

26TH Annual



SHOULDER TO SHOULDER VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

Strengthening Children and Families

October 28 & 29, 2026

Shoulder to Shoulder is a collaborative partnership between community agencies to provide quality training and networking opportunities to those who work with, support and care for children and families who have been connected to Child Welfare. We rely on community partners and collaborations to operate. Conference scholarship and program funding was made possible by Oregon Resource Family Alliance and Oregon Department of Human Services Child Welfare. Contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the grantors.

2025 Shoulder to Shoulder Planning Committee



www.stsconference.com

2025 Shoulder to Shoulder Conference



Virtual and In-Person
Options Available!



A Love Stretched Life: How a Foster/Adoptive Mom and Birth Mom Became Family
Jennifer Bracken and Jillana Goble

Tuesday, October 28, 2025

In-person @ Holiday Inn Portland Airport
Pre-Conference Event | 5:30-8:30 p.m. PDT
Appetizers, dessert & refreshments included



Voices of Youth: Foster Care Alumni Panel

Justine Bautista, Gloria Big Back, Alecia McConnell and Julio

Wednesday, October 29, 2025

In-person @ Holiday Inn Portland Airport
Full Day Conference | 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. PDT
Morning and afternoon meals included



Nurturing Belonging: Cultivating Hope in Uncertain Times

Dr. Caprice Hollins
Spanish interpretation available

Presentations in English



Collaborative Problem Solving: A skills building approach to help bring calm and greater connection to your home
Ted Layman, LCSW, Therapist



The Art of Conversation
Melody Aguayo, Ph.D.
Adoption Trauma Coach



Parenting Brain Power-Up
Jessica Sinarski, LPMHC

Presentations in Spanish



Introducción a la resolución colaborativa de problemas
Maria Sanders, LSW



Apoyando el crecimiento después de experiencias difíciles
Maria Sanders, LSW



El Arte de la Conversación
Melody Aguayo, Ph.D.
Adoption Trauma Coach

Visit the STS Conference site for registration and scholarship details. A limited number of caregiver scholarships are available.



www.stsconference.com



2025 Shoulder to Shoulder Speakers & Presentations



PRE-CONFERENCE: TUES, OCT 28, 2025

5:30 PM – 8:30 PM

Pre-Conference Reception

4:00 PM - 5:00 PM

Oct 28, 2025 | 5:30 - 8:30PM (PDT) Pre-Conference (Tuesday)

Pre-Conference Reception

5:30 - 6:30 PM

Join us for an IN-PERSON Shoulder to Shoulder Pre-Conference Event, held at the Holiday Inn Portland Airport (I-205) in Portland, OR. Come to connect with others, enjoy some light refreshments, appetizers and desserts. We'll have the opportunity to hear from inspiring speakers.

There is also the opportunity to attend the speaker portion of this evening virtually.



A Love Stretched Life: How a Foster/Adoptive Mom and Birth Mom Became Family

6:30 PM (PDT)

Sixteen years ago, Jillana Goble walked into the Juvenile Court House and met Jennifer Bracken. Jillana was fostering Jennifer's 6-month-old baby boy at the time. At this time, Jillana and Jennifer did not know nor trust each other. At court, Jillana handed Jennifer a photograph of her child, Jennifer took it, started crying and they unexpectedly found one another giving a hug. Jillana told Jennifer "I'm rooting for you".

What followed was many years—two child welfare cases— and lots of twists and turns as Jillana and Jennifer put down planks to build a relational bridge without a blueprint. Against the backdrop of many ups and downs, they grew to care for one another deeply. Today, they see one another firmly as family.

Their story will leave you inspired and encouraged by the possibilities you also have to be a bridge-builder in your own respective roles (whether on the child-welfare side, community partner, bio parent, foster parent, adoptive parent).

2025 Shoulder to Shoulder Speakers & Presentations



Speaker(s): Jennifer Bracken and Jillana Goble

Jennifer Bracken and Jillana Goble have been in relationship for 16 years and counting. They first met at the Multnomah County juvenile court where Jillana was fostering Jennifer's 6 month baby boy. Jennifer grew up in the Oregon foster care system experiencing 63 different homes from the age of 9-18. All of her 4 children have been child-welfare involved at some point. Jillana and her husband, Luke, fostered and adopted Jennifer's 3rd child and became relative providers (via adoption) for her 4th child. After two stints in relative care with the Goble family, Jennifer has been successfully parenting her 4th child for the last 9 years. She has 9.5 years clean, which Jennifer calls the "proudest accomplishment" of her life. Jillana and her husband, Luke, have 5 children, three of whom who first entered their family via foster care. She works for Every Child Oregon, a community partner to ODHS Child Welfare. Jillana is the author of *A Love-Stretched Life: Stories on Wrangling Hope, Embracing the Unexpected and Discovering the Meaning of Family*, which has given her and Jennifer many opportunities to speak to various audiences all over the county.



Voices of Youth: Foster Care Alumni Panel

7:30 PM (PDT)

This pre-conference event offers a unique opportunity to listen and learn from young adults with a wealth of knowledge and insight, graciously sharing their firsthand experiences with conference participants. A dynamic panel consisting of individuals with lived experience in the foster care system will share about their journey and the impact of time spent in foster care on their lives. Attendees will leave with greater understanding around the impact of trauma while gleaned practical strategies on how caregivers may enhance their affirmation and support of children and young adults in care. You won't want to miss this valuable opportunity!

Speaker(s): Justine Bautista, Gloria Big Back, Alecia McConnell, and Julio



My name is **Justine Bautista**, I am an enrolled member of the Northern Cheyenne tribe, a single mom, a first generation high school graduate, a college graduate from Mount Hood Community college and former N.I.C.W.A board member. Importantly I am a former indigenous foster youth, where I spent 2,557 days in the system where I faced many challenges, such as abuse, identity confusion and immense sorrow. Yet I am thankful for my experience because I came out a champion and I use my experience in the system to fight for change, children are sacred and our direct future

2025 Shoulder to Shoulder Speakers & Presentations



which I want to rise and speak up for the future where our children aren't separated but their families and selves are supported.

Peveensetowoesta, Mokee'e nahisivih Nahisdonah, navi'sipevidan.

Hello, my name is **Gloria Big Back**, I am 20 years old, and I am an enrolled member of the Northern Cheyenne tribe. I spent 17 years as a ward of the state, and am now in school studying social work. My goals are to graduate with my MSW and to continue my advocacy work for BIPOC youth and youth of color in the foster care system, as well as youth in guardianship.

Alecia McConnell is a dedicated foster care youth advocate who draws on her lived experience as a former foster youth to amplify the voices of young people in the system. She is committed to advancing healthy, long-term solutions that support youth as they transition out of care and into adulthood. Alecia brings a unique perspective to her advocacy work, combining personal insight with a passion for systemic change.

Julio – I am 17 years old. I am Blackfeet. I went into foster care when I was 7. I lived in 6 different foster homes. I went into guardianship when I was 12.

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ALL DAY CONFERENCE: WED, OCT 29, 2025

8:30 AM - 4:00 PM (PDT)



Session A 9:00 - 10:15AM (PDT)

Nurturing Belonging: Cultivating Hope in Uncertain Times

ENGLISH

[View Handout](#)

Presentation is in English/ Spanish interpretation is available

interpretación en español disponibles / Presentacion es en inglés

In a world marked by rapid change and uncertainty, leaders and community members hold the unique power to shape the culture of belonging within our organizations. This keynote address will inspire attendees to foster authentic connections and create inclusive spaces where everyone feels valued. Centered around the three fundamental pillars of hope, the session will provide practical strategies for reimagining workplaces as communities rooted in belonging and shared humanity. By rejuvenating hope and standing united, we can champion initiatives that uplift spirits, strengthen teams, and cultivate workplaces that inspire everyone to be their best selves. Together, we will explore how this renewed focus on belonging can pave the way for a brighter, more inclusive future for our children.

Speaker(s): Dr. Caprice Hollins, Ph.D.

Caprice D. Hollins was born and raised in Seattle, Washington. She received a B.A. in psychology from Seattle University and an M.A. and Psy.D. in Clinical Psychology with an emphasis in Multicultural and Community Psychology from California School of Professional Psychology—LA.



Dr. Hollins has over 25 years of experience working with ethnically diverse populations, facilitating workshops on racism, and teaching graduate courses, including 20 years with The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology as an Associate Professor of Counseling.

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After serving as the first Director of Equity and Race Relations for Seattle Public Schools she co-founded Cultures Connecting, LLC in 2008. Her organization provides culturally relevant professional development, keynotes, leadership coaching, and consulting services to organizations seeking to improve their ability to effectively engage in race conversations and dismantle institutional racism www.culturesconnecting.com.

Dr. Hollins wrote *Inside Out: The Equity Leader's Guide to Undoing Institutional Racism* and co-authored *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Strategies for Facilitating Conversations on Race*. She is a Seattle 2020 TEDx Speaker, on *What White People Can Do to Move Race Conversations Forward*.

Dr. Hollins works hard to balance her passion and commitment to equity and social justice while at the same time centering the importance of family and community.

Cultivando la pertenencia: Cultivando la
esperanza en tiempos de incertidumbre

INTERPRETACIÓN EN ESPAÑOL

interpretación en español disponibles / Presentacion es en inglés

En un mundo marcado por cambios rápidos e incertidumbre, los líderes y los miembros de la comunidad tienen el poder único de dar forma a la cultura de pertenencia dentro de nuestras organizaciones. Este discurso de apertura inspirará a los asistentes a fomentar conexiones auténticas y crear espacios inclusivos donde todos se sientan valorados. Centrada en los tres pilares fundamentales de la esperanza, la sesión proporcionará estrategias prácticas reimaginando los lugares de trabajo como comunidades arraigadas en la pertenencia y la humanidad compartida. Al reavivar la esperanza y mantenernos unidos, podemos impulsar iniciativas que eleven el espíritu, fortalezcan a los equipos y cultiven lugares de trabajo que inspiren a todos a alcanzar su mejor versión. Juntos, exploraremos cómo este enfoque renovado en la pertenencia puede allanar el camino hacia un futuro más brillante e inclusivo para nuestros niños.

Speaker(s): interpretación en español

Presentation is in English/ Spanish interpretation is available

interpretación en español disponibles / Presentacion es en inglés

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Session B 10:30 - 11:45 AM (PDT)

Collaborative Problem Solving®: A skills building approach to help bring calm and greater connection to your home.

ENGLISH

[View Handout](#)

Presentation is in English | Presentacion es en Ingles

In this training Ted Layman, LCSW, Family Therapist at Restore Therapy and Think:Kids Collaborative Problem Solving® Certified Trainer and Certification Instructor, will be exploring how the Collaborative Problem Solving® approach can be a tool for your family to bring more balance to your home through thoughtful parental leadership and direct engagement with your youth solving many of every day's behavioral problems in a trauma informed and neurobiologically grounded manner.

Ted will be providing a brief overview of the approach, followed by many tips and tricks for applying the Collaborative Problem Solving® approach with quite challenging youth pulling from his 15 years' experience supporting both foster/adoptive families and biological families using this model. We'll wrap up with time for Q&A at the end.

Speaker(s): Ted Layman, LCSW, Family Therapist

Ted specializes in Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS), and the director of The Family Clinic at Restore Therapy. Collaborative Problem Solving is an evidenced based practice strongly rooted in the latest neuroscience that has been shown to improve parent-child relationships, develop skills in children when conventional behavior modification models have not, and shown to reduce symptoms of Oppositional Defiant Disorder as well as parenting stress. Ted particularly enjoys assisting parents at feeling more confident and competent in connecting with their children and managing their challenging behaviors. When asked by people what he does for a living his answer is: "I teach adults how to listen to children."



Ted is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and founding clinician at Restore Therapy. He earned his B.A. in Social Work and his Masters of Social Work from Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. Ted holds certification in the Collaborative Problem Solving from Think:Kids based at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, MA. From time to time he travels across the country conducting CPS trainings for professionals at mental health organizations and schools.

Ted has been working with at-risk youth and families in a variety of rural and urban clinical settings including juvenile justice, substance abuse, outpatient mental health, violence prevention outreach, foster care, residential, home-based mental health services, primary care behavioral health, and

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private practice. Ted is a founding clinician at Restore Therapy and is licensed to provide clinical supervision for CSWA's in licensure track in the state of Oregon.

Ted enjoys hiking, backpacking, bicycling, exploring the Portland's neighborhood life, and gardening. He lives

[Introducción a la resolución colaborativa de problemas | Introduction to Collaborative Problem Solving](#)

ESPAÑOL | SPANISH

[View Handout](#)

Presentacion es en español | Presentation is in Spanish

El curso Introducción a CPS presenta los principios básicos de la Resolución Colaborativa de Problemas®, un enfoque innovador, basado en el trauma y con base empírica, para comprender y ayudar a niños y adultos con problemas de conducta. Los participantes adquieren una comprensión más empática y precisa de las causas de las expectativas incumplidas y los comportamientos no deseados, y se les presenta una visión general de los tres componentes clave del enfoque.

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Presentation is in Spanish

The Introduction to CPS course introduces the basic principles of Collaborative Problem Solving®, an innovative, trauma-informed, and evidence-based approach to understanding and helping kids and adults with behavioral challenges. Participants learn a more empathic and accurate understanding of what causes unmet expectations and undesired behavior and are exposed to an overview of the three key components of the approach.

Speaker(s): Maria Sanders, LSW

Maria Sanders es Trabajadora Social Licenciada y está certificada en el método de Resolución Colaborativa de Problemas® (CPS) de Think:Kids, un programa del Departamento de Psiquiatría del Hospital General de Massachusetts. Trabaja con padres que enfrentan cualquier desafío en la crianza, desde lograr que sus hijos se duerman hasta abordar conflictos entre padres e hijos adolescentes.



María trabaja individualmente con padres de forma virtual o en su oficina de Montclair, Nueva Jersey. Ofrece programas a escuelas (públicas e independientes), consultorios pediátricos, organizaciones profesionales y reuniones corporativas.

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María comenzó su carrera profesional como trabajadora social escolar, trabajando para el Equipo de Estudio Infantil y dirigiendo grupos de habilidades sociales. Además, cuenta con más de 15 años de experiencia como Especialista en Intervención Temprana, trabajando como docente y trabajadora social.

Session C 1:00 - 2:15 PM (PDT)

The Art of Conversation

ENGLISH

[View Handout](#)

Presentation is in English | Presentacion es en inglés

For children with a history of trauma, trust is fragile—and conversation can feel dangerous. Even simple discussions can quickly spiral into arguments, shutdowns, or total avoidance. That's not because your child is difficult—it's because their nervous system is protecting them from perceived threat.

In this training, we'll explore practical tools to approach challenging conversations in ways that **decrease defensiveness, increase safety**, and nurture true connection. You'll learn how to engage without escalating, how to hold boundaries without power struggles, and how to build trust with every interaction.

Because when kids feel emotionally safe, communication becomes possible.

Speaker(s): Melody Aguayo, Ph.D., Adoption Trauma Coach

Dr. Aguayo holds a Masters in Marriage and Family Therapy and a Ph.D. in Psychology. Her doctoral and post-doctoral studies have all emphasized the impacts of developmental trauma. She is trained in Circle of Security, Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) & Theraplay. Her coaching practice emphasizes educating organizations, professionals, and families on the impacts of early trauma on development: cognitive, neurological, relational, and behavioral.



For over ten years, she has worked specifically with this population. She herself is an adoptive parent to two children, now adults, one with significant special needs including complex developmental trauma disorder, extreme mental illness, and substance abuse disorder. She approaches all of her audiences with the expertise of a professional and the endless compassion of a mother. She pursued her doctorate because of her son, and he continues to inspire her to learn and grow professionally and personally.

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She has written articles for Focus on the Family & Fostering Families Today. She is a notable keynote speaker who has spoken nationwide at many notable locations: CAFO, Vanderbilt's Neuroscience Symposium at CIA, Empowered to Connect, Wyoming Psychological Association Annual conference and many others.

She is bilingual, speaks internationally and offers her services in English and Spanish.

Apoyando el crecimiento después de experiencias difíciles | Supporting Growth After Difficult Experiences

ESPAÑOL | SPANISH

[View Handout](#)

Presentacion es en español | Presentation is in Spanish

Una mirada a cómo las experiencias de vida difíciles moldean el cerebro y el aprendizaje, y cómo los cuidadores pueden fomentar la resiliencia y el crecimiento.

En esta capacitación, Maria Sanders, LSW, Coach de Padres e Instructora Certificada en Resolución Colaborativa de Problemas de Think:Kids, explorará cómo responde el cerebro de los niños a experiencias difíciles y cómo estas pueden afectar el aprendizaje, el comportamiento y las relaciones. Juntos, consideraremos maneras prácticas y cotidianas en las que los cuidadores y el personal pueden apoyar el crecimiento y desarrollar resiliencia.

María ofrecerá una breve introducción de cómo el cerebro se adapta al estrés y los desafíos, seguida de estrategias prácticas y consejos para fomentar la sanación y la conexión con los jóvenes. Con más de 15 años de experiencia apoyando a familias, Maria destacará herramientas que brindan calma, fortalecen las relaciones y abren caminos hacia el crecimiento. Concluiremos con un espacio para preguntas y respuestas.

Presentation is in Spanish

A look at how difficult life experiences shape the brain and learning, and how caregivers can nurture resilience and growth.

In this training, Maria Sanders, LSW, Parent Coach and Think: Kids Collaborative Problem Solving Certified Trainer, will explore how children's brains respond to difficult experiences and how these experiences can affect learning, behavior, and relationships. Together, we will consider practical, everyday ways caregivers and staff can support growth and build resilience.

Maria will provide a clear overview of how the brain adapts...

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Speaker(s): Maria Sanders, LSW

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Session D **2:30 - 3:45 PM (PDT)**

Parenting Brain Power-Up

ENGLISH

[View Handout](#)

Presentation is in English | Presentacion es en ingles

We all know the healing power that a strong parent-child relationship can provide. And yet, when faced with aggression, defiance, and other trauma-driven behavior, the adult brain's natural response is to flip into protection mode. This workshop will provide a much-needed boost to weary parents by helping you see beneath the surface, befriend your whole brain (even the parts they get extra protective), and practice resilience-boosting strategies for everyday life.

Speaker(s): Jessica Sinarski, LPMHC

Jessica Sinarski, LPCMH, is an award-winning author, dynamic speaker, and the founder of BraveBrains. She has spent her entire career working with children who have challenging behaviors and the caring adults in their lives. She loves spicy food, Diet Coke, and her sweet, silly family...not in that order.



Jessica has worked with thousands of parents and helping professionals to get to the root of problematic behavior. She translates neuroscience into action steps through comprehensive

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professional development, diverse books, and kid-friendly resources. Learn more at www.JessicaSinarski.com.

El Arte de la Conversación | The Art of Conversation

ESPAÑOL | SPANISH

[View Handout](#)

Presentacion es en español | Presentation is in Spanish

Para los niños con un historial de trauma, la confianza es frágil—y conversar puede sentirse peligroso. En las familias adoptivas, incluso las conversaciones más simples pueden convertirse rápidamente en discusiones, evasión o silencios dolorosos. Esto no ocurre porque tu hijo es rebelde, sino porque su sistema nervioso está tratando de protegerlo.

En este entrenamiento, exploraremos herramientas prácticas para abordar conversaciones difíciles de forma que **reduzcan la defensividad, aumenten la seguridad emocional** y crean una conexión auténtica. Aprenderás a dialogar sin escalar conflictos, a mantener límites sin luchar por el poder, y a construir confianza con cada interacción.

Presentation is in Spanish

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