

2023 OCR FALL CONFERENCE ELEVATING YOUTH RIGHTS: ADVOCATING FOR THE WHOLE CLIENT

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2023

8:00 am | Registration and Breakfast

8:45-9:00 am | Welcome

MAIN BALLROOM | Presenters: Chris Henderson, Tori Shuler, and Alisiana Medina

9:00-10:30 am | Growin' Up!

MAIN BALLROOM | Presenter: Adrian McLemore

In this session, lived expert and national speaker Adrian McLemore will discuss how his foster care experiences prevented his permanent placement in a loving home and the lessons learned from system failures. Mr. McLemore will also discuss his experience as a kinship provider for his nieces and nephews, which became the foundation for developing a philosophy that focuses on permanency connections, ongoing supports, and maintaining relationships before, during, and after adoption or kinship placement

10:30-11:00 am | Break

11:00 am-12:15 pm | Protecting Children from the Adverse Impacts of Bias in the Child Welfare System

MAIN BALLROOM | Presenters: Amber Walden and Diana Rugh Johnson

****EDI**** Bias, whether conscious or unconscious, can be deeply harmful to children and families in dependency cases. Bias can be individual or systemic and can be based on many things, including race, religion, culture, poverty, literacy, substance use, and physical or mental disability. In this session, attorneys will learn how to zealously advocate for their clients by recognizing and addressing biases that harm their clients, diminish their families, and delay reunification.

12:15 pm-1:30 pm | Lunch

1:30 pm-2:45 pm | Breakout 1

The Nuts and Bolts of the Americans with Disabilities Act

MAIN BALLROOM | Presenters: Molly Hostetler and Debra Dodd

****EDI**** This session will provide a basic understanding of the ADA with the goal of addressing two main questions: who qualifies? And what protections are available to those who qualify? You will be provided information on the definition of "disability," as well as "reasonable accommodation," and how to use the protections of the ADA to help both parents with disabilities as well as children with disabilities. We will also examine inequities in family courts amongst individuals with disabilities and discuss possible solutions for equity. Attendees will learn practical tips to spot potential ADA issues from the beginning of the case, to include ensuring reasonable efforts and ADA services are provided to the disabled parent; spotting treatment plan issues and drafting plan objectives; making an effective ADA record; and how to preserve ADA issues to protect against future appellate claims.

Preserving Disability and Survivor Benefits of Youth in Care

SILVERS ROOM | Presenters: Amy Harfeld and Sheri Danz

10-20% of foster youth qualify for Social Security disability or survivor's benefits, which can amount to over \$900/month per child. These benefits are the youth's personal property and are required to be managed and used in their best interest to cover unmet current needs or conserved for their future use. Yet in nearly every state, these benefits are applied for, intercepted, and pocketed by agencies who use this money to reimburse themselves for their existing obligation to pay for the child's foster care. Most foster youth, in fact, never know that they were receiving these benefits nor derive any benefit whatsoever from them. This continues in large part because attorneys are unaware of the practice and of available options to ensure due process, accountability, and proper use of their client's benefits. This session will provide an overview of this topic, a review of current and recent policy and legislative changes and provide attorneys with concrete steps to take to preserve the rights and assets of their clients.

Doing the Work for the Youth We Serve: Understanding the Confluence of System Involvement and Cognitive and Communication Disorders

TEN MILE ROOM | Presenter: Dr. Shameka Stewart

****YOUTH JUSTICE**** This session will introduce the audience to cognitive and communication disorders in the context of youth behaviors in the juvenile justice system. The session will provide interactive simulations and problem-solving tasks to better recognize the impacts of these disorders on justice involved youth. Practical techniques and best practices will be discussed, including testing options and effectiveness. Finally, the racial and ethnic disparities, and cultural differences that judges encounter with this youth cohort will be shared.



2:45 pm-3:15 pm | Break

3:15 pm-4:30 pm | Breakout 2

Lots of Apples, Lots of Trees: Kinship and Family Time Updates and Importance

MAIN BALLROOM | Presenters: Ashley Chase and Sam Stephenson

To set families up for success, we must do away with the presumption that “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree” and instead focus on family connections. Children and youth have a right to maintaining family connections and kinship placements to the extent possible. This session will cover the state laws that were passed in the 2023 legislative session, as well as the social science related to kinship and family time, working with incarcerated parents, and placement advocacy. The speakers will also review best practices, how these new laws impact the attorney’s independent investigation, and what arguments to be making in court to advance this right.

Juvenile Collateral Consequences: Advocating for Your Client's Future

SILVERS ROOM | Presenter: Hannah Seigel Proff

****YOUTH JUSTICE**** Collateral consequences of a juvenile adjudication can adversely affect many facets of a young person’s life, including housing, welfare, immigration, employment, professional licensure, military careers, and more. Collateral consequences create social and economic barriers for young people for years after their delinquency case is closed. This presentation will teach participants about the core collateral consequences that arise in juvenile delinquency cases, and the impact collateral consequences have on the lives of adjudicated youth. Additionally, this presentation will offer ideas and time for brainstorming on how GALs can work with the youth and the parties to limit collateral consequences.

Early Intervention (Birth to 3): Basics for GALs and What to Know

TEN MILE ROOM | Presenters: Matt Cloven and Alicia Gauch

****EDI**** What is Early Intervention? Why and how is it important for the youth I am representing? How does it work? What challenges may I face as the GAL? Come learn about this important comprehensive service for your youngest youth.

4:30 pm-6:00 pm | Reception

EDGEWATER CAFE

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2023

7:00-7:45 am | Morning Wellness Activity - Yoga

KEYSTONE LODGE SPA (Studio K) | Maximum of 20 people, on a first come, first serve basis

8:00 am | Registration and Breakfast

9:00-10:30 am | A Place Called Home

MAIN BALLROOM | Presenter: David Ambroz

Based on his memoir, David shares his early experiences navigating homelessness with a mentally ill parent to his time in foster care and eventually escaping the cycle of poverty that traps generations of families. A graduate of both Vassar College and UCLA School of Law, David’s inspirational story recounts how he’s spent decades as a child welfare expert and advocate, working to effect change in major corporations like Disney and Amazon, and through governmental changes in Washington, DC, being recognized by President Barack Obama as an American Champion of Change. In his talks and through his work, David continues to uplift the communities from where he began – those in poverty, foster youth, families, and individuals struggling with mental illness, and the LGBTQ+ community.

10:30-11:00 am | Break and David Ambroz Book Signing

11:00 am-12:15 pm | Breakout 3

What About Us.... Working with the Older Youth

MAIN BALLROOM | Presenters: Jeff Cuneo, Sarah Yarbrough, Elizabeth Arrieta, Cara Nord (moderator)

Come listen to three panelists share a variety of expertise and knowledge about transition aged youth! Elizabeth Arrieta, a member of OCR’s LEAP, will share her transition experiences, as well as an emancipation checklist created by LEAP that can be used to support young people exiting from care. Sarah Yarbrough will share advocacy tips based on her years of experience as a GAL/CFY. Jeff Cuneo, Executive Director of Colorado Homeless Legal Project, will discuss his partnership with OCR, which provides civil legal services to the young people represented by OCR attorneys.

Jury Selection Practice Tips

SILVERS ROOM | Presenters: Devon Doyle and Jeff Ruff

This session will include practice tips specific to Dependency and Neglect case types. Time will be spent discussing what goals to have going into jury selection, and how to effectively question the panel in order to accomplish those goals. Jury selection can be an attorney’s time to form connections with the jury pool - thereby leaving the panel ready to hear from you about your client’s position. Come learn how to form those connections, and how to most effectively select a panel best suited for your case.



11:00 am-12:15 pm | Breakout 3 continued...

A Balanced Response to Children with Problem Sexual Behaviors

TEN MILE ROOM | Presenters: Jennifer Harris and Raechel Alderete

****YOUTH JUSTICE**** Research and best practice recommend a differential assessment and treatment approach for children under the age of 12 with sexual behavior problems (SBP) to prevent future SBP. Treatment approaches with this population are often one-size-fits-all, either assessing this population as all having a relatively minor SBP warranting a brief psychoeducational approach, or conversely all having a more serious SBP akin to adolescents who commit sexual offenses that require a watered-down but intensive offense specific treatment approach. The challenges of intervening with population are further complicated by limitations, and rightly so, on the age at which a child with SBP can be charged in juvenile court, and other systems (e.g., social services, schools, mental health, etc.) that may be reluctant, unfortunately, to become involved or maintain involvement with children with SBP and their families beyond initial identification. As a result, children with SBP may often not receive the appropriate treatment services, or any treatment services at all for that matter.

This presentation will highlight the current state of the research related to children with SBP including specific evidence-informed and best practice assessment and treatment strategies. In addition, this session will discuss the role that different child-serving agencies must take in order to ensure that children with SBP, and their families, receive proper services. One jurisdiction's attempt to address the challenges associated to children with SBP will be highlighted, including a summary of a policy and practice resource guide created to educate key stakeholders. Implications related to recent efforts to raise the age of juvenile court involvement, and the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) will also be discussed. Finally, case examples will be reviewed to demonstrate the unique risk and needs posed by children with SBP and their families.

12:15-1:30 pm | Lunch and Awards Ceremony (1:00-1:30 pm)

1:30-2:45 pm | Breakout 4

Zealous Advocacy for Trans, Nonbinary, and Gender Diverse Youth

MAIN BALLROOM | Presenter: Currey Cook

Trans, nonbinary, and gender diverse (TNGD) youth are over-represented in foster care, juvenile justice systems and among youth experiencing homeless compared to their cisgender peers. While in care or custody they too often face inequitable treatment, physical and emotional harm, and insufficient efforts to promote reunification, kinship placement, or another form of permanency with a family. Failure to work with justice involved TNGD youth to promote family, school, and community support leads to deeper system involvement. Participants will discuss interviewing skills, legal strategies, and recommend practices to promote supportive attorney-client relationships and robust advocacy strategies.

Education Rights for Students in Foster Care

SILVERS ROOM | Presenters: Jamie Burciaga and Maitri Jensen

This presentation will highlight the educational rights for students in foster care in Colorado. The presentation will include guidance on roles and responsibilities for professionals who are working with students in foster care when working towards the goal of attaining educational stability. Lastly, this presentation will include both federal and state laws in Colorado for students in foster care along with resources for students in foster care beyond high school completion.

Courageously Raising Race in JD and Crossover Cases: The Power of the GAL's Voice in Court

TEN MILE ROOM | Presenters: Nicole Duncan and Lindsey Sandoval

****YOUTH JUSTICE**** Race is directly related to the criminal justice system and if we leave that out in our advocacy of our clients, we are doing them a disservice. In order to best represent our clients' best interest, and represent them against the bias, obvious discrepancies, and harm of this system, we must also represent them as a whole. This includes race, culture, the way they see themselves in the world, and so much more. No matter if you are a GAL, Defense Attorney, or Mitigation Specialist, the reality is it's scary to talk about race, and people may not always respond well. Nonetheless, the other reality is it's our duty and it can make a huge difference in our clients' outcome and outcomes of many other children.

This training will not only address the importance of raising race and our duty to do so, but will show you how to do so both concisely and courageously. You will walk away with overall advocacy tips for your cases, more research on adolescent identity development especially for those overrepresented in the system, data ideas, and unique (and fun) ways to raise race at every stage of a case. You'll walk away with a Toolkit as well as confidence to stand against the corroding thread of systemic racism in youth justice. "When we speak, we are afraid our words will not be heard nor welcomed, but when we are silent, we are still afraid, so it is better to speak." Audre Lorde

How did we do? Let us know on our short feedback survey:



https://ocr.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_089R9Eyyt325H38



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SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Alderete, Raechel

Program Coordinator for the Colorado Sex Offender Management Board | Division of Criminal Justice

Raechel Alderete is currently the Program Coordinator for the Colorado Sex Offender Management Board within the Division of Criminal Justice, Colorado Department of Public Safety. In this role she is considered the senior authority and first-level Supervisor for the Sex Offender Management Board. Raechel provides subject matter expertise, interpretation, and consultation of the SOMB Standards and best practices to the field. Ms. Alderete is a certified trainer and provides trainings on the SOMB Standards, Correctional Fatigue to Fulfillment, Informed Supervision, JSOAP-II, Sexting, Problematic Sexual Behaviors, Community Notification and Sexual Violent Predators, School Re-entry, Teen Dating Violence as well as issues related to working on Multi-Disciplinary Teams. Ms. Alderete graduated from the Metropolitan State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminology and minor in Psychology. She has approximately twenty-six years of experience working in the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Field which includes fourteen years as a Probation Officer for the State of Colorado.

Ambroz, David

National Poverty and Child Welfare Expert and Advocate

David Ambroz is a national poverty and child welfare expert and advocate. He was recognized by President Obama as an American Champion of Change. Currently serving as the Head of Community Engagement (West) for Amazon, Ambroz previously led Corporate Social Responsibility for Walt Disney Television, and has served as president of the Los Angeles City Planning Commission as well as a California Child Welfare Council member. After growing up homeless and then in foster care, he graduated from Vassar College and later earned his J.D. from UCLA School of Law. He is a foster dad and lives in Los Angeles, CA.

Arrieta, Elizabeth

LEAP Member

Elizabeth is a young adult who grew up in the foster care system since the age of 12 but has successfully accomplished her goal of emancipating and moving out on her own at the age of 18. She is also part of LEAP who are all working together to help make the changes needed in the system to help more young adults to be successful. Elizabeth is currently working part-time and doing part-time schooling. She goes to Community College of Denver and is planning to transfer to Colorado University of Boulder and major in Political Science for a bachelor's degree. Later she is hoping to go to law school and either become an Immigration Attorney or a Guardian Ad Litem. Most of all, Elizabeth would love to make an impact on people's lives who are living through the foster care system and say that you can always do it and to never give up.

Burciaga, Jamie

State Coordinator for the Foster Care Education | Colorado Department of Education

Jamie Burciaga is the State Coordinator for Foster Care Education at the Colorado Department of Education. Jamie brings 11 years of experience at the state level, including experience in supporting young people experiencing foster care through the higher education process, individualized career and academic plans creation and implementation, training, technical assistance, and engaging multi-agency stakeholders. Most recently Jamie worked at the Colorado Department of Higher Education where she held a shared position with the Colorado Department of Human Services and worked with former foster youth and education training vouchers (ETV).

Chase, Ashley

OCR Staff Attorney & Legislative Liaison | AshleyChase@coloradochildrep.org

Ashley began her career in child welfare law while attending the University of Colorado School of Law with her participation in the Juvenile Law Clinic where she was awarded the CU Law pro bono service award (2006/07) and the Juvenile Law Clinic Award (2007). After completing an externship with the Honorable J. Robert Lowenbach in the 19th Judicial District, Ashley began working in Weld County in the areas of family law and as a Guardian ad Litem. During her 10 years in Weld County, Ashley participated in all aspects of litigation and appeals. She worked in the problem-solving court (Family Treatment Court) and was a member of the 19th Judicial District Best Practices Team. In 2010 she was awarded the Jim Covino Advocate of the Year award from the Office of the Child's Representative and in 2017 she was a member of the Best Practices Team of the Year. Ashley has presented and taught across the state in the field of Child Welfare Law and continues to follow her passion as the Staff Attorney and Legislative Liaison at OCR. Ashley received her B.A. degree from the University of Northern Colorado in the field of Advertising Media and Public Relations in 2000. She worked in Major League Soccer for four years prior to attending the University of Colorado School of Law and receiving her Juris Doctorate in 2007.



Cloven, Matt

OCR Education and Disability Case Consultant

Matt Cloven has worked with people with disabilities of all ages for approximately 20 years. In this time, he has helped families, individuals, and professionals navigate the many systems that impact people with disabilities. Some of these systems include education (special education and 504), justice (restoration of competency educator, ADA expert and consultant in child welfare cases), and public services (Medicaid, DVR, SSI). Matt has been a disability advocate and consultant professionally since 2014 and has provided educational and systems support, as well as disability-specific training for families, GALs, and child welfare and community-based provider agencies across Colorado. Though much of his knowledge comes from this work, Matt also has certificates from attending the William & Mary Law Institute of Special Education Advocacy. He is also a certified assessor for Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) and is a Court Visitor for guardianship and conservatorship probate cases in Larimer County. He holds his Masters in Cultural History and Philosophy.

Cook, Currey

Director of the Youth in Out-of-Home Care Project | Lambda Legal

Currey Cook (he/him) is Senior Counsel and Director of the Youth in Out-of-Home Care Project at Lambda Legal, where he advocates on behalf of and collaborates with LGBTQ+ youth in child welfare, juvenile justice settings, and experiencing homelessness. He works at the state and federal level and achieves systemic improvement through a mix of litigation, proactive law and policy development, and training for professionals, including child advocates, working with youth in out-of-home care and receiving government-funded services. Prior to his work at Lambda, Cook was an attorney with the Office of Public Advocacy (OPA) for twelve years in Anchorage, Alaska. Cook worked as a juvenile defense attorney and guardian ad litem and later as supervising attorney of OPA's Child Advocacy Section. In 2009, Cook became the Co-Director of the Bronx office of The Children's Law Center New York, a non-profit law firm representing children in New York City Family Court. Additionally, Cook served as a consultant to The National Juvenile Defender Center (now Gault Center) in Washington, D.C. Cook co-authored Safe Havens: Closing the Gap Between Recommended Practice for Transgender and Gender-Expansive Youth in Out-of-Home Care, a groundbreaking report capturing legal protections for youth at the state level and sharing the voices and lived experiences of trans youth in care. He is a member of the board of directors for the National Association of Counsel for Children and the American Bar Association's Children's Rights Litigation Committee. Cook graduated from the University of Georgia with a journalism degree and Mercer University Law School in Macon, Georgia.

Cuneo, Jeff

Executive Director of Colorado Homeless Legal Project

Jeffrey Cuneo is an attorney and the Executive Director of the Colorado Homeless Legal Project. Begun in 2021, CHLP provides trauma-informed, equitable, and client-centered civil legal services to youth and young adults, most of whom experience, or are at risk of experiencing homelessness. He has worked as an attorney and advocate with this population for over 20 years. Previously, he was in private practice focusing on representing youth in the delinquency and adult justice systems. Mr. Cuneo was also an Assistant Public Defender in Sacramento County, California for 10 years. He is the former Program Director for the Placer County Re-entry Program, where he implemented a wholistic system to assist and provide resources to recently released inmates. He was elected and served as a Trustee of the Sacramento City Unified School District Board of Education. Currently, he is a board member for the Denver VOICE, the street newspaper., and a Senior Fellow with the American Leadership Forum. He lives with his wife Carrie, and their two children, Charlie, and Haddie.

Danz, Sheri

OCR Deputy Director | SheriDanz@coloradochildrep.org

Ms. Danz's legal advocacy on behalf of children and youth includes representing adolescents and young adults in child welfare and other civil matters as a Skadden Fellow/staff attorney at the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago; representing juveniles in delinquency proceedings as a staff attorney at the Colorado State Public Defender's Office; and representing youth in public benefits, child welfare, and protective order proceedings as a legal intern at the Door's Legal Services Program, a multidisciplinary youth services center in New York City. Ms. Danz has also worked on issues regarding parents' counsel at the Office of the State Court Administrator in Colorado and served as a law clerk to the Hon. Gene Carter, United States District Court Judge for the District of Maine. Prior to law school, Ms. Danz taught special education in rural North Carolina through the Teach for America Program. Sheri Danz is a graduate of New York University School of Law, where she received a Root-Tilden-Kern public interest scholarship and served as a member of the New York University Law Review.

Dodd, Debra

OCR Attorney Contractor

Debra has twenty-six years of legal experience; nineteen of them in child welfare. After graduating from the University of Kansas School of Law in 1997, she spent seven years as a Deputy District Attorney in Adams County as a felony trial deputy. In 2004, she left the DA's office to become a Guardian ad Litem, with a practice primarily centered in Weld and Boulder counties. In the 19th Judicial District, she was a member of Weld County's Family Treatment Court and the District Best Practices Team. In 2017 she was appointed as a part-time magistrate for the 19th Judicial District. Her docket focused on paternity, child support, and child custody matters. As a magistrate, she served on the state-wide child support statutory revision committee and the Domestic Relations Best Practices Team. Off the bench, Debra shifted her practice from being a trial GAL to appellate work, working as a member of OCR's litigation and trial strategy support team. From 2016 to 2021, Debra represented parents through her appellate contract with ORPC. In 2021, Debra added a contract with Boulder County, where she serves as a Special County Attorney representing the Department in Boulder County's dependency and neglect appeals. Debra has authored countless briefs, frequently argues before the Colorado Court of Appeals, and is proud to have fifteen published cases. She has previously presented trainings on a wide range of child welfare issues for both OCR and ORPC. Currently, Debra works full-time as a certified Level II appellate attorney for OCR's Appellate-Litigation Support Team. When not working on a brief, Debra enjoys spending time with her husband, four daughters, and one lazy dog, in Berthoud, Colorado.



Doyle, Devon
OCR Attorney Contractor

Devon Doyle has been a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) since 2017, currently practicing in Douglas and El Paso Counties. Prior to becoming a GAL, she worked at both the El Paso County Attorney's Office and the El Paso County District Attorney's Office. She has done dozens of jury trials as a prosecutor, several as a GAL as well. She enjoys the challenges that come with litigation work and establishing a level of comfort in the courtroom. She attended the University of Colorado at Boulder for her bachelor's degree, and the University of Kansas for law school.

Duncan, Nicole
The Duncan Youth Legal Services, LLC

Nicole Duncan is a former State Public Defender and now is the founder and sole practitioner of The Duncan Youth Legal Services, LLC. Through her firm which began November 2022, she works to serve youth both in and outside the courtroom through direct defense as well as policy and legislation. Nicole's primary focus is Racial Justice and the importance of raising race in all aspects of Youth Defense to better honor her clients, their stories, and goals. Nicole also defends youth either charged as adults or facing the threat of being charged as adults, as well as emerging adulthood cases, and gives trainings on raising race and the power of data in the courtroom. She aims to use a holistic model of defense and has begun to do so by connecting and actively participating with local youth organizations in Denver, learning from them, and connecting her clients and their families with them. Nicole is a board member of Colorado Juvenile Defender Center Board ("CJDC") and Bread and Roses Legal Center which supports social movements by working with activists and local community groups and was also the Youth Policy Council for the ACLU-CO for the 2023 Legislative session, assisting with policies, data, and legislation related to youth justice. She had the privilege of being named the Juvenile Defender of the Year in 2020 by the Colorado Juvenile Defender Center and is a 2020 Georgetown Law Ambassador for Racial Justice Alumni and is JTIP certified twice through the Gault Center (formerly National Juvenile Defender Center).

Gauch, Alicia
Attorney at Office of the Guardian ad Litem | agauch@guardianadlitemelpaso.org

Alicia is an attorney with the Office of the Guardian ad Litem of El Paso County working with children and youth of all ages in Dependency and Neglect cases and Delinquency cases. She is particularly interested in problem-solving to meet the needs of youth and their families however they're defined. She truly believes in leaving each family stronger than when she met them. We can't solve every problem, but we can go a long way in helping to make life easier for our families and empowering them going forward.

Harfeld, Amy
Director of National Policy | Children's Advocacy Institute at the University of San Diego School of Law

Amy Harfeld serves as the National Policy Director at the Children's Advocacy Institute at the University of San Diego School of Law. She has been a child advocate, educator, and public interest attorney for 25 years. Amy obtained her BA from the University of Michigan and her JD from City University of New York School of Law. In addition, she earned a secondary teaching credential at Cal State Los Angeles. She brings a uniquely balanced perspective to her child welfare and foster youth advocacy, having represented the child welfare agency, dependent children, and incarcerated parents in New York City. Launching her career in public service as a Teach for America corps member, she has also coordinated the National Coalition to End Child Abuse Deaths, served as Executive Director of First Star, directed the Children's Leadership Council, and led the American Bar Association's Commission on Youth at Risk. She lives in the Washington DC area and is the mother to two peppy school aged children.

Harris, Jennifer
Sex Offense Specific Treatment Provider & Evaluator

Jennifer Harris has her master's in social work from the University of Denver and practices as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in the State of Colorado. She has focused her clinical work on the prevention and treatment of sexually abusive behaviors since 2006. She has spent her career training as a sex offense specific treatment provider and evaluator. She is listed with the Colorado Sex Offender Management Board (SOMB) as a full level juvenile and adult treatment provider with Clinical Supervisor status. She is listed with the SOMB as a full level juvenile evaluator and an associate level adult evaluator. She served as Clinical Director and co-owner for Sexual Offense Resource Services (SORS) from May 2014 until October 2016, supervising eight to ten sex offense specific treatment providers at any given time across the State of Colorado. She established her own agency, Awareness, Prevention, and Treatment Services & Consulting in 2017. She is an Approved Treatment Provider through the Department of Corrections and contracted through Savio to provide services to juveniles involved with the Division of Youth Services. She is an appointed member and serves as co-chair of the Best Practices Committee of the SOMB. She obtained her Trauma Certification in Interpersonal Violence and Trauma Studies from the University of Denver as well. She serves as an expert witness in legal cases on behalf of victims and children.



Henderson, Chris

OCR Executive Director | chrishenderson@coloradochildrep.org

Mr. Henderson has dedicated his legal career to children's issues. His legal practice has focused on representing children's best interests in dependency and neglect and delinquency proceedings. In 2016, he founded and was the managing partner of Child Advocates of Colorado. Mr. Henderson has provided strategic leadership and directed operations for a team of attorneys, social workers, and support staff to provide quality multidisciplinary representation for hundreds of children involved in the court system. Prior to relocating to Colorado, Mr. Henderson was a staff attorney with the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles where he represented numerous children and served as lead attorney for the first dependency drug court in Los Angeles County. Before attending law school, Mr. Henderson was a therapist for children and adolescents, providing therapy for in-patient children and adolescent psychiatric patients. In July 2018, Mr. Henderson was selected by the Board of Directors to be the new Executive Director. Mr. Henderson attended Colorado State University, receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in 1994. He obtained a Masters of Arts Degree from the University of Denver in 1998. He received his Juris Doctor Degree from Whittier Law School in 2004 graduating summa cum laude.

Hostetler, Molly

Disability Law Colorado

Molly is the attorney Team Lead for the Intake and Self-Advocacy Services team at Disability Law Colorado, where she joined in February of 2023. As Team Lead, she supervises all requests for service made to DLC and determines which resources to provide and at what level of advocacy. Prior to that she was an indigent defense attorney, working for both the Office of Alternate Defense Counsel and the Office of the State Public Defender. She represented indigent adults and juveniles for 15 years in criminal trials and appeals. She is passionate about fighting for the rights of marginalized individuals and working towards equity in all forms. She lives in Colorado Springs with her child and 135 lb. beast of a dog, "Lenny."

Jensen, Maitri

Foster Care Education Specialist at CDHS

Maitri Jensen is a Foster Care Education Specialist with the Colorado Department of Human Services. Maitri has professionally been working with youth for over ten years while specifically working with youth in foster care for just over six years. Through all the work that she has done, Maitri remains committed to improving educational systems for highly mobile youth, including youth in the foster care system.

McLemore, Adrian

National Speaker & Lived Expert | [Adrian Speaks, LLC](#)

Adrian McLemore has an intimate and deep understanding of the foster care {child welfare} system. At just six years old, Adrian found himself in a foster home. For the next 12 years, he lived in three states, bouncing between his parents and the system, eventually aging out of foster care. Then at 21, he responded to a call to become a kinship caregiver for his niece and nephew, who were both toddlers at the time. From these experiences, Adrian has become a champion for ensuring young people are part of the foster care conversation. He has taken what is inherently personal for him and made it his life's work. Adrian's life's work and mission is to share the knowledge that everyone is a kinship care provider, and we all have a role to play in achieving better outcomes for youth and families.

Medina, Alisiana

LEAP Member

Alisiana is Native to the state of Colorado and is a member in her tribe Diné/Navajo, also recognized as 'Navajo Nation.' Her Nation regions over what is known as the 'Four Corners.' She grew up in the child welfare system in various forms, which were from group homes, foster care homes here in the state of Colorado and eventually 'aged out of the system' (emancipation). She continues her journey by continuing her education with graduating with her AAS (Associate of Applied Science) and Pre-law with a Paralegal certification and transfer into University of Colorado, Denver in the SPA (School of Public Affairs) in pursuit of her BA in Criminal Justice and minor in Legal Studies. All the while continuing her advocacy work through Children's Bureau and CDHS (Colorado Department Human Services), CWD (Child Welfare Division) with 'Pathway to Success – Milestones of Foster Care,' 'Pathways to Success Steering Committee,' part of designing of NYTD 'National Youth in Transition Database,' advisor 'Educational Opportunities Workgroup,' 'Collaborative Child Welfare Response to Human Trafficking Task Group,' and the Continuing Jurisdiction Exploratory Committee,' CYLN (Colorado Youth Leadership Network,' and 'Colorado Foster Youth Successful Transition to Adulthood Program Advisory Board.' Collaboration with CNAY (Center for Native American Youth) and CCIA (Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs) with 'SAIGE Leadership' and 'ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act) Tribal Families Coalition.' Collaboration with NFYI (National Foster Youth Institution) with legislation processes.' Collaboration with RMCLC (Rocky Mountain Children Law Center) with 'Children's Caucus,' 'Catalyze,' 'project Foster Power (pFP). And now serving and collaborating with DIFRC (Denver Indian Family Resource Center) with other nonprofits to help our relatives and native community members and the OCR (Office of Child's Representatives) with LEAP (Lived Experts Action Panel) and also, Appointee by Jared Polis for Colorado Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Council. In hopes to become a GAL (Guardian of Ad Litem) or a Family law, Tribal, Juvenile Attorney would be her dream!



Nord, Cara

OCR Youth Empowerment Attorney | caranord@coloradochildrep.org

Cara's interest in children's issues began over 20 years ago when she wrote an original oratory about child abuse for her junior high forensics team. After earning a Bachelor of Arts magna cum laude in American Politics and Philosophy/Prelaw, Cara taught fourth grade in Washington, D.C. through Teach for America. Her teaching experiences afforded her the opportunity to attend law school on a full-tuition public interest scholarship. During law school, Cara interned at a public defender's office where she represented children in At-Risk Youth (ARY) and Child in Need of Services (CHINS) proceedings, interned with TeamChild, and completed Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) training. After graduating from law school summa cum laude, Cara clerked for the Washington State Supreme Court and volunteered as a Big Sister. She then spent over 10 years litigating child welfare trials and appeals as an Assistant Attorney General in Washington State and as an Assistant County Attorney in Colorado. Cara joined OCR in February 2017. She enjoys legal research and writing, facilitating interactive trainings, and addressing race/class disparities.

Ruff, Jeff

OCR Attorney Contractor

Jeff Ruff graduated from the University of Montana with a BA in Economics in 1996, and the University of Montana School of Law in 1999, he worked at the Yellowstone County Attorney's in Montana. Jeff was admitted to practice law in Colorado in 2000. He began his legal career as an environmental attorney working on large scale litigation projects for an EPA and DOJ contractor. After working on developing a litigation support company with a friend in early 2001, he began working as a Criminal and Juvenile Defense Attorney in late 2001 for a mid-sized law firm in Denver. He started Ruff & Tureson, PC. In 2003. The practice primarily focused on Criminal and Juvenile defense representation for court-appointed, low pay and slow pay clients. They were a high-volume practice representing hundreds of juveniles and adults. In 2007, Jeff began working as a contractor for OCR, in Dependency and Neglect, Juvenile Delinquency and Truancy cases primarily in Adams County. In 2008, he formed The Ruff Law Firm, LLC, and continued to work as a defense attorney and a GAL. In 2012, he joined law practices with his wife, and they formed Ruff & Tartar, PC. Jeff has handled cases in more than half of the judicial districts in the State of Colorado and has worked with thousands of children and families throughout his career. He has had the opportunity to speak about juvenile law and his experiences at numerous conferences, including Juvenile Judicial conferences, County Attorney conferences, Public Defender trainings, OCR conferences and trainings, and Education Summits/Conferences for Teachers and Administrators. Jeff has been recognized or won several awards for his advocacy including Reunification Hero in June of 2021; the Civility in Practice Award for the Adams and Broomfield Bar Association in February 2018; the Excellence in Practice Award - Spirit of the Convening in OCR Core Competencies II | January 28-29, 2021, 2017; and the OCR Jim Covino Advocate of the Year Award in 2013. Last, but not least, he is a father to two beautiful and talented daughters and is the second-best GAL in his house.

Rugh Johnson, Diana

Director of Court Improvement Program | State of Georgia

Diana Rugh Johnson is the Director of the Court Improvement Program for the State of Georgia. Before taking that position in August 2021, she served for six years as a Judge Pro Tempore in the DeKalb County Juvenile Court and practiced law in the areas of child welfare, disability, adoption, and custody. Diana was one of the first attorneys in Georgia to be certified as a Child Welfare Law Specialist. She serves on the Steering Committee of the American Bar Association's National Alliance for Parent Representation and on the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Commission for Delta Gamma Fraternity. Diana holds an MS in Biochemistry from Clemson University and a JD from Georgia State University.

Sandoval, Lindsey

Licensed Clinical Social Worker

Lindsey Sandoval is a licensed clinical social worker and has been practicing social work for seventeen years. She received her Bachelor of social work degree in 2006 and a Master of social work degree in 2014. Lindsey's experience includes child welfare, respondent parent advocacy, guardian ad litem social work, school social work, and defense-based forensic social work. In August 2014, Lindsey was hired as the first Juvenile Denver Public Defender social worker and helped to create the social work position at the Denver Trial Office. After leaving the Public Defender's office in March 2019, Lindsey became a contract forensic social worker with Alternate Defense Counsel. Lindsey is a private forensic social worker, field instructor, and supervising clinical consultant for new ADC contractors. Lindsey has done training for the National Association for Public Defense, the Office of Child's Representative, Alternate Defense Counsel, and the Juvenile Defender Center. Lindsey is also on the board for Chained Voices, supporting incarcerated adult and juvenile artists throughout Colorado. Lindsey specializes in juvenile/young adult cases. Lindsey has worked on countless Direct Files, homicides, and detention cases with experience in juvenile and adult criminal defense.

Shuler, Tori

OCR Board Member and Director for Fostering Great Ideas | Denver, CO

Victoria Shuler, "Tori," is a former foster youth and started as a youth advisory member of the OCR Board before joining as a voting board member in 2023. Tori is the Denver Director for Fostering Great Ideas, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of foster children. Tori also serves on the board of Directors for The Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman. Tori is passionate about helping current and former foster youth share their stories to enact change in the foster care system. She believes youth perspective is vital to every part of our foster care system. Tori entered foster care at the age of three and was in and out of care in several states until she emancipated from the Arapahoe County Department of Human Services in 2007. Since that time, Tori has been an advocate for foster care reform and the protection of rights for foster children. Tori is a graduate of the University of Colorado Denver with her bachelor's degree in history and an emphasis on the history of social movements.



Seigel Proff, Hannah

Trial Attorney

Hannah is a trial attorney who has represented hundreds of adults and children in criminal and delinquency cases over the last fifteen years. Hannah is the co-founder and acting executive director for the non-profit Learn Your Rights in the Community (LYRIC), an organization that teaches young people about their constitutional rights. When Hannah isn't practicing law or attempting to run a non-profit, she travels, studies Spanish, reads novels, and enjoys long walks with her three Scottie dogs.

Stephenson, Sam

Managing Case Coordinator for the Office of the Guardian ad Litem

Sam Stephenson is the Managing Case Coordinator at The Colorado Office of the Child's Representative in Colorado Springs. Sam is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and earned his master's degree in social work from Metropolitan State University Denver. He wrote his master's thesis on the impact of judicial discretion on case management and outcomes in Dependency and Neglect Cases. Sam has worked in child welfare for over ten years – in nearly every social work capacity: Caseworker, Supervisor, Respondent Parent Counsel Social Worker, and Case Coordinator with The Colorado Office of the Child's Representative. Sam Stephenson is a community organizer with a demonstrated history of working to create equity for individuals and families in Colorado; experienced social worker with a passion for streamlining services and enhancing quality of life; and an artist with a particular interest in literature and poetry.

Stewart, Shameka

Associate Professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders

Dr. Shameka Stewart is an Associate Professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders and the Juvenile Forensic Speech-LanguagePathologist(r). Dr. Stewart is also a special education advocate trained by the Wright's Law training center. She has a Ph.D. in Communication Sciences and Disorders, and a Juris Doctorate of Law. Dr. Stewart's clinical and scholarly work specializes in Juvenile Forensics, Law Enforcement Interaction with youth with CD, child language disorders and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). Her primary research focuses on the Confluence and Impact of cognitive and communication disorders on the school-to-confinement pipeline, status offenses, involvement with the criminal justice system, law enforcement interaction, and criminal recidivism in youth placed at-risk for delinquency and crime (especially Black and Brown youth from under-resourced areas). Dr. Stewart is also a clinically certified and licensed speech-language pathologist and is licensed to practice in Maryland, Washington, D.C, and multiple other states. Through her work, Dr. Stewart has created cutting edge social justice and juvenile justice specialty courses for graduate CSD students, nationally known training programs for law enforcement and legal counsel, and national and international CE workshops and training for licensed SLP clinicians, students, and families of children with special needs.

Walden, Amber

Juvenile Court Attorney | State of Georgia

Attorney Amber D. Walden has over 15 years of extensive experience practicing in juvenile court. Her focus and dedication has been in representing parents and children involved in child abuse and neglect cases. Over the last six years in Georgia and nationally, she has been committed to increasing the level of quality legal representation for parents and children by conducting trainings and workshops independently and through collaborations with other groups and agencies. Attorney Walden's goal is to increase the consistency and accessibility of information and resources for attorneys and other community partners, and provide instruction on the practical application of statutes, case law, and policies, so that attorneys can confidently and successfully protect each parent's and child's statutory and constitutional rights.

Yarbrough, Sarah

OCR Attorney Contractor

Sarah Yarbrough has been with BMA for 10 years and is a Senior Associate. She has been a contract attorney with OCR for the entirety of her tenure at BMA. She represents children as GAL/CFY in Dependency and Neglect and Delinquency matters as well as doing CLR work in Domestic cases. Sarah specializes in Human Trafficking and has dedicated her time to the 18th Judicial District Human Trafficking Taskforce and Multidisciplinary Team. Sarah's primary caseload is working with adolescents as she excels in getting their needs met and working with the Department of Human Services team.

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