

Attendee Packet

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Welcome

Greetings from Marquita Little NuMan, Executive Director of Partnership for America's Children

Dear child advocates,

I'm delighted to welcome you to the 2023 SPARC Convening! The Partnership for America's Children is honored to coordinate the SPARC network and convene state child advocates dedicated to transforming child welfare policy.

I hope you find the convening engaging and insightful. Over the next several days, we'll have lots of thoughtful conversations and explore innovative approaches to rethinking child welfare systems by advancing policies prioritizing prevention, supporting families, centering equity, and leveraging community resources.

We invite you to participate in discussions that will help shape powerful advocacy strategies that accelerate the policy changes we hope to achieve through our collective effort. We'll reflect on crucial questions such as: How can we take a holistic approach to prevention? How can we ensure every child has a safe place to call home? How can we amplify the voices of people with lived experience in our advocacy? You will also have the chance to share your successes and delve into the pressing challenges child welfare advocates face today.

As we converse, network with one another, and explore how the SPARC network can help enhance your capacity to lead child welfare advocacy, I want to encourage all of us to hold in our minds the core purpose of our work as advocates—to support transformational and equitable policy change so *all* children can thrive. As we advocate in service to this purpose, some of the challenges we face are familiar, and others are facing new challenges. We hope we've crafted an agenda and created a space that allows us to leverage the collective wisdom, expertise, and strength of SPARC members and partners to address the pressing challenges that child welfare advocates are confronting today.

Again, welcome! Please refer to the attached agenda for more details about what we have planned. We hope you'll make powerful connections, have energizing conversations, and forge new connections. Finally, thank you to the Partnership team for your dedication and hard work planning the wonderful experience ahead of us, and I'd like to express our deep gratitude to the Annie E. Casey Foundation for hosting us and investing in this critical work.

In partnership,

Marquita Little NuMan

Convening Agenda

2023 SPARC Convening: Prioritizing prevention, preserving families, and enhancing family and child well-being.

Sunday, December 3	
<p>5:30 PM – 7:30 PM Hotel Indigo Edgar Allan Poe Room (Top floor)</p>	<p>Informal Reception for all Convening Attendees</p> <p>Remarks from Nora Collins-Mandeville, <i>ACLU of Illinois (SPARC Leadership Council)</i></p> <p>Pick up your name tag early and relax after a day of travel to enjoy light refreshments, drinks, and great company with SPARC members and Partnership staff. Later, if you are still hungry, you can grab some dinner at the hotel or go out on the town to enjoy a meal at one of Baltimore’s many restaurants.</p>
Monday, December 4	
<p>8:00 AM – 9:00 AM Annie E. Casey Foundation Opportunity Room (2nd Floor)</p>	<p>Name Tag Pickup and Breakfast</p> <p>All attendees are required to sign in at the front desk when entering the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s building. The front desk staff will have your name and you can pick up your name tag from Partnership staff on the second floor. Want to connect to wi-fi when you arrive? The network is “AECF – Guest” and the password is jimcasey.</p>
<p>9:00 AM – 9:30 AM</p>	<p>Welcome</p> <p>Elissa Hyne, <i>Partnership for America’s Children</i></p> <p>Marquita Little NuMan, <i>Partnership for America’s Children</i></p> <p>Todd Lloyd, <i>Annie E. Casey Foundation</i></p>

Monday, December 4 (continued)	
9:30 AM – 11:00 AM	<p>Investing in Families: A Holistic Approach to Prevention</p> <p>Sarah Jankowski, <i>New Jersey Department of Children and Families</i> Gretchen Cusick, <i>Chapin Hall</i> Susan Elsen, <i>Massachusetts Law Reform Institute</i> Danielle Mitchell, <i>Acenda Integrated Health</i> Christina Armstrong, <i>Greenway Family Success Center</i></p> <p>This discussion will focus on prevention strategies for meeting the needs of children and families before they become involved with the child welfare system. We will focus on family resource centers, and how these flexible and family-focused hubs of support and resources provide programs and targeted services to meet families' needs and prevent child welfare involvement. We will then turn our focus to the role of economic and concrete supports, highlighting the mounting evidence that macro-economic and public benefit policies designed to support families by meeting their basic needs, reducing material hardship, and buffering against income shocks, can prevent both child abuse and neglect.</p>
11:00 AM – 11:15 AM	Break
11:15 AM – 12:45 PM	<p>Partnering with Lived Experience: Policy & Practice Change</p> <p>Angel Petite, <i>FosterClub</i> Binley Taylor, <i>FosterClub</i> Bianca Bennett-Scott, <i>National Foster Care Youth & Alumni Policy Council and FosterClub Lived Experience Leader</i> Tina Harris, <i>National Foster Care Youth & Alumni Policy Council and FosterClub Lived Experience Leader</i> Melvin Roy, <i>FosterClub Lived Experience Leader</i> Geori Berman, <i>Florida's Children First</i> Rebekka Behr, <i>Florida Youth SHINE</i></p> <p>In this session, members will be provided tools and considerations to utilize in making a plan for Lived Experience Leader (LEx) engagement in their policy and practice agendas. SPARC members will receive direct insight from FosterClub, Lived Experience Leaders, Florida's Children First and Florida Youth SHINE on how to best engage LEx in creating, achieving and implementing their state level policy and practice agendas.</p>

Monday, December 4 (continued)	
12:45 PM – 1:45 PM	Lunch
1:45 PM – 3:15 PM	<p>Rethinking Mandated Reporting: Prioritizing Family Resources and Community Support</p> <p>Crystal Charles, <i>Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (NY)</i></p> <p>Jasmine Wali, <i>Child Welfare Policy Consultant</i></p> <p>Leanne Heaton, <i>Chapin Hall</i></p> <p>This session will explore alternative approaches to mandated reporting, shifting the narrative from a reactive model to one focused on empowerment, equity, and community through mandated supporting. In this engaging discussion, we'll dissect the impact of mandated reporting and subsequent CPS investigations and the documented immediate and lasting harm inflicted on both children and families. Finally, we will consider an alternative approach that provides families with resources and community support through equitable, harm reductionist, and anti-racist practices, while divesting from systems of surveillance and punishment.</p>
3:15 PM – 3:30 PM	Break
3:30 PM – 4:30 PM	<p>REI Workgroup Session</p> <p>Molly Dunn, <i>Children's Action Alliance (AZ)</i></p> <p>Kelsey Bala, <i>Rhode Island KIDS COUNT</i></p> <p>This interactive session will focus on the Model Neglect Statute Project of the Race, Equity, and Inclusion Workgroup. Through small group discussion and digital engagement, participants will have an opportunity to review and shape the draft model policy. Beyond identifying the strengths and deficits of the draft policy, we will discuss the feasibility of adopting a model policy in specific jurisdictions and probe what conditions need to be created to make a model policy both politically feasible and impactful for children and families.</p>
4:30 PM – 4:40 PM	<p>Day One Wrap Up</p> <p>Rachael Miller, <i>Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (SPARC Leadership Council)</i></p>
4:40 PM – 6:00 PM	Break

Monday, December 4 (continued)	
6:00 PM – 6:15 PM	Gather for Transportation to dinner Meet in the Indigo Hotel Lobby at 6:00 PM where we will gather and take transportation to La Tavola.
6:30 PM La Tavola Ristorante Italiano 248 Albemarle St Baltimore, MD 21202	Dinner This is a time to connect, celebrate, laugh, and have fun together! Shuttles back to the hotel will run 8:00 – 9:00 PM.
Tuesday, December 5	
8:00 AM – 8:50 AM Annie E. Casey Foundation Opportunity Room (2nd Floor)	Breakfast
8:50 AM – 9:00 AM	Day Two Opening Lesley Kelley, <i>Voices for Georgia’s Children (SPARC Leadership Council)</i>
9:00 AM – 10:00 AM	Child Welfare Policy Reform: A Critical Examination of State Child Abuse Registries Cathleen Palm, <i>The Center for Children’s Justice (PA)</i> Amy Rose, <i>Voices for Vermont’s Children</i> Shannon Moody, <i>Kentucky Youth Advocates</i> Molly Dunn, <i>Children’s Action Alliance (AZ)</i> Participants will engage in an informative and interactive discussion regarding the Child Abuse Registries Reform Project. The discussion will walk through identifying the problem and solutions, state examples, and plans for the reform effort moving forward.
10:00 AM – 10:15 AM	Break

Tuesday, December 5 (continued)

10:15 AM – 11:15 AM A Home for Every Child: Finding and Maintaining Placements for All Children and Youth (Part 1)

Amanda McKinney, *Children Now (CA)*

Alex Volpe, *Catalyst Center*

Tina Harris, *National Foster Care Youth & Alumni Policy Council and FosterClub Lived Experience Leader*

Bianca Bennett-Scott, *National Foster Care Youth & Alumni Policy Council and FosterClub Lived Experience Leader*

Brooke Derrick, *Wayfinder Family Services*

Donna Ibbotson, *Wayfinder Family Services*

Carol Ramirez, *Wayfinder Family Services*

The child welfare system faces persistent challenges placing older youth, sibling groups, children with unique needs, and LGBTQ+ identifying youth into stable homes. During this conversation, we will explore innovative strategies for not only finding but also maintaining placements for every child and youth, including finding and supporting kin caregivers.

11:15 AM – 11:30 AM Break and grab lunch

Tuesday, December 5 (continued)	
11:30 AM – 12:30 PM	<p>A Home for Every Child: Finding and Maintaining Placements for All Children and Youth (Part 2)</p> <p>Jenny Pokempner, <i>Youth Law Center (CA)</i></p> <p>Alex Volpe, <i>Catalyst Center</i></p> <p>Tina Harris, <i>National Foster Care Youth & Alumni Policy Council and FosterClub Lived Experience Leader</i></p> <p>Bianca Bennett-Scott, <i>National Foster Care Youth & Alumni Policy Council and FosterClub Lived Experience Leader</i></p> <p>Brooke Derrick, <i>Wayfinder Family Services</i></p> <p>Donna Ibbotson, <i>Wayfinder Family Services</i></p> <p>Carol Ramirez, <i>Wayfinder Family Services</i></p> <p>The child welfare system faces persistent challenges placing older youth, sibling groups, children with unique needs, and LGBTQ+ identifying youth into stable homes. During this conversation, we will explore innovative strategies for not only finding but also maintaining placements for every child and youth, including finding and supporting kin caregivers.</p>
12:30 PM – 12:45 PM	<p>Closing Remarks and Adjourn</p> <p>Robin Rosenberg, <i>Florida’s Children First (SPARC Leadership Council)</i></p>

Information and Logistics

Purpose

The purpose of the 2023 SPARC Convening is to provide SPARC partners with the space to connect and network with each other and key stakeholders to build and deepen peer-to-peer relationships; the opportunity to hear from leading experts on topics that shape the child welfare landscape; and the chance to share information and strategies for achieving policy change that benefits children, youth, and families involved in child welfare.

Locations

Annie E. Casey Foundation
503 North Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Hotel Indigo
24 West Franklin Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Wi-Fi network

AECF – Guest (Password: jimcasey).

Directions

From BWI (approx. 13 mi/20 km): Take I-195 to 95 North. Then take 95 North to Exit 53 (Inner Harbor). Turn right on Pratt St and go about four blocks to turn left on Charles St. Head north and turn left on Franklin where the hotel will be on the right. The parking garage is on the left.

From Baltimore Penn Station Amtrak (approx. 0.8 mi/1.29 km): Head south on N. Charles Street about 8 blocks. The Annie E. Casey Foundation building will be on the left. Turn right onto E. Franklin Street, and the hotel will be on the right.

Parking

The Franklin St Garage is situated near the historic Mount Vernon district of Baltimore and is close to many restaurants and bars. The garage entrance is located on the left-hand side of W Franklin St, just west of N Charles St, and is easily accessible off of I-83. GPS: 15 West Franklin Street.

The garage is open and staffed Sunday – Thursday 6:00 AM – 10:00 PM; Friday 6:00 AM – 12:00 AM; Saturday 8:00 AM – 12:00 AM and has a height restriction of 6.5 ft.

Drive-up Rates

Up to 1 hour: \$6.00

Up to 3 hours: \$9.00

Up to 12 hours: \$11.00

Up to 24 hours: \$13.00

Weekend (All day Saturday & Sunday): \$5.00

Weekday evening after 4PM: \$5.00

Health and Safety

Although we are not requiring participants to wear a mask, we highly encourage individuals to do so. We will have surgical and N95 masks available. If you are not feeling well or are showing COVID-19 symptoms, please stay home. If you become symptomatic while at the conference, please take a COVID-19 test and stay in your hotel room if the test comes back positive.

Expenses and Reimbursement

You will receive a physical copy of the reimbursement form as part of your retreat materials. If you are viewing this document digitally, you can download a copy of the form [here](#).

SPARC will cover the following expenses for SPARC member organizations.

- Hotel rooms for the nights of December 3 and 4
- Travel expenses, including
 - Airfare
 - train fare
 - mileage at 65.5 cents/mile (if you are traveling using your personal car)
 - rental car fee
 - parking

SPARC will provide reimbursement for up to \$500. If you anticipate that your travel expenses will exceed this amount, please reach out to Elissa Hyne (ehyne@foramericaschildren.org) for an exception.

Speakers

Sarah Jankowski

New Jersey Department of Children and Families

Sarah Jankowski graduated from the University of Delaware with a BA in Criminal Justice and from Montclair State University with a Master of Arts in Child Advocacy. She is a Supervising Program Support Specialist in the Office of Family Support Services, Division of Family and Community Partnerships, housed within New Jersey's child welfare agency, the Department of Children and Families. She joined this team after serving over twenty years with the state's child protection agency, the Division of Child Protection and Permanency. In that role, she supported families who were involved in CPS investigations, receiving CPS services, and whose children were in state custody. This led to her current position, where she leads a team of program support staff that provide technical and programming support to prevention programs throughout NJ. These include Family Success Centers and Kinship Navigator Programs, among others.

Gretchen Cusick

Chapin Hall

Dr. Gretchen Cusick is a Research Fellow at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Her research aims to support the transformation of youth-serving systems, to improve the responses to and experiences of youth involved with the legal system, and to inform community-based services and strategies. She is currently collaborating on a study of the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice's transformation efforts and on an evaluation of deferred prosecution for juveniles. Gretchen has experience with program evaluation, mixed-methods studies, administrative data analysis, and randomized controlled trials. She also brings to her work a rich experience building partnerships, which informs her collaborative approach to research and evaluation.

Gretchen previously operated a consulting firm aimed at building data and analytic capabilities of not-for-profit and other social impact organizations. She also served as the Director of Investments for Chicago Beyond, where she oversaw a portfolio of postsecondary education and violence prevention efforts. As the Research Director at the University of Chicago's Crime and Education Labs and in her former research role at Chapin Hall, Gretchen conducted evaluations of violence reduction and educational support programs. Her research has focused on multi-system involvement of youth, the transition to adulthood among vulnerable populations, public system responses to youth affected by trauma, and the reentry into communities of formerly detained youth. Gretchen has taught an MBA course on Decision Strategy at the Baumhart Center within Loyola University's Quinlan School of Business, masters-level courses in Data for Policy Analysis and Management at the University of Chicago, and courses in research methods and juvenile delinquency.

Gretchen obtained a PhD in Sociology with an emphasis in Crime, Law, and Justice from The Pennsylvania State University in 2004 and a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Miami University in 1998.

Susan Elsen

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

Susan Elsen joined MLRI's Family Law Unit in May 2001. She currently focuses on children and family issues including child custody and child welfare issues and directs her advocacy towards ensuring that children grow up in homes that are safe, financially secure, and provide a foundation for a healthy, productive adulthood. Before joining MLRI, she had a private family law practice from 1996–2006, was a staff attorney at Neighborhood Legal Services in Lynn from 1991-1996 and at South Middlesex Legal Services starting in 1988, and was an Assistant Corporation Counsel for the City of New York from 1984-1988. She graduated from Columbia Law School.

Christina Armstrong

Greenway Family Success Center

Christina Armstrong has worked in the Family Success Center network for 5 years, starting as the Family Partner with Greenway Family Success Center. She became the Site Director in 2021. Her main priority as a leader has been to expand services offered to Woodbridge Township, NJ and the greater Middlesex County area by incorporating more community partnerships and developing creative initiatives to increase access to concrete support. She has leveraged her role in local advocacy networks, such as the County Human Services Advisory Council, to promote family voice and advocate for greater access. Christina has a Bachelor's degree in Spanish from Rutgers university and a certificate in Translation and Interpreting.

Danielle Mitchell

Acenda Integrated Health

Danielle Mitchell is the Program Director of Acenda Family Success Centers and Atlantic CCYC. Danielle oversees the eight family success centers that Acenda manages in 6 counties throughout New Jersey. She works to enhance the community by managing successful centers by means of establishing relationships and partnering with community leaders and agencies. She has built a dynamic and supportive team atmosphere to advocate and strengthen community members. She works with participant leaders to create and implement community inspired, innovative and skill building activities and workshops. Danielle holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Elon University with a focus in Management & Leadership.

Angel Petite

FosterClub

Angel currently lives on the Oregon Coast, near FosterClub's headquarters. She is a descendant of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. Angel graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Superior with a Bachelor of Arts in Communicative Arts & Political Science. Before coming to FosterClub, Angel worked at a non-profit providing parenting resources to young parents and also at a County Human Services supporting individuals applying for and accessing public benefits. Through the years, Angel's desire to "make a difference" has transformed from one of providing service to recognizing that individuals and communities must be supported to make the changes in their own lives according to their own measures of well-being. Currently, she volunteers as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) in Clatsop County, Oregon. Her other achievements include a stellar gif game and being able to laugh at inopportune moments.

As Senior Policy Manager at FosterClub, Angel feels proud of her work when Lived Experience Leaders share the growth they've experienced during engagement and when field leaders and policymakers meaningfully engage LEx leaders as vital partners in transforming the system. Angel hopes to equip, connect and facilitate more LEx leaders across the country who will transform the system, ensuring young people have what they need to thrive.

Bianca Bennett-Scott

National Foster Care Youth & Alumni Policy Council & FosterClub

Bianca Bennett-Scott is the definition of a true independent woman. Reigning from the birthplace of hip hop, The Bronx NY, she has not only endured many trials and tribulations but has conquered them with style and grace. Due to her family's substance abuse, Bianca was placed in the New York State Foster Care system at the age of 2 and 13 and spent a total of eight nonconsecutive years before being permanently placed with her maternal grandmother. Although she has dealt with irreversible trauma, her resistance and perseverance is a lesson to all. Bianca grounds herself in the power of education and commitment to justice. She is a strong advocate for the Black Lives Matter movement, Restorative Justice in addition to advocating for people whose voice has been hindered by social injustices.

Bianca is a first-generation college graduate with an Associate's Degree in Business Administration and a Bachelor of Arts in Law and Government. In addition, Bianca is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated, a member of the National Foster Care Alumni Council, and Program Manager and Supervisor for You Gotta Believe, a non-profit that finds families for older youth in care. In the future, Bianca strives to obtain her Master's Degree in Public Administration and plans to create a non-profit of her own to help youth with similar struggles she has faced. Bianca is a proud product of the foster care system and uses her experiences to not only change her life but impact others.

Binley Taylor

FosterClub

As the director of system change for FosterClub, Binley feels a sense of both pride and satisfaction in his role when reminded of the impact that FosterClub's work has on the lives of others. When he began his career in social services nearly a decade ago, Binley chose this career path because he wanted to work in a field where there was a clear need for improvement. He believes that best practices in the field of child welfare need to be changed, and he hopes to be a recognized leader, known for collaborating with others who want to positively transform the industry.

Binley earned a Master of Social Work degree from The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and has worked at several child welfare agencies in varying capacities. Through those roles, Binley has been able to see firsthand how families in need serve as some of the most vulnerable individuals in society. These experiences have provided him with unique insight for the urgency for child welfare reform and systemic change.

Melvin Roy

FosterClub

Meet Melvin Roy: Born and raised in Richmond, Virginia, Melvin entered foster care in 2014.

Following his time in care, Melvin went off to Old Dominion University where he studied in Human Services with a minor in Psychology. While in his undergraduate career, Melvin felt inspired from his own experiences in care to create an organization aimed at helping youth in foster care reach higher education which he named 'Foster-U.'

After the founding of Foster-U, he was awarded the opportunity to work with organizations such as FosterClub, American Express, Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute and The U.S. House of Representatives, where he began to lay the foundation for his future.

Now a recent graduate with his B.S. in Human Services, Melvin currently lives in Washington, D.C. where he continues his advocacy for youth in foster care by serving in a multitude of ways from being a Court Appointed Special Advocate (C.A.S.A), an Advisory Board Member for Tidewater Friends of Foster Care and Connect our Kids as well as serving on the Board of Directors for United Methodist Family Services.

Melvin has committed to continue serving youth and families to not only fuel the love and passion he has for this work but to be a voice for those vulnerable youth and families who need it most.

Tina Harris

National Foster Care Youth & Alumni Policy Council & FosterClub

Tina Harris (She/Her/Hers) is a 28-year-old First-Gen college student who recently obtained her double Associates in Clovis, New Mexico. Currently, Ms. Harris is working alongside a variety of advocacy groups, both statewide and nationally, to offer her expertise as a youth consultant and youth engagement trainer. Ms. Harris is also an active state board member of the New Mexico Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee.

After being subjected to difficult experiences at a young age, she is now an advocate for current or former youth that have been involved with the Child Welfare and the Juvenile Justice/Criminal Systems. When not attending classes, or hanging out with her extensive family both biological and adoptive, Ms. Harris has a passion for traveling the states and hopes to go out of the country for the first time by the end of 2024! She enjoys long hours curled up with a book, backyard cookouts and lounging in the sun with her emotional support feline, Kilo most of all.

Geori Berman Seldine

Florida's Children First

Geori Berman Seldine, Executive Director of Florida's Children First (FCF), has spent most of her career fearlessly advocating for children and ensuring that children and youth are put first when making policy decisions. She has worked to make meaningful, sustainable changes to the child welfare system to transform children's lives. Geori became Florida's Children First's Executive Director in 2022, after nearly a decade of working at Florida's Children First.

Prior to becoming Executive Director of Florida's Children First, Geori served as the Statewide Director of Florida Youth SHINE (FYS), a statewide youth advocacy organization for current and former youth involved in the child welfare system. During this time, she organized, expanded, and developed Florida Youth SHINE into a national model for youth advocacy best practices while managing the daily operations, communications, curriculum, grants, and programs for FYS. She worked alongside young people to recruit, engage, train, educate and empower them by providing innovative programs and a platform to amplify their voices on a local, state, and national level. Geori's advocacy and commitment to including youth with lived experience in systemic change has resulted in significant policy and practice changes that improve the lives of Florida's Children.

Prior to joining Florida's Children First, Geori worked in the field of Student Affairs in leadership, social justice, and student programming where she developed innovative programs to arm students with the tools and support they need to be successful change agents and leaders. Additionally, she worked with the Enough is Enough Anti-Violence Campaign, The Global Center for Social Entrepreneurship, and as an AmeriCorps at Boys Town.

She is a graduate of Leadership Florida's Connect program and has served as a National Officer to Theta Phi Alpha, a Conference Delegate for the National Panhellenic Council, a Mentor for the Clinton Global Initiative University, and as a member of the Junior League of Boca Raton.

Geori received her Master's Degree in Educational Leadership from the University of the Pacific and her Bachelor's Degree in Communications and Sociology from Florida Atlantic University.

Rebekka Behr

Florida Youth SHINE

Rebekka Behr is Chair of the Florida Youth SHINE Statewide Board. She is a graduate from The Florida State University with a Bachelor of Science in Family & Child Sciences as well as Sociology. Since graduating in Spring 2020, Rebekka started working with the Florida Department of Health and has moved up in the Human Resources Department since then.

Crystal Charles

Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy

Crystal Charles is a Senior Policy Analyst. She conducts policy and data analysis, leads and participates in coalitions, and advocates on behalf of the Schuyler Center in the areas of child welfare, child poverty, home visiting, and other related issues. During her time at Schuyler Center, Crystal has earned an Executive Certificate of Nonprofit Leadership from Baruch College, the result of her training in the Spring 2022 cohort of Leadership Fellows New York.

Prior to joining Schuyler Center, Crystal was a Public Administration & Policy PhD student, Teaching Assistant and Research Assistant at the University at Albany. Her research focused on how collaboration between nonprofit organizations and government agencies, the internet, and social media can be employed as vehicles for social change, increased civic participation, and government transparency. Before coming to Albany, Crystal was a Tow Policy Advocacy Fellow at the Fortune Society.

Crystal holds a Master of Public Administration and a Bachelor of Arts in Humanities and Justice from John Jay College.

Jasmine Wali

Policy advocate & consultant on child welfare/family policing and economic justice

Jasmine Wali is a policy advocate and consultant on child welfare, family policing, and economic justice. Previously Jasmine served as the Director of Policy and Advocacy at JMAC for Families and has been a practicum instructor at the Columbia School of Social Work. Jasmine has worked in the nonprofit and education sector around the foster system for nearly a decade. She received her MSW from Columbia University with a policy emphasis. Jasmine was a Fisher Cummings Fellow, working at the federal Office on Trafficking in Persons and served on the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse project committee to make program eligibility recommendations for federal funding. Her lens on the Family Regulation System is shaped by her experiences on a personal, direct service, and policy level.

Leanne Heaton

Chapin Hall

Dr. Leanne Heaton is a Research Fellow and Data Manager at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. She serves as the Principal Investigator and/or Research and Evaluation Lead on several state-funded human services public policy initiatives, and supervises a team of researchers and analysts. In this capacity, she advises human service administrators on their use of research, evaluation, and data to inform development, implementation, and monitoring of public policies to improve outcomes for vulnerable children, youth, and families. Leanne provides guidance to state child welfare agencies implementing the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) provisions of the Family First Prevention Services Act and serves as a Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) subject-matter expert. She provides guidance on multiple evaluation projects within child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Prior to joining Chapin Hall, Leanne was a Senior Study Director at Westat. During her tenure, she focused on initiatives that informed practice and policy in child welfare and juvenile justice systems. These included the Annie E. Casey Foundation's On the Frontline Initiative designed to enhance child welfare agencies' organizational capacity to improve decision-making practices; the Permanency Innovation Initiative (PII), a federal initiative to reduce long-term foster care; and the National Survey of Youth in Custody (NSYC), a federally funded study to identify the prevalence of rape and sexual assault in juvenile facilities. The results of PII lead to a promising evidence-informed intervention for supporting LGBTQ youth in foster care. The findings from NSYC are widely disseminated to a broad range of audiences and were instrumental to the development and implementation of standards designed to reduce sexual victimization in juvenile facilities across the country (i.e., the PREA Standards for Juvenile Facilities).

Leanne holds a PhD in Social Work from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), a Master of Social Work from the University of Alabama, and a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work from the University of Montevallo. She is licensed as a clinical social worker in Virginia.

Molly Dunn

Children's Action Alliance

Molly Dunn is the Director of Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice at the Children's Action Alliance. Deeply influenced by her own early experience as a foster child, Molly has dedicated her career to improving outcomes of system-involved youth. As a provider of direct legal services, Molly has represented hundreds of children and youth in dependency, juvenile justice, education, immigration, family law, and other proceedings. As a clinical instructor at Stanford and Loyola law schools, she has mentored and guided other advocates to serve system-involved youth. Prior to joining Children's Action Alliance, Molly directed FosterEd Arizona. Molly holds a B.A. from Macalester College and a J.D. from Stanford Law School.

Kelsey Bala

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Kelsey Bala is a policy analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. Kelsey is responsible for policy analysis, advocacy, research, and project management on child welfare and juvenile justice issues. Kelsey received her Bachelor of Science from Gordon College and her Master of Public Health from Brown University with a concentration in Maternal and Child Health. Kelsey has a background in adolescent mental health and worked as a Clinical Research Assistant at Bradley Hasbro Children's Research Center on several prevention-based research studies, including one on dating violence prevention interventions for juvenile court-involved girls. While at Brown, Kelsey wrote her master's thesis on how Adverse Childhood Experiences can affect adult health. Kelsey is a Providence native. She has strong ties to the community and a deep knowledge of the needs of children and youth and is passionate about eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Kelsey is currently Rhode Island's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) State Coordinator and an Annie E. Casey Rising Leaders for Results Fellow.

Cathleen Palm

The Center for Children's Justice

Cathleen believes every child is unique and deserves to be nurtured, protected and connected to well-supported families. She has spent nearly three decades working to improve the way in which systems (often publicly funded or managed) engage with and work to support children, youth and families. She has served as a consultant with a variety of non-profits, including the Pennsylvania Chapter of Children's Advocacy Centers/MDTs, The Coalition for Low-Income Pennsylvanians, Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape, the United Way of Pennsylvania, and Pennsylvania Alliance for Children and Families. In addition, she served as a consultant to the Congressionally created Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities (CECANF). Her professional experiences include time spent within the Pennsylvania Department of Auditor General, Pennsylvania Senate and United States Senate. She has served as an appointed member of a variety of state-level initiatives, including the Governor's Commission for Children and Families, Pennsylvania's Children's Trust Fund, the Joint State Government Commission's Advisory Committee on Addiction Treatment and the Governor's Early Learning Council.

Shannon Moody

Kentucky Youth Advocates

Shannon Moody is the Chief Policy and Strategy Officer at Kentucky Youth Advocates. Shannon recently earned her PhD in Social Work at the University of Kentucky to further strengthen her ability to understand and effectively translate social science research. At Kentucky Youth Advocates Shannon strives to effectively engage all who will listen around the fact that our future is dependent upon the success of children and their parents/caregivers within our communities.

Amy Rose

Voices for Vermont's Children

Amy studied Psychology, Sociology, and Anthropology at St. Michael's College and spent her "semester abroad" exploring history and art at Xavier University in New Orleans. She participated in Americorps while a student and then the Peace Corps gave her the opportunity to experience life in Kenya. Prior to Voices, Amy supported program development and support for youth who were not getting their needs met by traditional structures of support. She also spent some time with the Center for Best Practices within CT's Judicial Branch - primarily focused on the Raise the Age initiative and bringing in home services to the state. Exposure to violence and loss have shaped Amy's desire to understand historical, familial, and community violence and create structures where healing is possible. She is most interested in the intersections of reproductive justice, environmental justice, racial justice, and economic justice. As the policy director for Voices for Vermont's Children, Amy strives to support individual and community stability, so that we can all undue harm and promote well being.

Amanda Miller McKinney

Children Now

Amanda Miller McKinney is a Senior Associate of Child Welfare policy at Children Now where she focuses on implementation of large-scale policy initiatives impacting children, youth, and families involved with the child welfare system. Amanda comes to Children Now with over ten years of experience improving outcomes for children, youth, and families across child- and youth-serving systems. Previously, Amanda worked for The Institute for Innovation & Implementation where she led state and federally funded projects and provided technical assistance to counties and states on implementation of evidence-based practices and cross-system approaches to improving outcomes for children and youth involved in the child welfare and/or juvenile justice systems or experiencing homelessness. Amanda also has prior experience supporting implementation of Family Finding in child welfare departments across the U.S. and Canada as part of the National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness. She also has experience supporting provision of behavioral health treatment for children in a variety of special education, juvenile detention, and community-based settings. Amanda holds an MSW from the University of Maryland School of Social Work and a BA in Psychology from the University of Chicago.

Alex Volpe
Catalyst Center

Alex Volpe is the Catalyst Center’s Director of Programs. Alex has been working with underserved youth and families for 20+ years. Upon completing her Master’s in Social Work at the University of Chicago in 2005, Alex worked as a therapist at Mercy Home for Boys and Girls, a residential treatment facility in Chicago. After moving to the East Bay with her family in 2008, Alex began working at Bay Area Youth Center(BAYC)/Sunny Hills Services (now “Side by Side”), a nonprofit serving foster and probation youth. Alex led BAYC as the Executive Director from 2013-2017. Under Alex’s leadership, BAYC significantly expanded mental health and housing services to youth in Alameda County and earned a reputation as an agency who would provide shelter and services to the highest need youth who were often terminated from other services due to their acute symptoms and behaviors. Alex is committed to the principles of trauma-responsive care and providing culturally relevant services to young people and their families.

Following her tenure at Bay Area Youth Center, Alex held a number of contract and interim positions, including serving as the Interim Chief Operating Officer at Unity Care Group, as well as the Executive Director at the Ann Martin Center. In her current role at the Catalyst Center, Alex and her team support providers and counties throughout the state in improving services and placement options for systems-involved youth, with a particular focus on serving our youth with significant unmet complex needs.

Prior to becoming a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Alex received her JD from the University of Texas in Austin and worked as a corporate and securities attorney in San Francisco and Austin. She currently lives in Oakland with her children.

Carol Ramirez
Wayfinder Family Services

Carol Ramirez, LCSW, has been with the organization since 1994 and serves as the Vice President and Chief Program Officer. She is a powerful advocate for children serving in multiple leadership roles, including past board member for Voice for Adoption. Carol has extensive child welfare experience and leadership as well as advocacy and policy work. Carol received her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Social work from California State University Sacramento and is a licensed clinical social worker.

Brooke Derrick
Wayfinder Family Services

Brooke Derrick joined the Wayfinder team in 2020 after a merger with Lilliput Families. Brooke served at Lilliput as Program Director for 5 years and prior to that as Associate Director at AASK Adopt A Special Kid for 6 years. As Program Director, Brooke leads a dynamic team of supervisors and staff serving thousands of children and families in kinship, foster, and adoption services in five sites throughout the California Bay Area region. She has spent the last 20 years working in the field of social welfare to help children secure safe, loving, permanent homes. Brooke received her Master's Degree in Social Welfare with a focus on Management and Planning from the University of California, Berkeley.

Donna Ibbotson
Wayfinder Family Services

Donna joined the Lilliput, part of Wayfinder Family Services, in 2001. As a program director for the Central Valley, Donna leads a team of program supervisors and staff serving kinship, family finding, foster care, adoption, and post adoption services in four sites throughout the Northern California region. Donna has worked on expanding foster care including kinship care, kinship support services, family finding and post-adoption programs. She is committed to improving services and resources for children and families.

Jenny Pokempner
Youth Law Center

Jenny Pokempner joined YLC in the spring of 2021 as the Policy Director, working on both child welfare and juvenile justice issues, with particular emphasis on the needs and entitlements of older foster youth. Prior to joining YLC, Jenny worked at the Juvenile Law Center as a senior attorney and has played a large role in state and national reform work related to older youth in foster care, with areas of focus on: older youth permanency, extended foster care, eliminating group care, and improving educational and employment outcomes and opportunities. Jenny values using legal strategies that are informed by and done in partnership with young people with experience in foster care. Jenny is based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

In-Person Participant List

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