programs may face in implementing comprehensive practices to assess DLLs' language development. This may include the limited availability of valid language assessments designed for DLLs, varying levels of staff knowledge about multilingual language development, and practical ways to involve families in the assessment process. Finally, we will describe assessment practices and strategies from a converging evidence framework, which draws on multiple information to collectively provide an in-depth account of DLLs' linguistic knowledge, skills, and areas of growth to guide educational decision-making (Castilla-Earls et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2024).

Learning Objectives:

- Identify challenges in assessing the language development of DLLs in ECE.
- Identify strategies to assess DLLs in ECE.

Listening to Nebraskans: Community-Based Research for Creating New Pathways in Early Childhood

Simin Kazemi, Natalie Hanna, Tierra Harper, Amy LaPointe, Itzeni Nayeli Lopez, Brittnie Snyder

Track: Early Education

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, childcare providers, early childhood educators, Early Head Start personnel, educators, family support workers, Head Start personnel, parents/caregivers, school administrators, school representatives

Description: The RESPECT across Nebraska project is a partnership among multiple colleges, universities, and communities dedicated to strengthening the state's early childhood workforce. One of the main goals for the project is to center community voices in designing and implementing new pathways for teacher preparation and pathways into the profession. To achieve this goal, the project has engaged in community-based participatory research to center the voices, experiences, strengths, and needs of various communities across Nebraska. This includes several rounds of focus groups with Nebraska's diverse communities, representing both geographic diversity (rural communities) and racial/ethnic diversity (Hispanic, Native American, Black and immigrant communities). The focus group data were analyzed using qualitative research techniques within a multiple case study design. In this session, participants will hear from community members themselves as they describe the research process, share findings from each community, compare similarities and differences across communities, and offer their key takeaways for future pathways in early childhood education.

Learning Objectives:

- After this presentation participants will be familiar with the processes of community-based participatory research employed by the RESPECT project, including collaboration between

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university and community researcher partners to recruit participants, collect data and interpret findings.

- After this presentation participants will understand various Nebraska communities' perspectives on:
 - ◊ Their strengths and resources to support young children's development and early childhood education.
 - ◊ The types of experiences young children need in order to grow and learn in healthy ways.
 - ◊ What early childhood educators need to know and be able to do, as well as the personal qualities that are important for educators to have.

Navigating a Successful Transition from Preschool to Kindergarten

Kelsey Dayan, Dr. Patti Drewes-Hynek

Track: Early Education

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, childcare providers, early childhood educators, EDN providers, educators, family support workers, foster care support workers, foster parents, Head Start personnel, home visitors, parents/caregivers, service providers, school administrators, school representatives

Description: During this session you will learn about how to improve and enhance your transition process for children moving from Preschool to Kindergarten. Through the presentation of resources along with a discussion of tips, tricks, and what we have learned, you will leave the session with new ideas and tools to implement immediately to see an improvement in the transition process in your district!

Learning Objectives:

- Identify essential components for transitioning from preschool to kindergarten.
- Identify barriers to a successful transition process.
- Identify resources to aid staff in developing a transition process.
- Learn ways to facilitate conversations about the transition process.

Nebraska Growing Readers: Lessons Learned in Increasing Book Access and Reading Habits

Steven Cain, Greta Carlson

Track: Strengthening Partnerships to Support Young Children

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, childcare providers, early childhood educators, Early Head Start personnel, educators, family support workers, home visitors, parents/caregivers, service providers, school administrators, school representatives

Description: In its first year, the Nebraska Growing Readers (NGR) program distributed 886,063 books to 37,872 children ages three to five across the state. In partnership with Nebraska Department of Education and Unite for Literacy, this statewide community-based family literacy program increased book access through 1000 childcare providers, 65 Sixpence home visitors, 3000 kindergarten students, and 7 community bookstands. Community work through writers' workshops creating local books and developing community book gardens also deepened the work. An evaluation of the program, conducted by our external evaluation partners at Monroe-Meyer Institute, showed that NGR book distribution was associated with measurable improvements in book access, reading behaviors, and selected language and literacy skills. Specifically, among families participating in home visitation, children with a larger number of books at home showed a significantly higher likelihood of meeting benchmarks for early language and literacy skills. In its second year, evaluators are collaborating with program staff to further explore the effectiveness of strategies and practices used by home visitors and

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childcare providers to help families establish and strengthen their reading habits at home. This session will share the findings from the 2024 NGR evaluation and highlight lessons learned in supporting early reading habits. Additionally, presenters will share ways in which NGR built on the successes of the pilot including the strategies utilized by home visitors and childcare providers to support community-based literacy.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will learn how NGR book distribution supported improvements in reading behaviors, and selected language and literacy skills for Nebraska's youngest readers.
- Participants will learn promising practices that home visitors and childcare providers can apply to further enhance early literacy development through family partnerships.

Neurodiversity in Young Children: Supporting the Development of Neurodivergent Children

Dr. Lynne Clure

Track: Early Childhood Services

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, childcare providers, early childhood educators, Early Head Start personnel, EDN providers, family support workers, foster care support workers, foster parents, guardians ad litem, Head Start personnel, home visitors, parents/caregivers, school representatives

Description: This session will describe various types of neurodivergence observed in young children, including autism, ADHD, and other developmental differences, as well as key differences between them. We will briefly discuss neurotypical development, traits of neurodiversity that are most often observed in young children, and misconceptions about early traits and diagnosis. An overview of the assessment process to accurately diagnose young children and the importance of accurate early identification will be discussed. Finally, we will discuss ways to support neurodivergent children, the benefits of various interventions, and the importance of collaboration between systems of care to promote development in this population.

Learning Objectives:

- Name at least one type of neurodiversity observed in young children.
- Describe at least two ways to support the development of neurodivergent children.

One Size Does Not Fit All: How Early Decisions Influence Lifelong Outcomes for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Children

Michael Brummer

Track: Early Childhood Services

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** All

Description: Like all children, including Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (D/DB/HH), children have the right to equal opportunities, yet often there is limited awareness about the wide range of language acquisition options available to them from birth through adulthood. This session will examine the various communication approaches and their potential impacts on a child's cognitive, emotional, and well-being development, academic success, and future opportunities. Participants will explore how systemic factors—such as hospital resources, parental decision-making, and access to information—can shape lifelong outcomes. Post-secondary education data will also be shared to highlight disparities between D/DB/HH students and their hearing peers. Through this discussion, attendees will gain insight into how to better support families in making informed decisions that promote equitable access and long-term success for D/DB/HH children.

Learning Objectives:

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- Understand the diverse language acquisition and communication options available for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing children, and how these choices influence developmental, educational, and long-term outcomes.
- Examine the impact of hospital resources, parental decision-making, and broader systemic factors on language access. In addition, participants will review post-secondary education data to analyze disparities between D/DB/HH students and their hearing peers.
- Gain strategies to support families in making informed, equitable decisions that foster success across the lifespan.

Outdoor Learning and Experiential Education in Practice

Erin Kampbell, Lisa Poppe, LaDonna Werth, Jackie Steffen

Track: Early Education

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in the juvenile court system, anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, childcare providers, early childhood educators, early childhood mental health professionals, Early Head Start personnel, educators, foster parents, Head Start personnel, home visitors, parents/caregivers

Description: Join us for an inspiring session that explores how the outdoors can serve as a dynamic learning environment for young children! Featuring the newest Let's Go Outside – We Can Dig It! toolkit developed by Nebraska Extension, this session will share how simple, hands-on gardening experiences support early learning across multiple domains and how programs can use integrated marketing materials to showcase their outdoor learning efforts. This toolkit is the second in the Let's Go Outside series, building on the success of the original Can You Find? guides, which focused on nature scavenger hunts. Both toolkits follow the same effective format, but this session will focus on the newest gardening-themed edition. Each front-and-back activity guide in the toolkit includes clear instructions, material lists, and step-by-step photo support. Literature connections offer a meaningful bridge between garden experiences and broader learning goals like social-emotional development, language and literacy, as well as supporting child and caregiver mental health. Activities such as smelling herbs, observing insects, and harvesting vegetables encourage sensory exploration, motor development, early science skills, and creativity. The toolkit includes sample activities, literature tie-ins, and a robust set of marketing tools, including ready-to-use social media posts, newspaper write-ups, and radio spots designed to help early childhood professionals promote how their program is using the guides and engaging young children outdoors. Whether you have access to a garden plot or just a few containers, this session offers adaptable strategies for engaging young children in joyful, story-rich, nature-based learning.

Learning Objectives:

- Describe how gardening activities support mental health, wellbeing, and early childhood development across multiple learning domains.
- Explain the role of children's literature in enhancing and extending garden-based learning experiences.
- Demonstrate how to adapt garden-based learning strategies for a variety of settings, including classrooms with limited space or resources.
- Use the toolkit's activity guides to plan and implement meaningful garden-based lessons for young children.
- Use the toolkit's marketing materials to promote how children are learning outdoors.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

Puppetry as Empowerment: Providing Opportunity for Every Child's Voice to Be Heard

Alexandra Ashworth

Track: Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, childcare providers, early childhood educators, early childhood mental health professionals, Early Head Start personnel, educators, medical providers, mental health providers, parents/caregivers, service providers

Description: How do we give a voice to children who feel as though they are not seen, heard, or their life-story has been untold? I welcome you to join me in an inspiring tale of how a child who was said to never be able to walk or speak, found a voice through the wondrous art of Puppetry and Creative Dramatics. Experience the power of Puppetry in bridging cultures, affirming children's identities, and hearing each child's story through a Trauma-Informed lens. Garner the tools to infuse these practices within children's Socio-Emotional Development, Peer to Peer relations, and expression of knowledge. Let us empower each child through play through the timeless art of Puppetry, ensuring every child's identity, voice and story is heard, embraced, and affirmed!

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will garner knowledge of the cultural significance of puppetry and how it can be utilized for students with disabilities, differing cultures/languages, varying socio-economic statuses, and traumatic experiences, ages one to six years of age.
- Participants will learn how to manipulate Puppets within the classroom space for exploration of emotion, peer to peer relationships, Literacy/Language curriculum, and connecting with students individual life-experiences and stories.
- Participants will learn how Puppetry can be utilized to tell one's story, express one's understanding of emotion, exploration of trauma, and social interactions with peers, specifically within ages 1-6. Providing a deeper understanding of the impact of Puppetry with:
 - ◇ Toddlers; Focusing on peer to peer interactions, identification of emotions, and lived experience, and behavior management.
 - ◇ Preschool; Focusing on perspective taking, exploration of ecological theory as a basis for the myriad of relationships, experiences, and cultural experiences each child individually experiences.
 - ◇ School Age: Puppetry as an avenue for safety in expressing their knowledge and understanding, socio-emotional understanding within peer to peer relationships, and Trauma-Informed practice for educators in relating to and connection with families, cultural backgrounds, socio-economic status, and the impact of these factors within a child's educational experience through Kindergarten.
- Participants will be empowered with tools to connect and hear each child's story through the forms of Puppetry, Music, Movement, and Dance within Language, Literacy, Cognitive, and Socio-Emotional Development.
 - ◇ How Music, Movement, and Literacy bridges gaps for Multilingual learners, children with disabilities, and varying backgrounds within peer to peer relationships.
 - ◇ Providing educators with the tools to individually, intimately, and creatively connect with and uplift each child within their care.

Reasonable Efforts: Practical Application for Judges, Lawyers, Caseworkers, CASAs, and All Involved in Child Welfare

Judge Douglas Johnson

Track: Advocating for Young Children

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who works with young children in the juvenile court system, attorneys, CASA volunteers, child welfare professionals, foster parents, judges

Description: Lawyers and non-lawyers who work in Child Welfare need to know the importance of the reasonable efforts laws, how they are applied and how they impact the children and parents we serve.

Learning Objectives:

- Know the reasonable efforts laws
- Understand why the reasonable efforts laws are important
- Understand how the reasonable efforts laws are applied
- Understand how these laws impact the children and parents we serve

Reclaiming our Joy in Early Childhood

Hayley Jackson Perez

Track: Provider Mental Health and Well-Being

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, childcare providers, early childhood educators, Early Head Start personnel, educators, Head Start personnel, home visitors, school administrators

Description: The work we do in early childhood is tough- it is emotionally and physically draining. Now, with more teachers experiencing burn out, it is more important than ever to provide teachers with tools to combat the stress and overwhelm. This training will dive into the realities of working in early childhood spaces and the burn out and stress that comes with teaching in this space. Content will cover a deep dive reflection on our goals and visions for teaching in early childhood and reincorporating joy into our every day practice. Strategies for mindfulness and self-regulation will also be introduced.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will explore positive aspects of their own teaching practices and reframe stress into sparks of joy.
- Participants will reflect on their 'why' in early childhood
- Participants will learn new strategies and skills for self-regulation and mindfulness

Reflective Supervision: Cultivating Self-Awareness in Supervision

Krista Roebke, Tracey Kock

Track: Provider Mental Health and Well-Being

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** All - This is designed for individuals who currently serve in a supervisory role or have interest in becoming a supervisor in any area of practice.

Description: This session explores the foundational role of self-awareness in effective supervision. Designed for new and emerging supervisors, it focuses on the internal shifts required when transitioning from peer to supervisor. Participants will examine how personal values, emotional responses, and professional boundaries shape their supervisory identity. This session sets the stage for reflective supervision by first turning the lens inward—because how we lead begins with how we understand ourselves.

Learning Objectives:

- Recognize the shift in identity from peer to supervisor and its emotional impact.
- Reflect on personal values and beliefs that shape leadership.
- Identify emotional responses to supervisory challenges and pressures.
- Discuss strategies for self-regulation and resilience, including breathwork and reflection.
- Understand compassion fatigue and explore personalized approaches to well-being.

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Regulate to Relate: Emotional Regulation as a Foundation for Connection

Dayna Goff

Track: Provider Mental Health and Well-Being

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** All

Description: Any profession focused on helping others is rewarding, but can be emotionally draining as well, which can affect how well you connect with clients and colleagues. In this session, we will discuss the importance of emotional regulation and how important it is as a foundation for connection with others.

Learning Objectives:

- Develop a basic understanding of how stress affects us and the work we do
- Discuss the importance of emotional regulation as a professional working in the helping professions
- Develop mindful self-regulation strategies to help take care of yourself “in the moment”
- Leave with an understanding of how staying emotionally regulated can help you show up better for your clients and colleagues

Resilient Beginnings: Understanding ACEs, Behavior, and Brain Development in Early Childhood

Libby Valerio-Boster, Sarah Dankenbring

Track: Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, early childhood educators, early childhood mental health professionals, Early Head Start personnel, EDN providers, parents/caregivers, school administrators

Description: This session is specifically designed for early childhood educators and related professionals dedicated to creating supportive and nurturing environments for young children. The presentation will provide a thorough understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and their profound effects on a child’s mental and physical health, social well-being and behavior patterns. Ultimately, this training aims to empower educators with practical, evidence-based strategies for building resilience in young children. We will discuss specific techniques to create safe spaces within classrooms, foster a sense of security, and promote healthy development. By the end of this session, attendees will be equipped with the tools to not only manage challenging behaviors but also to support and build positive relationships with children who have experienced adversity. This training will conclude with a discussion on practical wellness strategies for educators.

Learning Objectives:

- Define Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and their impacts on mental, physical, and social well-being
- Identify the impacts of ACEs and stress on the brain
- Develop an understanding of the behaviors related to childhood trauma and how they may present in the classroom
- Identify resilience-building strategies

Restoring Connection: Attachment-Based Interventions for Young Children and Parents Impacted by Trauma

Debra Wesselmann

Track: Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families

Description: Early trauma and disrupted attachments can derail healthy development, leading

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young children to struggle with mistrust, self-protection, and insecure attachment patterns. Parents often carry similar wounds from their own histories, which can make connection and co-regulation difficult. This session focuses on “holding the minds” of both parent and child—creating emotionally safe spaces and modeling secure-based responses to non-secure behaviors. Participants will learn practical methods, including the use of music and therapeutic storytelling, to foster connection, emotional healing, and stronger attachment relationships.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the 5 building blocks to secure attachment between young children and their parents or caregivers.
- Name at least 3 characteristics of a reflective, attuned approach to interacting with young children and their parents.
- Identify 3 essential characteristics of an effective therapeutic story.

Shining a Light on Domestic Violence and Family Dynamics

Sarah Kirkwood, Lindsey Turner

Track: Advocating for Young Children

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** All

Description: Ever find yourself working with a family and feel as though something is off? Whether you are going into the home or working with families in the community, this workshop will help gain insight into the complex patterns of domestic violence. It is a known fact that domestic violence often occurs within isolation and can be a hidden factor in the lives of many families. The dynamics of domestic violence and the impact of power and control can be difficult to identify and navigate best practices to mitigate the adverse effects it has on children and survivors. This workshop will help participants identify patterns of domestic violence, develop skills to walk beside survivors on their journey to safety, identify best-practices to support children, and will learn the importance of including batterers in services while also developing skills to confidently hold them accountable.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify patterns of power and control both in the home and outside of the home.
- Understand the impact of domestic violence on children and families
- Gain skills to partner with survivors on their journey to safety
- Recognize best practices to support children who have been exposed to domestic violence
- Know how to hold the perpetrator accountable and the importance of including them in services

Strengthening Attachment Through Expressive Arts in Parent-Child Therapy

Jea Theis

Track: Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who works with young children in the juvenile court system (child welfare professionals, early childhood mental health professionals, Early Head Start personnel, educators, family support workers, foster care support workers, home visitors, mental health providers, parents/caregivers, service providers, school administrators)

Description: This session explores how expressive arts interventions can be powerful tools for fostering secure attachment between parents and young children. Early childhood is a critical window for developing emotional regulation, trust, and connection, yet many families face stressors—such as trauma, separation, or developmental challenges—that can disrupt healthy bonding. Expressive arts therapy offers a playful, nonverbal way to engage both parent and child, supporting co-regulation and emotional attunement. Participants will learn practical

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strategies for integrating movement, music, visual art, and storytelling into therapeutic work to deepen parent-child connection. Case examples will highlight how these interventions reduce relational stress, increase parental sensitivity, and empower caregivers to respond to their child's emotional needs with greater empathy and consistency. This workshop will provide hands-on demonstrations, discussion of developmental considerations, and guidance for adapting techniques across diverse cultural and family contexts. Attendees will leave with concrete tools to use in clinical settings to strengthen attachment, enhance emotional safety, and support resilience in the early years. No prior art experience is required—just a willingness to explore and create.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify how expressive arts interventions support secure attachment and emotional attunement in the parent-child relationship.
- Demonstrate at least four practical expressive arts techniques that can be applied in early childhood therapy assessments and interventions.
- Adapt expressive arts strategies to meet diverse developmental, cultural, and family needs in order to enhance therapeutic outcomes.

Strengthening Prevention Through Relationship-Based Parenting: Evaluation of Circle of Security Parenting (COSP) in Nebraska's Child Welfare System

Dr. Julie McCrae, Samantha Bradley

Track: Strengthening Partnerships to Support Young Children

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in the juvenile court system

Description: Circle of Security Parenting (COSP) is a relationship-based parenting intervention that supports caregivers' capacity for emotional attunement, attachment, and co-regulation with their young children—domains deeply linked to child safety and stability. Despite its widespread use, COSP has lacked rigorous evidence in the child welfare context, particularly studies that meet the standards of the federal Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse which allows federal resources to be used for the provision of evidence-based parenting programs. Our evaluation is funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), through the Child Care Research and Evaluation Discretionary Grants program. This Evaluation uses a quasi-experimental design to examine COSP's impact on out-of-home placements and maltreatment outcomes, with attention to differences by race, geography, and participation level. We use linked administrative data from Nebraska's COSP programs and Children and Family Services Division data in Nebraska from 2018-2024 to first describe families who receive COSP statewide, and second to test the relationship between COSP program participation and child welfare outcomes including permanency and maltreatment reports. Throughout the study, we engaged two Advisory Groups of parents and COSP facilitators and we will describe how we used complementary data approaches and insights to understand COSP delivery, participant experiences, and outcomes. Attendees will learn about study outcomes and implications for scaling COSP and similar relational interventions within public systems. The session will highlight how evidence-building efforts can be community-informed, trauma-attuned, and policy-relevant—particularly early childhood prevention.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will understand outcomes of a rigorous study of Circle of Security Parenting in Nebraska provided to over 1,500 families statewide from 2018-2024 and impacts on child welfare involvement and placement.
- Insights into program delivery and impact from reports from parents and program facilitators, through Advisory groups that contributed to study design and implementation.

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- Implications for Nebraska's prevention efforts related to child maltreatment and involvement with child welfare.

Strengthening Systems: The Power of Family-Centered Treatment in Healing & Behavior Change

Jasmine Platt

Track: Strengthening Partnerships to Support Young Children

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, attorneys, CASA volunteers, child welfare professionals, family support workers, foster care support workers, foster parents, guardians ad litem, home visitors, judges, mental health providers, parents/caregivers, service providers

Description: This session will explore the theory, application, and outcomes of Family-Centered Treatment (FCT), an evidence-based, trauma-informed model that works within the family system to address high-risk behaviors in youth. Participants will gain insight into how FCT differs from individual-focused interventions and why engaging the family unit is critical for long-term success.

Learning Objectives:

- Define the foundational principles of Family-Centered Treatment (FCT).
- Describe the four phases of FCT and how they guide intervention.
- Apply engagement techniques for working with challenging family dynamics.
- Evaluate outcome data supporting FCT as an effective alternative to residential care.
- Identify implementation strategies and tools for integrating FCT into community-based services.

Supporting Parent-Child Relationships: How Dyadic Interventions Help Families in Protective Services

Samantha Byrns, Joanna Halbur

Track: Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who works with young children in the juvenile court system, attorneys, CASA volunteers, child welfare professionals, early childhood mental health professionals, family support workers, foster care support workers, foster parents, guardians ad litem, home visitors, judges, medical providers, mental health providers, service providers

Description: Attachment is vital to a young child's lifelong development. The attachment relationship between a child and their caregiver begins at birth. When protective services are involved, ruptures in relationships happen. It is important to be mindful of the impact of attachment and development when working with young children and their caregivers, especially when concerns arise. This includes promoting the attachment relationship as well as responding to ruptures within a therapeutic and team setting. This session will review the importance of the attachment relationship and how that relationship can promote security for children and their caregivers. It will also address the process of rupture and repair within the parent-child relationship as well as with the professionals working with parents and children in the team environment.

Learning Objectives:

- Gain an understanding of the role of attachment relationships with young children and their caregivers and how relationships promote security for children.
- Describe the process of rupture and repair in relationships.
- Explain the importance of integrating a therapeutic and team approach in addressing ruptures and repairs with families in protective services.
- Recommend and refer evidence-based practices for dyadic treatment of young children.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

The Case for PIWI: How to Successfully Engage the Parents of Infants and Toddlers

Nikki Roseberry, Christen Million

Track: Early Childhood Services

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in early childhood education, early childhood educators, early childhood mental health professionals, Early Head Start personnel, family support workers, foster care support workers, Head Start personnel, home visitors, mental health providers, service providers

Description: Learn about the evidence-informed parent engagement strategy of Parents Interacting with Infants and if it is the right fit to integrate into your work! This session will discuss what PIWI is, demonstrate some of the skills, discuss the logistics of implementation, and provide data showing its effectiveness.

Learning Objectives:

- Introduce what PIWI is and its objectives
- Discuss the skills that are developed through the training process
- Demonstrate the skills through video examples
- Discuss how PIWI functions logistically in Nebraska
- Provide data showing PIWI's effectiveness

The Enhanced Resource Guidelines: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases

Judge Douglas Johnson

Track: Advocating for Young Children

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who works with young children in the juvenile court system

Description: Legal and non-legal participants will learn the fundamentals of the ERGs and how to improve hearing quality. Those courts and stakeholders who work together to implement the ERGs have better outcomes for children and parents in child welfare cases.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the fundamentals of the ERGs.
- Understand how faithfulness to the ERG model improves outcomes for children and parents in child welfare cases
- Better fulfill one's role in child welfare cases through understanding the nature of quality hearings.

The Intergenerational Impact: Understanding Parental Development, Attachment, and Trauma-Informed Co-Regulation

Dr. Mark Hald

Track: Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child

Audience Level: Enhanced | **Intended Audience:** All

Description: Early relational trauma can have a profound impact on an individual's emotional regulation and, in turn, affect their capacity for parenting. This presentation explores how a parent's own history of relational trauma can influence their ability to provide the consistent and attuned care necessary for a child's developing emotional regulation.

Learning Objectives:

- The "spillover effect" of parental stress and trauma on the parent-child relationship and attachment formation.
- How parent-child co-regulation can be disrupted by past trauma and what this means for a child's development.

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- Trauma-informed approaches to help parents build their own emotional resilience.
- Practical ways to support the parent-child bond, even when parents are navigating their own history of emotional challenges.

Together We Thrive: Shifting from “Just” Paperwork to Powerful Partnerships with Families

Katie Zabel, Dr. Lisa Knoche, Dr. Tammi Hechtner-Galvin

Track: Strengthening Partnerships to Support Young Children

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, childcare providers, early childhood educators, early childhood mental health professionals, Early Head Start personnel, EDN providers, educators, family support workers, Head Start personnel, home visitors, parents/caregivers, service providers, school administrators

Description: Join us as we explore how to make the most of every interaction with parents and transform routine meetings into impactful opportunities. We will highlight the intentional use of specific strategies that will strengthen the bridge between families and educators. We will share highlights on how educators can use collaborative planning with families to create consistent, responsive support across all environments for children.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify ways to transform routine meetings with parents into meaningful, collaborative opportunities that support child development.
- Demonstrate the use of specific, purposeful strategies that build and deepen relationships between families and educators
- Engage parents in joint decision-making to co-create learning plans that reflect shared goals and promote consistency across home and educational settings.

Tools, Not Just Talk: CE-CERT and the Skills of Sustaining a Career in the Helping Profession

Jamie Bahm

Track: Provider Mental Health and Well-Being

Audience Level: Foundational | **Intended Audience:** All

Description: Compassion fatigue. Burnout. Vicarious trauma. Moral Distress. Though these terms differ in definition, they all describe the emotional toll exacted upon professionals in helping professions. Whether in child welfare, the courts, advocacy, early childhood, health care, or education, professionals often face overwhelming exposure to trauma, stress, and systemic barriers that undermine a sense of purpose and leave professionals feeling depleted or disengaged. This session explores CE-CERT (Components for Enhancing Career Experience and Reducing Trauma), an evidence-informed model designed by Dr. Brian Miller, to support professionals in navigating these challenges. CE-CERT moves beyond awareness of secondary trauma by introducing acquirable, practical real-time emotion regulation strategies that can be used in the midst of daily work to sustain a career in the helping profession. CE-CERT's five skill domains offer accessible skills that serve as a buffer to mitigate the emotional and physical toll of the helping professions. Ultimately, the goal of CE-CERT is not merely to survive the work; rather, the goal is to have a vocation that is uniquely and deeply satisfying.

Learning Objectives:

- Recognize the impact of compassion fatigue, burnout, vicarious trauma, and moral distress on helping professionals' effectiveness and well-being.
- Explore CE-CERT's five skill domains and practical strategies to strengthen resilience and sustain meaningful, satisfying careers in helping professions.

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Trauma and Resilience

Dr. Suzi Yokley-Busby

Track: Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child

Audience Level: Foundational | Intended Audience: All

Description: Did you know trauma can change the human brain? Trauma is not just a buzzword; it's the key to understanding certain human behaviors. Its effects are far-reaching, but learning to recognize its trademarks will help you unshackle yourself and others from unhealthy behaviors and outcomes. Join us as we learn how to recognize trauma, understand its impact on the brain and body, and identify and apply interventions to trauma-related behaviors. Whether you're new to trauma or looking for a refresher, this course will provide an excellent foundation to build upon.

Learning Objectives:

- Define trauma, traumatic stress, toxic stress, and resilience.
- Identify how trauma affects behavior and development.
- Evaluate the stages of dysregulation.
- Apply interventions.

Turning Priorities Into Practice: How the Children's Foster Care Program Provides High-Quality Health Care

Melissa Coffin, Laurie Berglund

Track: Strengthening Partnerships to Support Young Children

Audience Level: Enhanced | Intended Audience: All

Description: This session builds on "Caring for the Most Vulnerable" by highlighting how a multidisciplinary team works together to improve health outcomes for children in foster care. The Children's Foster Care Program integrates best practice for medical, behavioral and social care using a trauma-informed, child-centered approach. Attendees will explore how this team collaborates with system partners to navigate the complex needs of this population to provide comprehensive, accessible and consistent health care. This session aims to provide insight for professionals across agencies working to deliver more effective, coordinated care for foster youth.

Learning Objectives:

- Describe how a multidisciplinary team can collaborate to address the complex health needs of children in foster care
- Identify best practices for integrating medical, behavioral, and social care using a trauma-informed, child-centered approach.
- Examine strategies for building effective partnerships between health care providers and child welfare system partners.
- Recognize the benefits and challenges of delivering comprehensive and consistent care within a foster care clinic model.
- Apply insights from the Children's Foster Care Program to enhance coordinated care efforts within their own organizations or systems. Apply insights from the Children's Foster Care Program to better serve children in rural communities.

Understanding Family Hardship, Staff Well-Being, and Family Engagement in Educare Lincoln in the Context of Risk and Protective Factors to Trauma Exposure

Peter Dossen, Ni Ketut Wilmayani, Dr. Soo-Young Hong, Deb Buck

Track: Trauma and Resiliency of the Developing Child

Audience Level: Enhanced | Intended Audience: Anyone who interacts directly with young children and/or their families, anyone who works with young children in early childhood

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education, childcare providers, child welfare professionals, early childhood educators, early childhood mental health professionals, family support workers, parents/caregivers

Description: Early childhood is a period for healthy development. Yet, economic hardship and limited household resources can undermine parenting practices, reduce stimulating interactions, and heighten the risk of trauma-related experiences, including emotional distress, behavioral problems, and poor academic outcomes. Research demonstrates that both family-level factors, such as poverty and parental depression, and staff-level factors, such as job-related stress and unsupportive work environments, can contribute to children's vulnerabilities. However, protective factors related to family engagement initiatives, supportive staff environments, and high-quality early childhood education (ECE) programs that align with trauma-informed principles can buffer these risks and foster better behavioral and learning outcomes through the development of supportive relationships. Therefore, this study aims to examine staff well-being and environment, family hardship, and family engagement to better understand how Educare Lincoln, a high-quality ECE program serving families with diverse and low-income backgrounds, uses these nuances in helping children thrive. The parent survey included a total of 79 participants, and the staff survey included 60 participants. The findings are expected to provide insight into strengthening ECE practice and policy by illustrating how these variables collectively reflect trauma-informed principles of safety, trust, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural responsiveness.

Learning Objectives:

- To examine staff well-being and environment, family hardship, and family engagement to better understand how Educare Lincoln, a high-quality ECE program serving families with diverse and low-income backgrounds, uses these nuances in helping children thrive.

Unspoken Struggles: Navigating Trauma, ADHD, Autism, and Sensory Needs in Families

Shelby Czarnick

Track: Early Childhood Services

Audience Level: Enhanced | Intended Audience: All

Description: In this session, we'll break down the walls that keep families trapped in the vicious cycle of trauma, ADHD, autism, and sensory overload. The voices of these families—often silenced by a system that fails to understand them—will finally be heard. From being the infant to becoming the sibling, these children are carrying more than they should, and it's time we listen to their unspoken truths. Trauma doesn't show up neatly in a textbook. It twists itself into behaviors that could be ADHD, autism, or both—leaving professionals and families stuck in confusion. Today, we're going to decode those symptoms and separate the noise from the real issues. But it's not just about the kid—it's about the whole family. We're going beyond clinical labels and digging into the trauma that's impacting everyone. You'll get strategies that help you connect with families stuck in survival mode and start creating real change. If you're tired of treating symptoms and want to actually help people break free from the trauma trap, this session is for you. Get ready to challenge everything you thought you knew and take away practical tools that will help you make a real difference.

Learning Objectives:

- Analyze the intersection of trauma, ADHD, autism, and sensory issues to differentiate overlapping symptoms and develop targeted interventions.
- Evaluate family dynamics within the context of trauma, moving beyond textbook symptoms to assess the holistic impact on all members.
- Apply strategies to build connections with families and implement interventions that address both trauma and neurodivergence in a supportive, integrated way.

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Alexandra Ashworth

Literacy Interventionist and Instructional Coach | Playful Progress L.L.C.

Alexandra Ashworth is a passionate educator, Instructional Coach, Literacy Interventionist, puppeteer, and arts-integrated educator who strives to create educational environments that empower, embrace, and promote student voice! Working with students ages birth through adolescence, Alexandra has served as an Educator, Mentor Teacher, Instructional Coach, and School Director across the United States. From the urban streets of New York City to the rural hills of Appalachia, Alexandra has taught Multi-Lingual Learners in a wide variety of languages alongside working closely with students who have Tier 3 MTSS needs, neurodivergence, and dyslexia. With a background in Child Development and Family Studies, one of Alexandra's greatest loves is being a collaborative partner with Student families to not only empower students within their learning, but their families as well! Alexandra is deeply passionate about Multi-Sensory Education and accessibility for all students, being certified and trained in Orton-Gillingham Comprehensive Plus training, Orton-Gillingham Morphology Plus Training, as well as Wilson Reading Systems. A lover of bringing literature, writing, and reading to life in playful and creative ways, Alexandra studied at the Graduate level at NYU within Educational Theatre and is completing her Masters in Literacy Education with Pre-K through 12th grade Reading Specialist Endorsement and Certification. She desires to empower not only the students in her care, but that of every educator who daringly dons a puppet, fosters a love of learning, and seeks to uplift the voices of ALL of their students.

Jamie Bahm, MS, IMH-E

Assistant Project Director | Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children, UNL's Center on Children, Families, and the Law

Jamie Bahm is an Assistant Project Director with the Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children at the University of Nebraska's Center on Children, Families, and the Law. Jamie currently serves as the project lead for the Lancaster County Safe and Healthy Families Initiative, a community coordinated response addressing the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child maltreatment. Jamie also works with juvenile court jurisdictions to integrate therapeutic practices into court processes, aiming to improve outcomes for children and families involved in the child welfare system. Jamie is endorsed as a trainer in both the FAN and CE-CERT models of reflective practice. She also contributes to policy initiatives focused on infant and early childhood mental health in Nebraska. Jamie's previous roles include serving as a Technical Expert Lead with JBS International, where she provided technical assistance to state grantees working to integrate behavioral health into primary care for children and perinatal women. Additionally, Jamie held supervisory and case management roles with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Children and Family Services, specializing in supporting adjudicated youth with high behavioral health needs and overseeing the Lancaster County Family Treatment Drug Court. Jamie holds both a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Science in Criminology and Criminal Justice from the University of Nebraska.

Laurie Berglund, MSN, APRN, PNP-PC, FNP-BC, PMHS, PMHNP-C, CNE **Child Advocacy Nurse Practitioner | Children's Hospital & Medical Center**

Laurie Berglund is a highly accomplished Pediatric Nurse Practitioner at Children's Hospital & Medical Center in Omaha, Nebraska. She currently serves as a leader in the Foster Care Program and is an active member of the Children's Advocacy Team, where she focuses on providing comprehensive, trauma-informed care for children in foster care. Laurie holds a Master of Science in Nursing and is board certified as a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner – Primary Care (PNP-PC), a Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP-BC), a Pediatric Mental Health Specialist (PMHS), and a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner – Certified (PMHNP-C). She is also a Certified Nurse Educator (CNE), reflecting her commitment to clinical excellence and

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mentorship in nursing education. She earned her Pediatric Nurse Practitioner degree from the University of Nebraska Medical Center and her Family Nurse Practitioner degree from the University of Massachusetts, Boston. To better serve the complex mental health needs of foster youth, Laurie completed her PMHNP through Mount Marty University. One of only three nurse practitioners in Nebraska certified as a Pediatric Mental Health Specialist, Laurie brings a unique and essential skill set to her practice. She participates in Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) meetings and collaborates with community partners through Project Harmony, helping bridge healthcare and social services for vulnerable children. With a career centered on advocacy, collaboration, and clinical excellence, Laurie is dedicated to ensuring that foster youth receive the highest quality of holistic care— addressing both their physical and mental health needs.

Mikki Bohling, MSED, MAED, SLP-CCC

Special Education Coordinator | ESU 10

Mikki Bohling is a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist and Special Education Coordinator with over 14 years of experience serving children from birth to age 21. She currently serves as an internal coach for Routines-Based Early Intervention (RBEI), supporting the implementation of evidence-based, family-centered practices in early childhood settings. Mikki serves as co-chair of PRT 10 and serves as a team member on the Central Region ASD team.

Kim Bowen

Assistive Technology Specialist | Assistive Technology Partnership

Kim Bowen is an Assistive Technology Specialist at ATP Education, dedicated to enhancing learning experiences through assistive technology solutions. She holds a Bachelor of Social Work from Nebraska Wesleyan University and has extensive experience supporting children and families in various educational and developmental roles. Kim brings a practical and compassionate approach to inclusive education, with expertise in empowering educators and students by bridging the gap between technology and individualized learning needs.

Sami Bradley, LIMHP, IMH-E

Vice President of Early Childhood Mental Health | Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

Sami Bradley, LIMHP, IMH-E, has been dedicated to the social and emotional well-being of young children for the past 20 years. As the lead of the Rooted in Relationships Initiative at the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, she collaborates with state and community partners to develop supportive systems of care for children from birth through age 8. A recognized leader in infant mental health, Sami co-leads the Nebraska Association for Infant Mental Health and coordinates Circle of Security in Nebraska. Her background includes direct practice as a Licensed Independent Mental Health Practitioner, along with roles at Early Development Network and Head Start. Sami holds degrees from Doane University and the University of Nebraska at Kearney, and is endorsed as an Infant Mental Health Mentor in Policy. Sami lives in rural Nebraska with her husband, five children, and many animals (including her favorite chickens!). Through her work, she is passionate about supporting early childhood mental health, believing that building strong relationships and connections early in life has a lifelong impact.

LeLynda Briggs-Linstadt, MSC, NCC

Family Engagement Specialist | Omaha Public Schools

LeLynda (she/her) is a graduate of Loyola University New Orleans and has been in the Mental Health field for nearly 20 years. Since graduating, LeLynda has worked in the nonprofit sector, juvenile justice, early childhood education as well as outpatient therapy. LeLynda currently

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works as a Family Engagement Specialist with Omaha Public Schools supporting families and schools by navigating and mediating those difficult moments and conversations to help rebuild relationships between school and home. She is passionate about holistic & culturally responsive preventative services especially as it relates to marginalized communities and doing the work of de-stigmatizing and advocating for services and supports that are equitable and culturally responsive in mental health and all aspects of social services.

Michael Brummer

Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing | Outreach Liaison

Michael Brummer serves as an Outreach Liaison with the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, where he provides advocacy, oversight, and information to advance communication access and strengthen equity across all sectors of society. In this role, he works closely with individuals, families, agencies, and communities to ensure that Nebraskans who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, or Late-Deafened can fully participate in Nebraska's "Good Life." Michael brings more than 20 years of experience working with children who are deaf and hard of hearing across a variety of educational settings, including classroom teaching, itinerant services, and coordination of student activities. His background includes supporting language development, communication access, and inclusive learning environments statewide. In addition to his outreach work, Michael teaches American Sign Language courses through the Nebraska Regional Programs and Wayne State College. His passion for ASL education, accessibility, and community empowerment continues to drive his commitment to creating a more inclusive and informed Nebraska for all.

Deb Buck

Family Engagement Specialist | Educare Lincoln

Samantha Byrns, LIMHP, LPC, NCC, IMH-E

Assistant Project Director | Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children, UNL's Center on Children, Families, and the Law

Samantha is an Assistant Project Director at the Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children at the University of Nebraska's Center on Children, Families and the Law. She is a Nebraska Trainer in Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP), Integration of Working Models of Attachment into Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (IoWA-PCIT) and the Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood (DC:0-5). She is also a Reflective Practice Trainer in the Facilitating Attuned Interactions (FAN) model developed by the Erikson Institute and the Components for Enhancing Career Experience and Reducing Trauma (CE-CERT) model developed by Dr. Brian Miller. She enjoys providing reflective practice and consultation and is an Endorsed Infant Mental Health Clinical Mentor. Samantha also provides outpatient therapy and facilitates Circle of Security-Parenting classes.

Steven Cain, MA

Senior Lead of Evaluation and Data Analysis for Early Childhood | Nebraska Children & Families Foundation

Steven Cain is the Senior Lead of Evaluation and Data Analysis for Early Childhood, overseeing the evaluation efforts for Nebraska Growing Readers. He joined the team early in the first year of the program and collaborated with MMI to produce the first evaluation of the program. He received his Masters in Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education from UNL and carries his passion for education into his work across early childhood efforts.

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Greta Carlson

Early Childhood Program Manager | Nebraska Growing Readers

Greta Carlson is the Early Childhood Program Manager for Nebraska Growing Readers and has guided the work since the early days. Her background is in community organizing, child development, and project coordinating with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Texas Lutheran University in Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation. She is passionate about working with communities to deliver high quality programming and collaboration for Nebraska's families.

Maja Cartwright, MSW

Brave fACEs Program Director | BraveBe Child Advocacy Center

Maja Cartwright is the Program Director of the Brave fACEs initiative at BraveBe, where she has devoted 19 years to supporting children and families affected by trauma. During her career, Maja has conducted over 5,000 forensic interviews with children, bringing a wealth of experience and empathy to her work. She has also served as a family advocate and an active member of multidisciplinary teams, collaborating across systems to ensure comprehensive care. With a deep expertise in Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and prevention strategies, she brings a compassionate and insightful perspective to her work, empowering communities through education, advocacy, and trauma-informed practices.

Dr. Lynne Clure, PhD

Psychologist | Clure Psychology

Lynne Clure, PhD, is a licensed psychologist and owner of Clure Psychology in Omaha, NE. She completed her PhD in school psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and a pre-doctoral internship at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital through the University of Tennessee Professional Psychology Internship Consortium. During internship, Dr. Clure was trained as a certified therapist in Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT). She has been a within-agency trainer for PCIT International Association since 2016 and is currently a candidate for Regional Trainer. Prior to moving into private practice in 2024, Dr. Clure spent 10 years as a psychologist and training coordinator at Children's Nebraska. Her current practice specializes in assessment of neurodevelopmental differences and provides comprehensive testing for ADHD, Autism, and learning differences including dyslexia. Her therapy practice focuses primarily on working with parents of young children. Dr. Clure is licensed to provide services in Nebraska, Iowa, and authorized to practice telepsychology in 42 states through PSYPACT. She is endorsed as an Infant Mental Health Clinical Mentor and regularly holds trainings for therapists interested in PCIT, reflective practice, and other topics in infant and early childhood mental health.

Melissa Coffin, MSN, BSN, RN, CPN

Child Advocacy Nurse | Children's Nebraska

Melissa is a registered nurse with over 16 years of experience, with a background in maternal/infant nursing, sexual assault/domestic violence, pediatrics and child advocacy. She has a MSN in nursing education, has obtained additional training as a sexual assault nurse examiner and a certification in pediatric nursing. Melissa has been at Children's Nebraska for over 9 years in the Child Advocacy Team and Foster Care Program. She successfully completed an EBP fellowship with a focus on abusive head trauma and presented her work on the implementation of an abusive head trauma prevention program at the national SPN conference.

Shelby Czarnick, LICSW

Owner, Mental Health Provider | Essential Life Tools LLC

Shelby Czarnick is a licensed independent clinical social worker (LICSW), certified ADHD professional (ADHD-CCSP), program developer and leader, and owner of Essential Life Tools

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LLC. In her therapy role, she helps clients replace weaknesses with strengths in less than ten minutes. Clients are able to feel enough comfort and trust to tell and process traumas never spoken before within the first session. In business and leadership, she has created professional teams with collaboration and leadership within 1 month through strategic planning, self-care events, team meetings, staff personnel learning and growth, and developing efficient processes and protocols. She has also adapted the environment to instill desired feelings and energy flows for both staff and clients within 1 week. She has an additional specialization in environmental needs for those with neurodivergent brains and ADHD. She has repeated this process developing at least four behavioral health programs and an oncology navigation program. She sees challenges as opportunities for growth. She is excited for her next project of building a retreat clinic and center with a focus for individuals with neurodivergent brains and tendencies. She envisions a world that says you can't be replaced with you can.

Sarah Dankenbring

ACEs Capacity Building Specialist | BraveBe Child Advocacy Center

Sarah Dankenbring is the ACEs Capacity Building Specialist at BraveBe Child Advocacy Center. She holds a degree in Social Work from Nebraska. The majority of her professional experience has been in the early childhood field with a focus on social and emotional competencies for children. She has 20 years of experience working as a classroom teacher, program director, and classroom coach. She brings a wealth of knowledge around evidence-based models for promoting children's development. Sarah works with providers to empower them to provide trauma-informed care in their settings. She is passionate about a world where all children are supported in their social and emotional learning.

Kelsey Dayan, MS

Behavior Facilitator | Papillion La Vista Community Schools

Kelsey Dayan began her educational career in 2016 as a special education teacher at the elementary level. A master's degree in curriculum and instruction with a focus on inclusion quickly followed. She then continued her education with a second master's in administration focusing on preschool - 8th grade. Her passion for developing the essential programming to build student success led her to the position of a Behavior Facilitator in 2022. In this role, she enjoys collaborating and coaching teachers, building a teacher's skill set, and finding new successes with students.

Peter Dossen, MA

Graduate Student | University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Peter C. Dossen is an international student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He began his Ph.D. 2023 in the Human Sciences program specializing in Child Development/Early Childhood Education. Peter holds a graduate certificate in Early Childhood and Family Policy from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from William V. S. Tubman University, Liberia, and a Master of Arts in Child Development from the University of Haifa, Israel. Peter's research interests revolve around the mechanism linking the association among the intergenerational transmission of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), attachment, parenting, children's mental health, social-emotional development, and academic achievement in a post-war country. He currently serves as a student representative for the Alliance/IDEA on the Student-to-Student (S2S) Effort of the Early Childhood Policy in Institutions of Higher Education (ECPIHE). Peter has worked as an instructor at William V. S. Tubman University's Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education and also as a Registered Nurse at the Rocktown Kunokudi Clinic, where he held various roles, including officer in charge (OIC), Maternal and Child Health Focal person, and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Clinician. His transition from clinical nursing practice to child development stemmed from witnessing the lack of educational

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opportunities for children in the clinic catchment communities where he was assigned. This experience ignited his passion for policy reform initiatives that promote a safe, stable, and nurturing environment where young children and their families can thrive.

Dr. Patti Drewes-Hynek, MS/CCC-SLP; EdD

Supervisor of Early Childhood Services | Papillion La Vista Community Schools

Spanning a 20 year career in Papillion La Vista Community Schools, Dr. Patti Drewes-Hynek has served as a Speech-Language Pathologist in Early Childhood and now as the Supervisor of Early Childhood Services. Prior to living in Nebraska, she resided in St. Louis, MO and worked as an SLP at a non-profit for individuals with Autism and in the public school setting at the junior high. Her love for Early Childhood led her to obtain both a Master's and Doctorate in administration with a focus in early childhood.

Dr. Clariebelle Gabas, PhD

Research Assistant Professor - Department of Child, Youth, and Family Studies | University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Clariebelle Gabas is a language researcher focusing on the language learning and development of children in early childhood contexts. She worked previously as a speech-language pathologist and aims to support early childhood practitioners' language practices to provide meaningful learning experiences to all children.

Dr. Walter S. Gilliam, PHD

Executive Director | Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Walter S. Gilliam began serving as the executive director of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute in 2023, succeeding Founding Executive Director Samuel J. Meisels. Gilliam, who holds the Richard D. Holland Presidential Chair in Early Childhood Development, also holds a primary academic appointment at the Munroe-Meyer Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center at a rank of tenured professor. Gilliam came to the Institute from Yale University, where he was Elizabeth Mears & House Jameson Professor of Child Psychiatry and Psychology at the Yale Child Study Center and director of Yale's Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy. He is board president of ZERO TO THREE, a past president of Child Care Aware of America, board treasurer for the Irving Harris Foundation, and a director for First Children's Finance, All Our Kin, and the National Workforce Registry Alliance, and a former senior advisor to the National Association for the Education of Young Children. In 2023, he was named a senior fellow working with the Bipartisan Policy Center's Early Childhood Initiative. Gilliam is co-recipient of the prestigious 2008 Grawemeyer Award in Education for the coauthored book, *A Vision for Universal Preschool Education*. His research involves early childhood education and intervention policy analysis (specifically how policies translate into effective services), ways to improve the quality of PreKindergarten and child care services, the impact of early childhood education programs on children's school readiness, and effective methods for reducing classroom behavior problems and preschool expulsion, as well as issues of COVID-19 transmission, vaccination, and health and safety promotion in early childhood settings. His scholarly writing addresses early childhood care and education programs, school readiness, and developmental assessment of young children. Gilliam has led national analyses of state-funded PreKindergarten policies and mandates, how PreKindergarten programs are being implemented across the range of policy contexts, and the effectiveness of these programs at improving school readiness and educational achievement, as well as experimental and quasi-experimental studies on methods to improve early education quality. His work frequently has been covered in major national and international news outlets for print (e.g., New York Times, Wall Street Journal, USA Today, Chicago Tribune, LA Times), radio (e.g., NPR), and television (e.g., CNN Headline News, NBC TODAY Show, CBS Early Show, ABC Good Morning America, ABC World News Tonight, FOX

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News). Gilliam has actively provided consultation to state and federal decision-makers in the United States and other countries (such as the People's Republic of China and the United Arab Emirates) and frequently provides testimony and briefings before Congress on issues related to early care and education. Gilliam is a graduate of the University of Kentucky, where he earned a master's degree in educational psychology and a Ph.D. in school psychology. He grew up in Pikeville, Kentucky.

Kay Glidden, MS

Trainer | Compassion Resiliency

Kay Glidden, MS, in Higher Education from Indiana University, is a compassion fatigue specialist, trauma informed care trainer and mindfulness educator. Her experience stems from over 30+ years as a mental health professional and work in a public behavioral health system.

Dayna Goff, JD, MSW

Outreach & Training Specialist | Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children, UNL's Center on Children, Families, and the Law

Dayna L. Goff is the Outreach and Training Specialist with the Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Children at UNL's Center on Children, Family and the Law. Dayna earned her Bachelor's and Master's in Social Work from the University of Kansas and her Juris Doctorate from University of Nebraska College of Law. She previously worked as a therapeutic case manager at a child welfare agency, as the associate director of a visitation agency and as an attorney practicing in estate planning, family and juvenile law. She continues to practice juvenile law in Lancaster County.

Tana Goosic

NAIMH Endorsement Coordinator | Nebraska Association for Infant Mental Health

Tana is an Endorsement Coordinator at the Nebraska Association for Infant Mental Health. Tana has over two-years of service on the NAIMH board and brings a wealth of experience and commitment to her role. Having spent eight years in the childcare field, she has developed a profound passion for early childhood development. Tana strives to raise awareness about the critical importance of early childhood and aims to be a supportive presence for children and families of Nebraska.

Joanna Halbur, LIMFT, RPT

Director of Mental Health Services | Project Harmony

Joanna has worked with children and families in the non-profit and child welfare setting for over 19 years. She is currently the Director of Mental Health at Project Harmony in Omaha, NE. Joanna is a Licensed Independent Marriage and Family Therapist (LIMFT) in Nebraska. She is trained in Circle of Security Parenting (COS-P), Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), Child Parent Psychotherapy (CPP), Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), and Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT). Additionally, Joanna is one of the Nebraska trainers for IOWA-PCIT (Integration of Working Models of Attachment into Parent Child Interaction Therapy).

Dr. Mark Hald, PhD

Licensed Psychologist | Options In Psychology, LLC

Dr. Mark Hald is a licensed psychologist and a partner at Options in Psychology, LLC in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. He is also a clinical training supervisor for master's and doctoral-level clinicians at the practice. With over 40 years of experience, Dr. Hald provides a variety of mental health services, including assessment, intervention, and psychotherapy for children,

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adolescents, and their families, while also offering consultation to local schools and community agencies. In addition to his clinical work, he has presented numerous professional development trainings in Nebraska and nationally. His extensive career includes past roles in schools, residential treatment centers, and psychiatric hospitals. He has also taught at the college and university level since 1986. Dr. Hald holds several academic degrees, including a Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of Northern Colorado, an Ed.S. in School Psychology, and an M.A. in Special Education. He is a Licensed Psychologist in Nebraska, a Nationally Certified School Psychologist, and a Registered Play Therapist – Supervisor, with specialized training in interventions like Child-Parent Psychotherapy. In his personal life, he is married with three children and eight grandchildren, and he enjoys gardening, fishing, camping, and hiking.

Natalie Hanna

Early Childhood Educator and Coach | ESU 10

Natalie is an early childhood educator and coach with nearly 20 years of experience. She is a Step Up to Quality 5-Star provider, holds a CDA credential, and has degrees in Business Administration and Early Childhood Education. Natalie is dedicated to play-based learning, family partnerships, and educator support.

Tierra Harper, IMH-E®

Manager of Omaha Childcare Partnerships | Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative

Tierra Harper, IMH-E®, is the Manager of Omaha Childcare Partnerships at the Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative. With a strong background in early childhood development, Tierra is a passionate advocate for sustainable, affordable, and high-quality childcare. Her work focuses on addressing systemic gaps in early care and education, supporting Black Maternal Health, and promoting Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health. Tierra brings a community-centered approach to empowering families and early childhood professionals, especially in historically under-resourced areas. She holds a BS in Education and Human Sciences from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and is a credentialed Infant Mental Health Endorsed professional. Tierra's leadership continues to shape equitable access to care across the Omaha-Metro area. Outside of her professional work, she enjoys quality time with her husband, Antwine, and their son, Ashton.

Dr. Tammi Hechtner-Galvin, PhD

Project Coordinator | University of Nebraska

Tamara Hechtner-Galvin is the project coordinator for Getting Ready. This study focuses on strengthening the relationships children have with adults, as well as strengthening the partnerships between parents and their childcare providers. Collaboratively, parents and teachers identify and build on a child's strengths, establish developmental goals, and create home-center plans to support developmentally appropriate child goals. Hechtner-Galvin's research interests include family-school partnerships, early childhood education, assessment and early intervention. Recently, Hechtner-Galvin has added Project Coordinator for TransformED: Connections for Kids. She earned her doctoral degree in human development and family studies with an emphasis in early childhood education from Iowa State University.

Dr. Soo-Young Hong, PhD

Associate Professor | University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Soo-Young Hong, Ph.D. (she/her) is an associate professor in the department of child, youth and family studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL). Soo-Young completed her master's and doctoral degrees in child development and family studies at Purdue University and has been on the faculty (specialization: child development / early childhood education) at

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UNL since 2009. She has extensive early childhood experiences as an educator, mentor/coach, and researcher. Soo-Young currently teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on human development, early childhood policy, and developmental and family theories and investigates strategies to facilitate early childhood educators to support young children's learning in early care and education settings.

Ginny Howard

Early Childhood Specialist | Nebraska Department of Education

For over 20 years, Ginny Howard's passion has been in early childhood education. She worked in a metro-area school as a Pre-K teacher for 12 years and four years as an ECSE teacher & program coordinator in a smaller Nebraska school district. In 2016, she left the classroom and began coaching and training on the Pyramid Model in public schools, Head Starts, and community child care programs. During this time, she also was a consultant for Verbal Behavior for the ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) Network of Nebraska. Ginny began working at the Nebraska Department of Education as an Early Childhood Special Education Specialist in 2020. Ginny works to support professionals in improving child outcomes for infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities in Nebraska, as well as supporting districts in making decisions, based on regulations, for preschoolers with disabilities.

Hayley Jackson Perez, MS

Early Childhood Coach & Trainer | Hayley Jackson Perez Consulting, LLC

Hayley Jackson Perez is an accomplished early childhood education expert with over 18 years of experience. As an early childhood coach, consultant, and trainer, Hayley has a track record of providing high quality professional development experiences for educators, administrators, and parents. For the past three years, Hayley has served as an Extension Educator with the University of Nebraska, where she developed and delivered professional development to address the needs of the everchanging early childhood field. Prior to her time in Extension, Hayley taught, coached, and ran multiple community based early childhood centers. Her expertise is focused on several key areas, including challenging behaviors, early childhood coaching, and reclaiming joy in the work of early childhood. Hayley has a Bachelors of Science from Arizona State University as well as a Masters of Science in Human Development & Family Studies with a concentration in Early Childhood from Colorado State University. Hayley has completed all doctoral coursework and comprehensive exams in Early Childhood Education at the University of Nebraska, further solidifying her expertise in the field.

Judge Douglas Johnson, JD

Retired Judge

Judge Johnson served 26 years on the Separate Juvenile Court of Douglas County, NE. He taught Juvenile Law at Creighton University School of Law for 25 years. He is a Past President of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and has been a member of its faculty since 1998. He has served on numerous local, state and national committees and received numerous awards for public service and judicial leadership.

Jeri Johnson

Assistive Technology Specialist | Assistive Technology Partnership-Education Program

Jeri Johnson has over 25 years of experience in Special Education, including 15 years in early childhood classrooms where she supported students in integrating assistive technology into daily learning. In her current role as an Assistive Technology Specialist, she collaborates with teams across the state to identify and implement effective AT solutions. Jeri is committed to providing practical, evidence-based strategies that empower educators to confidently

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incorporate assistive technology into everyday instruction.

Erin Kampbell, MS

Extension Educator | Nebraska Extension

Erin Kampbell is an Early Childhood Educator with Nebraska Extension where she teaches and supports those who care for and educate children from birth through age eight. Her work centers on early childhood health and wellness, with an emphasis on the well-being of caregivers and educators. She is dedicated to advancing practices that support families and professionals in establishing and sustaining lifelong healthy relationships and habits. Erin holds a master's degree in child, youth, and family studies with a specialization in international family studies from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Simin Kazemi

Graduate Research Assistant | University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Simin is an international doctoral student at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, studying Child Development/Early Childhood Education in the Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies. For the past three years, she has served as a graduate research assistant with the RESPECT across Nebraska project. Her research and practice focus on promoting nature-rich experiences in early childhood. She is passionate about working alongside communities and learning with and from them to help advance high-quality, equitable early care and education for young children.

Ni Ketut Wilmayani, MPH

Graduate Student | University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Ni Ketut Wilmayani, who goes by Wilma, is a physician by training with international experience in global public health across both academic and community-based settings. Her work has centered on providing preventive health services for vulnerable populations.

She is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in the Department of Child, Youth, and Family Studies at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, specializing in Global Family Health and Well-being. She earned her Master of Public Health from Vanderbilt University, Tennessee in 2021 as a Fulbright Scholar. Prior to that, she completed her medical degree in Indonesia and worked at a Primary Health Center as well as teaching faculty in the Public Health Department, University of Mataram, Indonesia for seven years, focusing primarily on maternal and child health programs. Wilma's current research interests include early childhood, adolescent mental health, health promotion, health education, and behavior change. She is actively involved in a collaborative project on Trauma-Informed Programs and Practices for Schools (TIPPS) with the University of Michigan, where she conducted interviews with teachers to explore perspectives on trauma-informed practices in education. Additionally, Wilma participated in a health promotion project on adolescent mental health, a collaboration between the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and Boys Town National Research Hospital, Nebraska. In this role, she contributes to research on adolescent substance use, including alcohol, cannabis, and tobacco, by managing datasets and conducting quantitative analyses. She is passionate about expanding her expertise in health education through interdisciplinary approaches and is eager to continue collaborating with research teams from diverse academic institutions.

Corrie Kielty

Executive Director | Nebraska CASA Association

Corrie has served as the Executive Director of the Nebraska CASA Association since 2012, providing statewide leadership to a network of 21 local CASA programs that collectively serve children in 55 counties. During this time, the CASA network has expanded into previously

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unserved areas and built the capacity to advocate for 46% more children in foster care. Corrie brings more than three decades of experience in nonprofit and public service leadership. She has worked in public health, substance abuse treatment and as an aide to the Mayor of Lincoln, managing legislative policy and city initiatives, and held key roles in community organizing, behavioral health, and public policy. Corrie serves on the Nebraska Supreme Court Commission on Children in the Courts, the Governor's Commission for the Protection of Children, and several statewide advisory boards. Corrie enjoys spending time with her family including five grandchildren.

Christina Kilgore, BSOT

RBEI State Coordinator | Nebraska Department of Education

Tina Kilgore has been an Occupational Therapist for 24 years, more recently specializing in working with children ages birth-5. Tina participated as a state coach in the Coaching for Early Intervention project, a joint effort between NDE and UNL. She has presented multiple times throughout Nebraska focused on Routines Based Early Intervention. Tina was the ECSE Coordinator at Columbus Public schools for 3 years.

Sarah Kirkwood, LIMHP, LADC, IMH-E

Outpatient Therapist | Bloom Counseling LLC

Sarah Kirkwood is a Licensed Independent Mental Health Practitioner and recently obtained endorsement for Infant Mental Health Mentor Clinical. She has been a therapist in the field for 11 years and specializes in working with children and families who have been exposed to and experienced various traumatic experiences. She is trained in multiple trauma modalities including Child Parent Psychotherapy, Parent Child Interaction Therapy, and Brain Spotting. She works with community partners to provide trauma trainings and clinical support through Facilitating Attuned Interactions. She collaborates with the community to encourage continuity of care and best outcomes for children and families. Sarah has been a part of the Domestic Violence Problem Solving Court in Lancaster County for the past two years and received the Bob Moyer Memorial Award for Excellence in Domestic Violence Informed Practice in 2025. She has been trained in the Emerge Curriculum and runs a Domestic Violence Intervention Program for batterers.

Dr. Lisa Knoche, PhD

Research Professor | Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Lisa Knoche is a research professor and director of the Nebraska Academy for Early Childhood Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She is an applied developmental psychologist with expertise in the design, development, and evaluation of early childhood intervention and prevention programs to support healthy development in young children and support family engagement. Dr. Knoche has extensive experience in implementing collaborative research programs with community partners and has provided numerous local, national and international presentations to advance early childhood science, and improve practice and policy.

Tracey Kock, MSW

Project Manager | Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children, UNL's Center on Children, Families, and the Law

Tracey Kock is the NCRP Project Manager with the Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children at the University of Nebraska's Center on Children, Families, and the Law. Tracey is a Reflective Practice Trainer in the Facilitating Attuned Interactions (FAN) and Components for

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Enhancing Career Experience and Reducing Trauma (CE-CERT) models and provides reflective consultation. Prior to her current position, Tracey worked as a Permanency Director in child welfare in Nebraska's Eastern Service Area. Tracey earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Child Welfare and a Criminal Justice Certificate from the University of Wisconsin Madison and a Master of Social Work degree from the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee.

Jamie Kramer, MSW

Children and Family Services Administrator | State of Nebraska

Jamie Kramer is a Children and Family Services Administrator with the State of Nebraska with over fifteen years of extensive experience working in child welfare and holds a master's degree in social work from the University of Nebraska-Omaha. As a CFS Administrator, Ms. Kramer partners with federal, state and local agencies to implement services and strategies to better serve children and families who are working with the child welfare system, to prevent re-entry or deeper system involvement. Through the knowledge garnered from her child welfare work experience and educational conferment, Ms. Kramer is driven to safely reduce entry of families into child welfare.

Amy LaPointe, MS

Education Director | Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska

Born and raised on the Winnebago Indian Reservation and an enrolled member of the tribe, Amy LaPointe-Houghton served fourteen years as the Winnebago Tribe's Head Start Director before moving into her current role as the Education Director for the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska. During her tenure as the Head Start Director, she was directly involved in the development of Educare Winnebago, the only Native American Educare in the network. She still serves Educare Winnebago in the role of Executive Director and continues working to advance the program to its fullest potential. Alongside these efforts, she also serves as a strong advocate for early childhood and equitable evaluation, serving on various committees locally and within Nebraska. In addition, Amy oversees 5 programs in the Winnebago community, each of them providing educational support to community members. In her spare time, she loves spending time with her four grandchildren.

Jamie Lewis, MAEd, MSTOR/L

Special Education Coordinator-Central Region ASD Coordinator | ESU 10

Jamie Lewis is a Special Education Coordinator, Central Region Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Coordinator, and licensed Occupational Therapist with 25 years of experience in school-based and early intervention pediatric services. She holds multiple advanced degrees and certifications and has served on various state, regional and local advisory boards focused on improving outcomes for children with disabilities. Jamie is a member of PRT 10's Routines-Based Early Intervention (RBEI) Leadership Team.

Ingrid Lindal, MS

Nebraska Extension Early Childhood Educator | Nebraska Extension

Ingrid Lindal holds a Master's degree in Human Services and Family Studies with an emphasis in Early Childhood from Kansas State University. She currently serves as an Early Childhood Extension Educator with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She provides training and resources in English and Spanish to early childhood educators, supporting best practices across diverse settings. Her work focuses on developmentally appropriate practices, with a strong focus on social-emotional development, educator and child well-being, and STEAM.

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Sebastian Marin-Hine, MEd

Ph.D. Student & Research Assistant | Child Development/Early Childhood Education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Sebastian Marin-Hine is currently a Research Assistant at Educare Lincoln and at the Neuroimaging for Language, Literacy, and Learning (NL3) Lab at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he is pursuing a Ph.D. in Child Development/Early Childhood Education. At Educare Lincoln, he conducts child assessments focused on language and executive function, manages data collection, and collaborates with families and teachers to support children's developmental progress. In the NL3 Lab, under the mentorship of Dr. Ying-Ying Wang, he is involved in projects exploring educational neuroscience, particularly the neural and developmental processes underlying language and literacy acquisition in early childhood. Additionally, he collaborates with the Parents of Newborns study directed by Dr. Julia Torquati, where he contributes to research on parent-child interactions and early developmental outcomes. His academic background is multidisciplinary. He holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and a bachelor's degree in Audiovisual Arts, as well as a Master of Education (M.Ed.) in Inclusive Education from Universidad Autónoma de Bucaramanga (UNAB) in Colombia. He also earned a Specialization in Neurodevelopment and Learning, which deepened his expertise in understanding developmental trajectories and their implications for education. During his time at UNAB, he worked as a faculty member in the Early Childhood Education program, where he helped strengthen the neuropsychopedagogy track and designed academic initiatives to integrate neuroscience into teaching and learning practices. He also served as the academic and scientific coordinator of the Specialization in Inclusive Education, leading efforts to update its curriculum and align it with contemporary perspectives on diversity and educational neuroscience. Beyond his university work, he directed the research group Infancias Contemporáneas y Socialización and led community-based projects such as Juégatela por los Niños de la Guajira y Santander, which promoted child development and well-being in Indigenous and rural communities.

Dr. Julie McCrae, PhD, MSW

Research Fellow | Chapin Hall

Julie McCrae, MSW, PhD is Research Fellow at Chapin Hall, a national thinktank and research center focused on rigorous applied research to strengthen the lives of children, families, and their communities. Dr. McCrae has been studying interventions to prevent child abuse and neglect for over 20 years. She is skilled in complex study methodology using experimental, quasi-experimental and mixed methods study designs. She is Principal Investigator of Evaluation of Circle of Security Parenting in Nebraska: A Quasi-Experimental Design; evaluation of 100% Community in New Mexico, a collective impact model to reduce childhood adversity across the state; and recently completed a national study of the incidence of child maltreatment in out of home care. Dr. McCrae specializes in early childhood interventions including systems collaborations across partners such as health care, early care and education, and child welfare. Dr. McCrae is author of well over 100 publications, reports, briefs, and tools related to maltreatment prevention and impacts of early childhood adversity. She lives in Colorado with her husband and two sons.

Teri McGill, MEd, BCBA, LBA

NE ASD Network Regional Coordinator | NE ASD Network/Educational Service Unit #3

Teri McGill is a Regional Coordinator for the Nebraska ASD Network. In this role, she provides consultation and coaching to educators working with students with autism and related disorders from birth through age 21. Teri has presented on a wide range of early childhood and autism-related topics at both local and national conferences. Prior to this role, she taught Early Childhood Special Education for 18 years with Lincoln Public Schools. She holds a master's

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degree in special education from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA).

Christina Meredith

Abuse & Homelessness Survivor, Youth Advocate & Author of CinderGirl

Empowering others with her inspiring life story, Christina Meredith survived sexual, mental and emotional abuse, trauma, aging out of foster care, poverty and homelessness to forge a life committed to helping others. Through strong faith, hard work, and creativity she went on to become Miss California, graduate college, founded her own nonprofit foundation, and turned her enlistment into a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army. As told in her best-selling book, *CinderGirl: My Journey Out of the Ashes to a Life of Hope*, (now under development to become a major motion picture) during appearances on the Today Show and before speaking audiences nationwide, Christina's story celebrates the transformative power of dreams, and the potential within all of us triumph over adversity. "My entire story is about hope, faith, hard work, achieving the dream and the purpose that you have been given in this life, and not allowing things to deter you, because circumstances change," she says. "With hard work and a little faith, you can make them change." Christina Meredith is from the oldest city in the Nation, Saint Augustine, Florida. Christina endured years of abuse before entering the foster care system. Passed from family to family, Christina finally landed in the home where she remained until she aged out of the system at 18. Graduating from Allen D. Nease high school with nowhere to turn, Christina spent over a year homeless and living in her car after aging out of foster care. Eager for a fresh start, Christina moved out to California where she took a series of odd jobs, eventually catching the eye of a pageant recruiter who suggested she compete in the Miss California pageant. In April of 2013, Christina won the title of Ms. California and has since dedicated herself to speaking out on behalf of abused children all over the country. She has been the recipient of ISF's 2019 Community Impact Award from the state of Texas and her work for child welfare reform across Texas, opened for the Special Olympics, spoken to congress on the foster care crisis pushing for bigger mental health budgets specifically trauma therapy services for all foster youth, the state of Florida had her to speak to hundreds of foster youth and state workers teaching trauma awareness, the city of Saint Augustine hailed her a hometown hero awarding her the yearly Child Abuse Prevention month from the Saint John's Commissioners office, She has spoken all over the country sharing her story, from appearances on the Today Show, Fox News, MSNBC, CBS, and others; Christina's story has encouraged millions that they too can heal from the wounds of trauma becoming all they dream to be. Her mission to change the way America handles foster youth is well on its way as she continues to travel the country as a foster care activist and mental health advocate as a National sought-after Speaker. She has launched her foundation the CHRISTINA MEREDITH FOUNDATION that advocates for foster care reform, human trafficking laws, homelessness initiatives, and mental health programs. Christina's first book, *Cindergirl*, a national best seller, published by Harper Collins, is slated to become a major motion picture. She concurrently serves in the US ARMY as a Signal Intelligence Officer in the US Army. She has a bachelor's degree in political science with a focus on Foreign Affairs. She is obtaining her masters in Global Security and splits her time between Jacksonville, FL and Austin, Texas.

Dr. Kerry Miller, PhD

Associate Professor and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs | Munroe Meyer Institute

Driven by a passion for inclusive education and interdisciplinary collaboration, Dr. Kerry Miller works to prepare the next generation of leaders in disability and early childhood fields. She is an Associate Professor in the Department of Education and Child Development at the Munroe-Meyer Institute (MMI), University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC), where she also serves as Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and Associate Director of the Department of Education and

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Child Development. In these roles, Dr. Miller champions innovative, interprofessional training models that strengthen workforce capacity and empower self-advocates. She partners with state agencies, universities, and community organizations to design and evaluate programs that improve systems of care for children, families, and individuals with developmental disabilities.

Christen Million, MS

Assistant Vice President, Early Childhood Mental Health | Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

Christen Million is Assistant Vice President of Early Childhood Mental Health at the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, where she assists state and community partners to develop systems of care that support the social-emotional wellbeing of children birth through age 8 through the Rooted in Relationships Initiative. She previously worked as an Early Childhood and Family Specialist, where she provided Pyramid Model training, coaching, and support for Early Childhood staff. In addition, Christen has also worked for Head Start as a Family Advocate and a Mental Health/Disabilities Specialist. She received her Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Sciences with a concentration in Child Development from the University of Arkansas, and a Master of Science in Developmental Therapy from Henderson State University. Christen also holds a Developmental Therapy certification through the state of Arkansas. Christen currently serves as a co-lead for the Nebraska Pyramid State Leadership Team, helps to support Nebraska's statewide Early Childhood Coaching and Pyramid systems, and co-leads the state level infrastructure development of PIWI and is a PIWI trainer.

Becky Morton, MS

Early Learning Connection Coach Consultant | Educational Service Unit #3

Becky D. Morton is an early childhood educator and has worked with infants and toddlers, preschool children, and school-age children. She has also facilitated parenting classes, child care training, CDA coursework, and college-level classes in a variety of settings for over 25 years. Becky has been an Early Childhood Coach for over 10 years and feels honored to have the opportunity to serve children, educators, and families. Becky currently works as the Early Learning Connection Coach Consultant for the Educational Service Unit #3 in LaVista, NE and supports coaches in various Nebraska Early Childhood Coaching Initiatives. She is dedicated to developing and cultivating growth in coaches who work with early childhood educators and families to improve access to quality care and education for each child. One of her professional goals is to work collaboratively with early childhood coaches to increase access to equitable and culturally responsive learning spaces for all children, families, and educators. Becky received her Master's degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Nebraska – Lincoln.

Itzeni Nayeli Lopez, MSW, MPA

Director of Elementary Learning Centers | Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties

Itzeni Nayeli Lopez is a wife, mother of three daughters, and passionate advocate for creating environments where children and families can thrive. She believes education is the foundation of curiosity and the gateway to new opportunities. Nayeli currently serves as the Executive Director of Elementary Learning Centers at the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties, overseeing programs that support eleven school districts. In this role, she partners with community organizations, district leaders, and families to expand access to high-quality educational opportunities and supportive resources. Her career has focused on strengthening family engagement and fostering inclusive, caring spaces for both children and educators. She previously served as a Family Learning Manager and Educational Navigator at the Learning

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Community Center of South Omaha, and as a bilingual liaison at Beals Elementary. She also directed the LIVE Leadership Camp for over a decade, helping young people explore leadership and service. Nayeli holds dual master's degrees in public administration and social work from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Guided by her belief that teachers deserve care, appreciation, and support, Nayeli's work centers on building collaborative strategies and fostering environments where every child can explore their innate talents and every educator can flourish.

Andrea Nelson, MSE

KU Project Manager, ECU Program and RBEI State Trainer | University of Kansas

Andrea Nelson, MSE has spent the last two decades in the field of early childhood special education providing services to young children and their families as a classroom teacher, itinerant service provider, and early childhood coach. She is a trainer and coach in Routines Based Interview, Getting Ready Strategies, and Early Intervention Coaching. She is a Project Manager and Early Childhood Fieldwork Coordinator at the University of Kansas.

Lindsey Ondrak, LIMHP, LPC, IMH-E®

Outreach and Training Specialist | Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children, UNL's Center on Children, Families, and the Law

Lindsey Ondrak is an Outreach and Training Specialist at the Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children at the University of Nebraska's Center on Children, Families, and the Law. Lindsey is a Licensed Independent Mental Health Practitioner and Licensed Professional Counselor and provides outpatient treatment for children and their families with specialized training in trauma and attachment. Lindsey has been working with children and families since 2007. She is trained in Child Parent Psychotherapy (CPP), Integration of Working Models of Attachment into Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (IOWA-PCIT), Trauma Focused Attachment Therapy/Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), Theraplay (Level 1), Brainspotting and Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR). Lindsey is also a Reflective Practice Trainer in the Facilitating Attuned Interactions (FAN) model, a Circle of Security Parenting Facilitator, a Provisional Trainer in the Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood (DC:0-5) and she is an Endorsed Infant Mental Health Clinical Mentor.

Michelle Paxton, JD

Director | Nebraska Children's Justice and Legal Advocacy Center (NCJC)

Michelle Paxton is the Director and Founder of the Nebraska Children's Justice and Legal Advocacy Center (NCJC), a first-of-its-kind initiative that strengthens legal advocacy for children and families through an integrated model of clinical education, professional training, and multidisciplinary consultation. A recognized leader in juvenile legal advocacy and rural justice reform, Michelle has secured over \$4 million in funding to expand clinical education, rural attorney training, and multidisciplinary legal advocacy initiatives serving children and families in Nebraska's juvenile courts. As an Assistant Professor at the University of Nebraska College of Law, Michelle teaches juvenile law and directs the Children's Justice Clinic. She also founded the Children's Justice Attorney Education Fellowship, which trains and supports attorneys—county attorneys, guardians ad litem, parents' counsel, and youth counsel—who serve in Nebraska's most underserved regions. Her work bridges courtroom practice and systemic reform, emphasizing reflective supervision, mental health-informed advocacy, and community-based solutions. Michelle is a frequent speaker at national and regional conferences, including the American Bar Association and the National Association of Counsel for Children. Her recent publications and media appearances highlight the role of legal training in combating rural legal deserts and improving outcomes for vulnerable children.

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Jasmine Platt, MSSW, LCSW

Implementation Director | Family Centered Treatment

Licensed Clinical Social Worker and MSSW graduate with 11 years of experience. Committed to social justice, education, and advocacy when providing clinical services to children and adolescents. Passionate about the intersection of child abuse and attachment through the intervention of TBRI. Believes in the power of systemic family work in treating challenging behaviors of children and adolescents through Family Centered Treatment (FCT). Involved with the FCT model since 2022 as a therapist and a supervisor and has been with the FCT Foundation since 2024.

Lisa Poppe, MS

Extension Educator | University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension

Lisa Poppe is an Extension Educator for the Early Childhood team from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension. Poppe has a bachelor's degree from UNL in Early Childhood Education and a master's degree from UNL in Family & Consumer Science. She focuses on the social emotional well-being of children and the family through her work for the early childhood team at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension. She also trains adults in developmentally appropriate practices for children birth - 8 years old and teaches a court mandated class called Co-Parenting for Successful Kids to adult audiences.

Kristine Ray, MA

Special Education Preschool Specialist and 619 Coordinator | Nebraska Department of Education Office of Special Education

Kristine Ray currently serves as Nebraska's 619 Coordinator and Education Specialist in the Office of Special Education at the Nebraska Department of Education. She is passionate about inclusive practices in the early childhood environment, serving young children and families from birth to age eight. Her background includes a Bachelor of Science in Inclusive Early Childhood Education, a Master of Art in Curriculum and Instruction, and a Prek-8 Certification in Administration. She enjoys partnering with others who want to improve practice, use data inquiry cycles and build capacity. Kristine has collaborated with UN-L on projects for TechEdge and Primarily Math as well as supported professional learning for community based sites. She is currently delving into the fascinating world of special education law.

Christopher Reid, JD

Chief Deputy County Attorney for the Juvenile Division | Lancaster County Attorney

Christopher Reid is the Chief Deputy County Attorney for the Juvenile Division in Lancaster County, Nebraska. A native of Puyallup, Washington, he earned his B.S. in Psychology from York College before completing his Juris Doctor with High Distinction at the University of Nebraska College of Law in 2011. Christopher has dedicated his career to protecting children and strengthening families. His passion for child advocacy began as an undergraduate intern with the Court Appointed Special Advocate program, where he saw firsthand the impact of the legal system on children's lives. Since then, he has served as both a prosecutor and leader, working in areas ranging from juvenile justice to domestic violence, sexual assault, and child exploitation cases. In his current role, Christopher supervises attorneys handling child abuse and neglect, and juvenile delinquency cases, while also overseeing diversion programs designed to keep young people out of the court system. He is a frequent speaker at regional and national conferences on child abuse, juvenile justice, and prosecution strategies.

Peggy Reisher, MSW

Executive Director | Brain Injury Association of Nebraska

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Peggy Reisher, MSW, serves as the Executive Director of the Brain Injury Association of Nebraska (BIA-NE), where she leads statewide efforts to enhance the quality of life for individuals with brain injuries and their families through advocacy, education, and resource facilitation. Under her leadership, BIA-NE has grown from a small team of three to a statewide organization with ten full-time staff members, sixteen support groups, and a broad network of partners dedicated to ensuring that all Nebraskans impacted by brain injury have access to the resources they need to thrive. Peggy earned her Master of Social Work degree from the University of Nebraska-Omaha and began her career at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital, where she served for fourteen years as the social worker on the brain injury unit. Her early clinical work laid the foundation for her lifelong commitment to helping survivors and families navigate life after brain injury and for building systems that better identify and respond to brain injury across communities. In addition to her role with BIA-NE, Peggy serves on the Board of Directors for the Brain Injury Association of America and previously chaired the United States Brain Injury Alliance. She is also a member of the National Association of State Head Injury Administrators and a frequent presenter at local and national conferences on topics related to brain injury, justice involvement, and systems change. Throughout her 30-year career, Peggy has been recognized for her leadership and advocacy with several awards, including NASW-Nebraska Social Worker of the Year, the Lincoln Journal Star Excellence in Health Care Award, the Safe States Advocate of the Year Award, and the Friend of NASHIA Award. Guided by the belief that connection and compassion create lasting change, Peggy continues to champion a statewide network of hope and support for those affected by brain injury.

Dawn Rockey

Executive Director | CASA for Lancaster County

Dawn came to CASA with a background in state government and commercial banking. She worked for the State of Nebraska for 12 years, in both the legislative and executive branches, serving as Nebraska State Treasurer from 1991-1995. She spent the next nearly 12 years with First National Bank of Omaha in several commercial banking related positions and as a Second Vice President in Treasury Services working with corporate bank customers on their cash management needs. Dawn has served as on the following boards: Cause Collective Lincoln (formerly Human Services Federation, 2024 to present), Lincoln Electric System Administrative Board (2005-2011), Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission (1997-2003), the Nebraska CASA Association (2013-2020), the United Way of Lincoln and Lancaster County Board (2020-2023), Aiding Angels Foundation (2013 to present), and the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation Board (2021 to present). Dawn is a graduate of UNL, with a bachelor's degree in International Affairs and completed graduate hours in Public Administration and Political Science. She has lived in Lincoln for more than 40 years. Her husband, Brian, is the Director of the Nebraska Lottery and they have a 27-year-old son.

Krista Roebke

Program Manager | Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children, UNL's Center on Children, Families, and the Law

Krista Roebke is the Program Manager with the Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children (NRPVYC) at the University of Nebraska's Center on Children, Families, and the Law. Krista manages the Supervisor/Leadership training program. She also provides training support, mentoring, and consultation for the Reflective Practice Training program, and is trained in the Components for Enhancing Career Experience and Reducing Trauma (CE-CERT) model. Prior to her current position, Krista worked as the Child Welfare Training Manager under the Child and Family Services training contract with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, providing statewide training for new and seasoned Child and Family Services Specialists. Prior to joining the Center on Children, Families, and the Law, Krista was a Child and Family Services

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Specialist and then a Child and Family Services Supervisor in the Lincoln office. Krista earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology and a Minor in Child Development and Family Relations from the University of Nebraska-Kearney.

Nikki Roseberry, MA

Associate Vice President, Early Childhood Mental Health | Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

Nikki Roseberry (She/Her) is the Associate Vice President of Early Childhood Mental Health at the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, where she assists state and community partners to develop systems of care that support the social-emotional wellbeing of children birth through age 8 through the Rooted in Relationships Initiative. She is the co-lead for the state level infrastructure development of PIWI and is a PIWI trainer. Nikki also led the development and implementation of the Child Care Referral Network in Nebraska for four years. Before working for Nebraska Children, she worked for the State of Nebraska - Division of Behavioral Health administering funds for and coordinating work on substance use and suicide prevention as well as mental health promotion. Nikki has spoken at several state and national conferences on topics such as Parents Interacting with Infants Implementation, data-based decision-making, and building state prevention systems. In 2017, Nikki was the recipient of the State of Nebraska's Excellence in Leadership Award. Nikki has two bachelor of arts degrees in Psychology and English from the University of Nebraska and her Master of Arts in Counseling from Doane University.

Stacy Scholten, MS, IMH-E®

Assistant Vice President, Early Childhood Mental Health | NCFF-Rooted in Relationships

Stacy Scholten currently serves as the Assistant Vice President of Early Childhood Mental Health at Nebraska Children and Families Foundation. In this position she provides technical assistance to communities who desire to partner with early childhood providers and systems to enhance the social emotional development of young children ages 0 – 8 years. She is also an active member on a number of statewide collaborative teams including the Pyramid State Leadership Team, Coach Development Network, and facilitates the Connect the Dots Partnership. She has presented at several state and national forums on topics such as Community Implementation of the Pyramid Model, Family Engagement through Community Resources, and Trauma Informed Responses in Family Engagement. Before coming to Nebraska Children in 2019, Stacy worked for twelve years in the child welfare system in both Nebraska and the Seattle Metro/Western Washington region. Seven of the twelve years was at the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services bringing system and DHHS divisional partners together to address the well-being of children and families involved with child welfare. She has her master's degree in early childhood development from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and is passionate about preventing families' long-term involvement in systems through early childhood and dual-generation services.

Connie Shockley

Early Childhood Information Specialist | PTI Nebraska

Connie has been with PTI Nebraska as the Early Childhood Information Specialist for the last 18 years. Connie provides information to parents on early intervention, special education, parental rights, and community resources with a focus on helping parents be their child's advocate in various programs. Connie also serves as a Parent Partner to the Nebraska Early Development Network. Connie has a Bachelor's degree in Speech and has previous experience working hands on with children with disabilities. She is also a mother to two children with special needs.

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Mark Smith, MS

Consultant | Westat

Mark Smith worked as a School Psychologist prior to joining the Munroe-Meyer Institute (MMI), specializing in the area of severe behavior in children, youth, and adults with disabilities in schools, outpatient clinics, and Developmental Disability Services agencies. At MMI, he provided behavioral therapy services and consulted with other providers in the Psychology Outpatient Clinical Program at the Munroe-Meyer Institute (2003-2006). He has worked primarily in the University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) Program at the Institute, to which he received a faculty appointment in 2016. His areas of emphasis include Early Intervention, Leadership and Lived Experience, Public Health, Information Dissemination, Disability Legislation and Policy, Program Development, and serving in leadership roles regarding disabilities supports and services at the local, state, and national levels. In his work in the area of Early Intervention, he served as a Parent Partner to the Early Development Network and as a Board member to the Division of Early Childhood among other activities. He is also the parent of and sibling to young adults with intellectual/developmental disabilities.

Brittnie Snyder, MS

Family Service/Nutrition Coordinator | Omaha Tribe of Nebraska Head Start and Early Head Start

Brittnie Snyder is the Family Services/Nutrition Coordinator at the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska Head Start and Early Head Start. She has been in this position for over 15 years. She wears many hats such as driving the bus, greeting families, and occasionally becoming one of the chefs as well. She holds a Master of Science degree in Child, Youth, and Family Studies and a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Business Administration. She led this program to obtain an Early Head Start grant as well as numerous one-time funding to further the program in building on and hiring more individuals, as well as serving more of the children and families. She is very passionate about early education and ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to start life off with a head start. She values the families and children she works with every day because without them, our program is nothing!

Jackie Steffen, MS

Early Childhood Extension Educator | University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension

Jackie Steffen is an Early Childhood Extension Educator with Nebraska Extension, serving Cedar, Knox, Dakota, Dixon, Pierce, and Wayne counties. She brings over 20 years of experience in both formal and informal education. Jackie provides educational programming for early childhood professionals, families, and young children, with a strong focus on early literacy and child development. Jackie earned her bachelor's in elementary education from Mount Marty University and her master's degree in education from the University of South Dakota.

Jea Theis, LIMHP, LCSW

Social Worker, Therapist | Jea Theis Therapy LLC

Jea Theis is a licensed independent mental health counselor, clinical social worker, and Registered Expressive Arts Therapist (REAT) working in the social services and mental health field for twenty years. Jea started out in the area of family violence, as a men's domestic violence counselor and CPS worker. After completing her MSW degree, Jea practiced in a community mental health counseling center, worked as a social worker and grief counselor for a home and hospice agency, and has spent many years working children and families impacted by sexual abuse and other trauma. Jea has received specialized training in EMDR (Eye-Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), Brainspotting, CPP (Child-Parent Psychotherapy), TFCBT (Trauma-focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy), Parent-child Interaction Therapy (PCIT),

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Teacher-Child Interaction Training (TCIT), Compassion Fatigue and Expressive Arts Therapy. Jea is passionate about increasing awareness around compassion fatigue - providing education and consultation to agencies and supporting those working in helping professions in our community. Jea has worked in private practice for the last ten years and is co-founder of an innovative mental health practice called Omaha Therapy and Arts Collaborative (OTAC), which opened April 2016. Jea also co-founded NEXT Foundation (Nebraska Expressive Arts Therapy Foundation) in 2022, a non-profit organization in Omaha with a mission of bringing Expressive Arts and Mental Health care to marginalized and underserved members of the community.

Fotima Turdalieva

Ph.D. Student & Research Assistant – Child Development/Early Childhood Education | University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Fotima Turdalieva is a Graduate Research Assistant at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln majoring in Child Development and Early Childhood Education.

Lindsey Turner, LMHP

Associate Executive Director | Voices of Hope

Lindsey Turner is the Associate Executive Director at Voices of Hope. Lindsey has been with Voices of Hope for over 8 years, previously serving as the Children's Services Coordinator in which she was active in developing the Safe and Healthy Families Initiative (SAHFI) and continues to serve on the management team. Lindsey is a Licensed Mental Health Practitioner and has clinical experience working with adults and youth experiencing mental and behavioral health challenges. Lindsey's vocational background includes various positions within the child welfare system as well as supporting adults with developmental disabilities. Lindsey received her MA in Counseling Psychology through the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and her BA in Psychology and Spanish through Nebraska Wesleyan University.

Libby Valerio-Boster

ACEs Training Specialist | BraveBe Child Advocacy Center

Libby Valerio-Boster is the ACEs Training Specialist at BraveBe Child Advocacy Center. She holds a degree in Community Health and Wellness from Nebraska. She is passionate about bringing a public health lens to the issues of Adverse Childhood Experiences and trauma. Through her work with people of all ages in a variety of settings including a non-profit for children facing a parent's cancer, a veteran rehabilitation program, and now at a child advocacy center, Libby has seen the impact of ACEs throughout the lifespan. In her current role, Libby provides research-based trainings to professionals and caregivers, equipping them with strategies to understand trauma, support healthy development, and promote resilience. She is committed to raising awareness and helping communities create safer, more supportive space for children and families.

LaDonna Werth, MS

Extension Educator | University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension

LaDonna is an experienced Early Childhood Extension Educator serving North Central Nebraska, with over a decade of expertise in developing innovative online classes for early childhood professionals. She holds a bachelor's degree in Vocational Family and Consumer Science Education and a master's degree in education from the University of Nebraska-Kearney. Passionate about enriching the lives of children and families in rural communities, LaDonna delivers research-based programs tailored to their unique needs. Her signature program, Fit and Healthy Kids, offers monthly classes, online conferences, and on-demand sessions that blend technology with education. LaDonna collaborates with ten other state Extension Services

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and utilizes social media to share the latest research and innovative strategies, inspiring and educating families and early childhood professionals.

Debra Wesselmann, MS, LIMHP

Licensed Independent Mental Health Provider | The Attachment and Trauma Center of Nebraska

Debra Wesselmann, MS, LIMHP is a mental health practitioner with 35 years' experience in the field of attachment trauma. She's a member of the faculty with the Institute of Francine Shapiro and on the board of the EMDR Journal of Practice and Research. She co-founded The Attachment and Trauma Center of Nebraska in 2008, where she co-developed and researched the integrative family therapy and EMDR therapy model for treating attachment trauma in children. Ms. Wesselmann has written and co-written numerous articles, book chapters, and books, including a clinician's guide on the integrative model and its accompanying parent guide. A recognized expert in attachment, trauma, and EMDR therapy, she conducts training sessions in the U.S. and internationally.

Dr. Lorey Wheeler, PhD

Director, Nebraska Academy for Methodology, Analytics and Psychometrics
Research Professor | University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Dr. Wheeler's collaborative research program focuses on the role of family and context in individual development, including outcomes related to interpersonal relationships, psychosocial adjustment, and educational and occupational outcomes. A second focus of her research pertains to complex research designs and statistical models used to answer questions about ecological, developmental, and relational phenomena, evaluation of intervention and prevention programs, and the translation of these methods into useful tools for researchers.

Annette Wragge, MEd, BCBA

State Coordinator | ASD Network/UNL

Annette holds a master's degree in Early Childhood Special Education from the University of Nebraska and a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from Doane College. She is a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) with extensive experience in training and interventions related to autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Currently, Annette serves as the State Coordinator for the Nebraska ASD Network at the University of Nebraska, where she collaborates with the ASD team and the Nebraska Department of Education's Special Education division to provide statewide training and consultation on autism, behavior, and related topics. As an Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) teacher, Annette provided early intervention services and worked closely with families, related service providers, and young children receiving special education services. In her current role as State Coordinator, she has assisted school teams in implementing intensive behavior supports, including the Balance Program, Practical Functional Assessment, Skills-Based Treatment, and the Universal Protocol for managing emerging and severe problem behaviors. Additionally, Annette supervises both individual and group fieldwork for school-based BCBA trainees across the state. Annette has also served as an adjunct faculty member at Concordia University and the University of Nebraska, teaching courses focused on instructional strategies for individuals with developmental disabilities. Passionate about improving outcomes for individuals with ASD, she has designed and facilitated workshops at both local and national levels, emphasizing evidence-based practices and behavioral interventions.

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Brian Wojcik

Assistive Technology Specialist/ ATP Education Supervisor | Assistive Technology Partnership - Education Program

Brian Wojcik currently works as the Education Program Supervisor for the Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership within the Nebraska Department of Education. He has worked previously as Special Education Faculty at the University of Nebraska at Kearney and as the Coordinator of the Special Education Assistive Technology (SEAT) Center at Illinois State University. As an educator, Brian has been integrating technology to meet the needs of students with diverse learning needs for well over three decades. In his current position, Brian works to help educators build capacity for delivering quality AT services within Nebraska.

Dr. Suzi Yokley-Busby, EdD

Training Specialist | Project Harmony

Dr. Suzi Yokley-Busby graduated from high school in Genoa, NE, and attended Nebraska Wesleyan University to attain a degree in Education, with an emphasis in Special Education. Suzi worked at Eastridge Elementary, in the Lincoln Public Schools, before moving to Victorville, CA to continue teaching elementary school. This foundation opened many doors for her as she transitioned to Omaha Public Schools and work with many Nebraska community partners, to become a lifetime advocate for youth and public school at large. Through the years she proudly wore the title of coach, staff developer, resource teacher, middle school lead teacher, high school transition administrator, mentor, and alternative school counselor. Suzi received her master's degree in Community Counseling from University of Nebraska Omaha, her certificate in School Counseling, her Superintendent's Certificate, as well as her Doctorate in Leadership & Administration, all from the University of Nebraska Omaha. Suzi's husband works at Westview High School in OPS, and for Campus Life/YFC. They are the parents of 22-year old twins that are currently in college and following in their parents' footsteps, as they also work with youth in the community.

Katie Zabel

Early Childhood Coach and Trainer | University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Katie Zabel joined the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2013 to serve as an early childhood coach on the Getting Ready 0-3 project. She trains early childhood educators in the Getting Ready approach and supports them through ongoing coaching to build strong partnerships with the parents and families they serve. More recently, Zabel also has been on the Design and Development teams for TransformED: Connections for Kids, where she is also a coach. Zabel earned a bachelor's degree in early childhood education/human development from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where she also received an elementary education endorsement.



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-Previous attendee



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