

Nebraska CASA Conference Schedule Overview

FRIDAY, AUGUST 21ST

9:00 AM - 6:00 PM	Conference Check-In Main Lobby
10:00 AM - 4:30 PM	CASA Executive Director Meeting - Osborne Room
10:00 AM - 12:45 PM	CASA Staff Meeting Devaney Room
12:30 PM - 6:00 PM	Exhibitors - Perkins/Douglas CASA Store - Merlin
1 PM - 2 PM	NEW- Session Breakout 1
2:15- 3:15 PM	NEW- Session Breakout 2
3:30-4:30 PM	NEW- Session Breakout 3
4:40 PM - 5:40 PM	VOCA Data Integrity & Reporting for CASA Staff - Devaney
5:45 PM - 8:30 PM	Welcome Reception, and Music Bingo - Ardis

SATURDAY, AUGUST 22ND

7:30 AM - 9:00 AM	Registration, Coffee & Breakfast Snacks - Ardis
8:00 AM - 9:00 AM	CasaManager Resources for CASA Staff - Devaney
8:00 AM - 4:30 PM	Exhibitors - Perkins/Douglas CASA Store - Merlin
9:00 AM - 9:45 AM	Conference Opening & Keynote - Ardis
10AM -11AM	Session Breakout 1
11:15 AM - 12:15 PM	Session Breakout 2
12:30 PM - 1:45 PM	Luncheon Awards & Keynote - Ardis
2 PM - 3 PM	Session Breakout 3
3:15 PM - 4:15 PM	Panel & Conference Wrap Up - Ardis

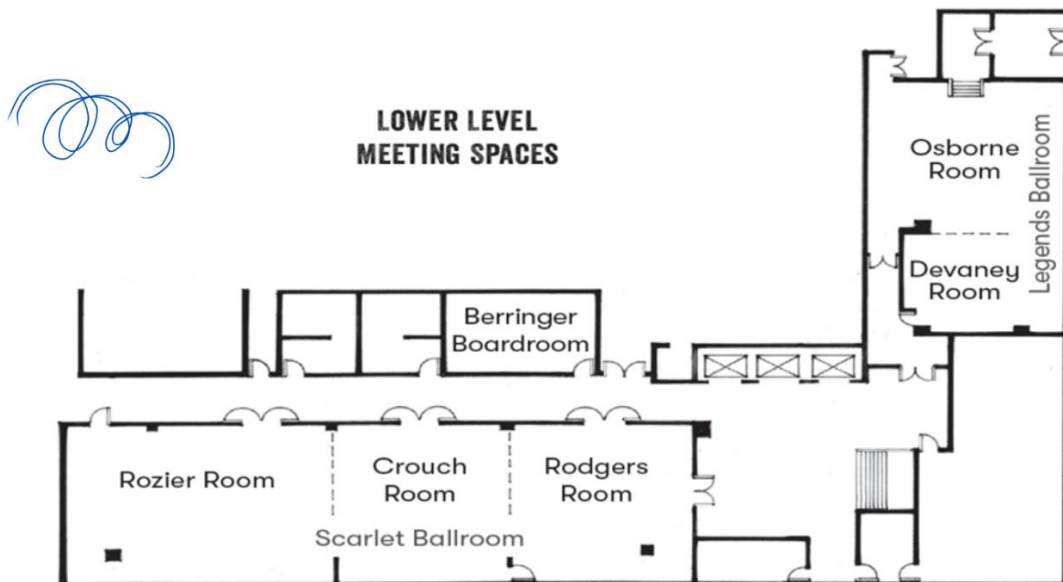
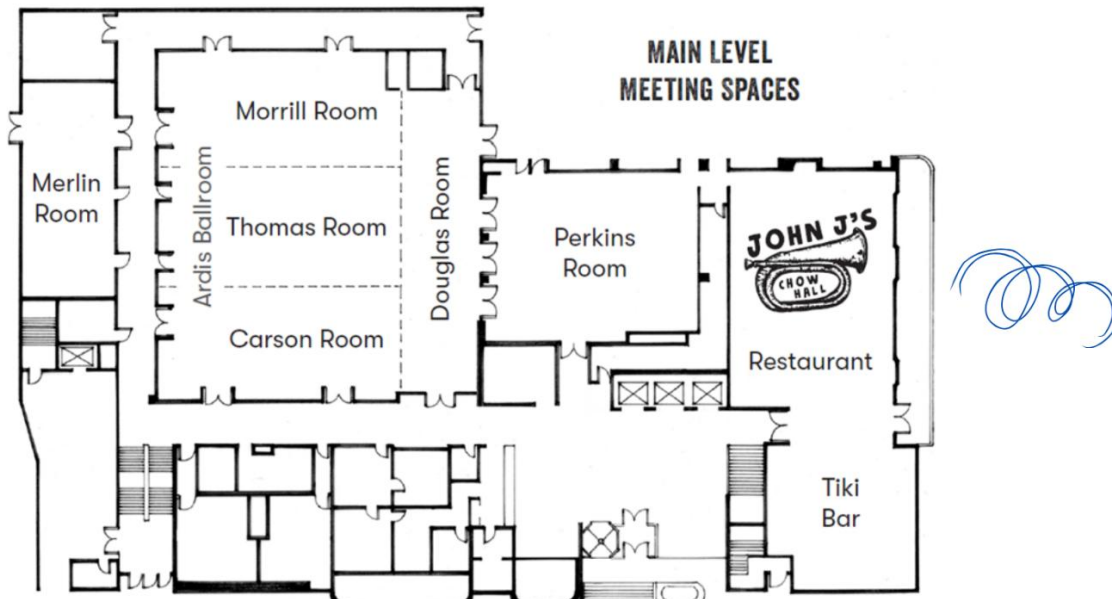


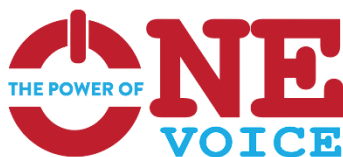
Scan this Code to find resources online including:

- Speaker Handouts
- Places to Eat Near the Conference Hotel
- An Online Program



Venue Map





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OUR EXHIBITORS ARE A VITAL PART OF OUR COMMUNITY, AND WE ARE SO GRATEFUL FOR THEIR SUPPORT! PLEASE TAKE A MOMENT BETWEEN SESSIONS TO STOP BY, SAY HELLO, AND EXPLORE THE WONDERFUL RESOURCES THEY'VE BROUGHT TO SHARE WITH US. LET'S SHOW THEM SOME LOVE!



Location: Main Level
Spaces: Perkins Room & Douglas Room
Total Exhibitors: 28 Agencies

Day 1 Friday, August 21, 2026		
9:00am - 6:00pm Main Lobby	Conference Check-In Open Welcome. Please collect your nametag and conference program at the welcome desk.	
10:00am - 4:30pm Osborne Room	CASA Executive Director Meeting Welcome all CASA directors to this meeting focused on enhancing local programs and fostering professional networking.	
10:00am – 12:45pm Devaney Room	CASA Staff Meeting All CASA staff are cordially invited to this meeting, which aims to facilitate professional networking and strengthen connections.	
12:30pm – 6:00pm	- Exhibitors – Perkins/Douglas Room - CASA Store - Merlin Room	
1:00pm – 2:00pm	New Pre-Conference Session Breakout 1:	
A. Rodgers Room	A. Brain Architecture Game Overview, Christy Prang, MBA A hands-on game demonstrating how early life experiences impact brain development, stress, and resilience. The Brain Architecture Game lets participants build a model brain, showing how positive and stressful events shape brain structure and long-term outcomes. Participants use cards and materials to represent protective factors and stressors, revealing the lasting effects of early experiences and the importance of support. Participants reflect on their journey, connecting the activity to real-world systems and understanding how resilience can be fostered.	A. Christy Prang is the Director of Training & Community Engagement at BraveBe Child Advocacy Center. She has worked in child welfare since 2015 and teaches child advocacy as an Adjunct Professor at NE Wesleyan University.
B. Rozier Room	B. Working with Parent Attorneys as Non-Attorney Professionals, Laura Lowe, P.C. This session focuses on building collaborative partnerships between attorneys and non-attorney professionals to enhance legal representation for parents, particularly in child welfare cases. Participants learn to define roles, share strategies for gathering data, and implement team-based advocacy to protect parental rights and improve outcomes for children.	B. Laura Lowe, P.C. With decades of experience serving as a GAL and Parent Attorney in NE, she brings both deep knowledge and compassionate insight into juvenile court cases.

C. Crouch Room  C. Sarah Cruz is the Youth Program and Prevention Coordinator at UNL's Center on Children, Families, and the Law and a Certified Social Worker. She joined CCFL in November 2023, focusing on youth homelessness initiatives.	C. Youth Homelessness in Nebraska: Understanding Risks, Prevalence, and Pathways to Support, Angela R. Gebhardt, MFS, MSW & Sarah Cruz This session offers a foundational exploration of youth homelessness in Nebraska. Participants will examine the scope and prevalence of youth homelessness, identify the most common risk factors that contribute to this issue, and learn about the range of services and resources currently available to support homeless youth across the state. The training also highlights systemic challenges and opportunities for positive change within Nebraska's homeless youth system, empowering attendees to better support and advocate for young people, including those with lived experience who are navigating homelessness.	 C. Angela R. Gebhardt, is the Lived Experience Coordinator for the Youth Homeless Systems Improvement grant, where she established Youth Action Boards in Nebraska. She also trains others on domestic violence and child welfare.
2:00pm – 2:15pm	Break	Merlin/Perkins/Douglas Room
2:15pm - 3:15pm A. Rodgers Room	New Pre-Conference Session Breakout 2: A. Trauma 101 Overview, Libby Valerio-Boster Exploring Adverse Childhood Experiences & Resilience. This training provides a comprehensive exploration of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), examining their impact on individuals and communities. Participants will gain a deeper understanding of the various types of ACES, their prevalence and the potential long-term consequences as well as learn strategies to promote resilience and prevent trauma. The training emphasizes the importance of wellness for professionals working with individuals impacted by ACES.	 A. Libby Valerio-Boster serves as the ACES Training Specialist at BraveBe Child Advocacy Center. She holds a degree in Community Health and Wellness and is committed to advancing awareness of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and their implications for public health. Through research-informed training, she supports professionals & communities.

B. Rozier Room	B. Strengthening Child Advocacy Through Collaboration, Investigator Lynette Russell This session will highlight how our Special Victims Unit partners across disciplines provide personalized, trauma-informed services to children and families. Attendees will learn how referrals are initiated through law enforcement to collaborate with child protective services, schools, domestic violence programs, child advocacy centers, the county attorney's office, and other programs within the community. How each case moves through a coordinated response that includes forensic interviews, medical evaluations, victim advocacy, counseling resources, and ongoing family support will be discussed. The presentation will explain how multidisciplinary team members collaborate to reduce trauma and improve outcomes and share practical strategies that can be adapted in communities of any size. Participants will leave with actionable ideas on building or strengthening cross-agency partnerships, improving referral pathways, and becoming active partners in child advocacy efforts while working with law enforcement in your jurisdiction.	 B. Lynette Russell holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and a master's degree in forensic science. During 27 years with the Lincoln Police Department, she has served roles including patrol, Special Victims Unit investigator, criminal investigator, School Resource Officer, and Domestic Violence investigator.
C. Crouch Room	C. When Addiction Affects the Family: Understanding the Impact on Children, Sarah Kirkwood, LIMHP, LADC, IMH-E® This session examines how parental substance use impacts children's emotional health, behavior, and development. Participants will gain an understanding of common challenges children may experience and learn strategies for supporting resilience and healthy family relationships.	 C. Sarah Kirkwood is a therapist and owner of Institute for Resilience, specializing in infant mental health, families, and trauma. With 11+ years of clinical practice and 15+ years in child welfare, she is an Infant Mental Health Clinical Mentor and adjunct professor in Doane University's Master of Counseling Program.



C. Crouch Room	C. Family Finding: A Pivotal Role in Team Collaborating, Advocating and Connecting Families, Lynnette Otero Discover how and why the NE Department of Health and Human Services division of Children and Family Services places an emphasis on locating and connecting families. Learn what the Family Finding Team does and how it supports the DHHS mission of Helping People Live Better Lives. Hear statistics and details on the different services the Family Finding team offers to the Child and Family Services Specialists. See genograms/family trees and learn how the team investigates locating additional family members along with their contact information.	 C. Lynnette Otero is a Child/Family Services Specialist Supervisor with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, where she supervises the Family Finding Team. She holds a BSW from the University of Nebraska and has served as an ongoing caseworker and permanency worker. Her work focuses on identifying and engaging relatives to strengthen family connections and support safe, timely permanency.
4:40pm – 5:40pm Devaney Room	VOCA Data Integrity & Reporting for CASA Staff with Gina James Step into CasaManager: This session is for CASA staff only. It will provide an overview of VOCA requirements for CASA programs, including how to identify VOCA-eligible cases, enter required data accurately, address missing information, and run VOCA reports. Participants will learn how proper data collection and reporting help demonstrate how VOCA funds are used to serve child victims and support continued funding eligibility. Real Time Learning: You will see the facilitator flagging children's cases as VOCA, entering key VOCA data points on those children, identifying and fixing missing VOCA data, and running VOCA reports.	 Gina A. James is CasaManager's Account Manager and Lead Trainer, supporting CASA programs nationwide with training, support, and strategic guidance. She has extensive experience in dependency and neglect case supervision, staff development, volunteer support, and interagency collaboration. She holds a B.S. in Business.



5:45pm – 8:30pm Ardis Ballroom  Monica Huber, Emcee, Executive Director of CASA of Elkhorn Valley and Nebraska CASA board member	Opening Reception and Music Bingo The 2026 Nebraska CASA Association Conference will begin with an opening reception for all conference attendees on Friday evening. Attendees are warmly invited to connect with colleagues while enjoying a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere, a cash bar, beverages, and a selection of delicious bites showcasing some of Lincoln's best local offerings. As you step into the Ardis Ballroom, please feel free to make yourself at home. Help yourself to a delicious buffet of heavy appetizers, settle in at your table, and enjoy. Elliott Piper of The Music Bingo People will host an upbeat round of Music Bingo, featuring a crowd-pleasing mix of favorites. Guests are encouraged to sing along, enjoy a few laughs, and take part for a chance to win a gift basket in a spirited, friendly competition. The Graduate Hotel, the NE CASA Association Conference Committee, and the Lincoln Visitors Bureau look forward to welcoming you and extending Nebraska hospitality at the opening reception.	 Caitlin Whitehead, Emcee, Prairie Plains CASA Executive Director and Nebraska CASA Board member  Elliott Piper, The Music Bingo People
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Special thanks to the 2026 Nebraska CASA Conference Planning Team:

Amanda Conradt, Senior Volunteer Coordinator at CASA for Lancaster County
 Brandi Klaassen, Volunteer Coordinator at Southeast NE CASA
 Christina Millsap, Training Director at Nebraska CASA Association
 Cindy Reed, NE CASA Board Member
 Corrie Kielty, Executive Director at Nebraska CASA Association
 Debbie Green, Director at SENCA CASA
 Happy Aldana, Executive Director at CASA of the Midlands
 Jodi Richards, CASA Volunteer Supervisor at Kearney/Buffalo County CASA
 Krista Bruns, Executive Director at PlainsWest CASA
 Kristi Morrow, Associate Director of CASA for Lancaster County
 Linda Shaw, Executive Director at Dawson/Gosper County CASA
 Margot Icenogle-Larsen, Executive Director at Kearney/Buffalo County CASA
 Mindy Bieck, CASA Volunteer at Sarpy County CASA
 Sarah Mundil, CFS Learning & Development Supervisor
 Shelby Pedersen, Executive Director at Southeast NE CASA
 Tammie Stolz, Operations Coordinator at Nebraska CASA Association

Day 2 | Saturday, August 22, 2026

7:30am - 9:00am Ardis Ballroom	Registration, Coffee & Continental Breakfast Welcome. Please collect your nametag and conference program at the welcome desk.	
8:00am – 9:00am Devaney Room	CasaManager Resources for CASA Staff, Gina James Step into CasaManager: This session is for CASA staff only. In this review session, we will cover a broad range of workflows which may include: • In-Service / Continuing Education • Outreach Presentations / Recruitment Campaigns / Booths • How to run In-service and Outreach Reports • How to correctly enter and pull reports on the number of new volunteer trainings • CasaManager Integrated Help Guide • Underutilized features Real Time Learning: You will see the facilitator enter In-Service workshops, recruitment events, and run reports to get those data points. You will also see how to properly enter core training data and run the reports. Additionally, you will watch how to access the Integrated Help Guide and receive a list of underutilized features and functions which help you work smarter, not harder.	 Gina A. James is CasaManager's Account Manager and Lead Trainer, supporting CASA programs nationwide with training, support, and strategic guidance. She has extensive experience in dependency case supervision, staff development, volunteer support, and collaboration. She holds a B.S. in Business.
8:00am - 4:30pm	• Exhibitors – Perkins/Douglas Room • CASA Store - Merlin Room	
9:00am – 9:45am Ardis Ballroom  Corrie Kielty, NE CASA Executive Director, MC	Conference Opening & Jen McNally, Keynote We hope you'll join us for a warm welcome from Corrie Kielty, Nebraska CASA Executive Director, and a meaningful and engaging keynote with Jen McNally, as she brings her timely message— Better. Together. — to life. Let's be honest: most "teamwork" sessions feel like a group project where you end up doing all the work, or a meeting that could have been a very short email. It's time to stop treating collaboration like a "have to" and move to the power of "get to." In Better. Together , it's about working smarter, avoiding the hero-complex burnout, and realizing that none of us is as smart, or as funny, as ALL of us!	 Jen McNally is a national speaker and Director of Mental Health & Wellness with 20+ years of experience in residential, outpatient, and educational settings. She oversees mental health programming for students and educators across Nebraska ESUs.

D. Devaney Room  D. Jason Varga is currently the Executive Director for Cause Collective in Lincoln, a local membership agency that strengthens other nonprofits so they can better serve the community. Jason spent twenty-five years working for other nonprofits.	D. Nonprofit Board 101, Part I, Jason Varga & Dawn Rockey This training provides an overview of the ten core responsibilities of a nonprofit board, as defined by BoardSource, a national leader in nonprofit board education and governance. Participants will gain a clearer understanding of the collective responsibilities of a nonprofit board and explore practical tips for: • Strengthening Collaboration, • Alignment, • and Effectiveness among board members. This experience is designed as a two-part journey, so to get the most out of our time together, please plan on joining us for both Part I and Part II. We've built these sessions to flow naturally into one another, and we can't wait to see the whole Nonprofit Board training unfold with you!	 D. Dawn Rockey joined CASA for Lancaster County as Executive Director in December 2006. Dawn came to CASA with a background in state government and commercial banking. She is a graduate of UNL, with a bachelor's degree in international Affairs and completed graduate hours in Public Administration and Political Science.
11:00am – 11:15am	<i>Break</i>	Merlin/Perkins/Douglas Room
11:15am – 12:15pm A. Rodgers Room	Session Breakout 2: A. Hard Conversations Prevent Harder Problems, Miranda Stoll LIMHP, LADC Working with youth and family means navigating emotionally charged situations, complex systems, and competing expectations. When difficult conversations are avoided or softened too much, the impact doesn't disappear; it often shows up later as confusion, frustration, burnout, or strained relationships. This session will emphasize real-world application, psychological safety, and prevention-focused communication skills that protect both professionals and the families they serve.	 A. Miranda Stoll is a licensed mental health practitioner, trauma-informed leadership facilitator, and community systems consultant with extensive experience supporting all professionals.

B. Rozier Room

B. Working with GAL Attorneys as Advocates: Their Responsibilities and How to Collaborate Effectively, Michelle Paxton, J.D.

Guardian ad Litem (GAL) attorneys serve a unique dual role in Nebraska's juvenile court, acting as both legal counsel and best interests advocate for children. This session provides a practical overview of the GAL's statutory responsibilities and courtroom duties, while focusing on strategies for effective collaboration with parents' counsel, county attorneys, and child welfare professionals. Participants will gain tools to strengthen communication, reduce conflict, and promote child-centered, high-quality advocacy in juvenile cases.



B. Michelle Paxton is the Founder and Director of the NE Children's Justice and Legal Advocacy Center (NCJC) and an Assistant Professor at the University of Nebraska College of Law.

C. Crouch Room

C. Real Colors Personality Workshop Part I, Jackie Cervantes-Guzman

Join us here to start this journey with us. Real Colors is such a wonderful way to see the world through a brand-new lens, helping you celebrate your own unique strengths while discovering the amazing traits in those around you.



C. Jackie Cervantes-Guzman earned a B.S. from UNL with a major in Elementary Education. After earning a master's degree in education, she began her 20-year career with the UNL Extension first as a Positive Youth Development Educator then an Early Childhood Educator.

D. Devaney Room



D. Jason Varga is the Executive Director for Cause Collective in Lincoln, a local membership agency that strengthens other nonprofits so they can better serve the community. Jason spent twenty-five years working for other nonprofits.

Because this is a two-part experience, we ask that you join us for both Part I and Part II. This ensures we can build that solid foundation for a strong, connected team together in a way that's fun, interactive, and truly meaningful. We can't wait to dive in with you!

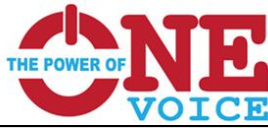
D. Nonprofit Board 101, Part II, Jason Varga & Dawn Rockey

Welcome back! We're so excited to have you join us for the second half of our journey. This session is a true continuation of the wonderful conversations we started in Nonprofit Board 101, Part I, so we'll be picking up right where we left off.

Together, we'll walk through the rest of the board's essential responsibilities and make sure there's plenty of time for all your thoughtful questions. It's going to be a great way to wrap up everything we've learned!



D. Dawn Rockey joined CASA for Lancaster County as Executive Director in December 2006. Dawn came to CASA with a background in state government and commercial banking. She has a bachelor's degree from UNL in international Affairs.



12:15pm - 12:30pm	Break	Merlin/Perkins/Douglas Room
12:30pm - 1:45pm Ardis Ballroom  Alex Stowe, NE CASA Board of Directors President is an Executive Director of a national association. Alex received his Juris Doctorate from UNL and has extensive experience with nonprofits, compliance, and health care law and regulation.	Lunch, Networking, Awards & Tristian Smith, Keynote Join us for a special luncheon as we celebrate <i>The Power of One</i>. The incredible way one person, one action, and one community can truly transform the lives of children and families across Nebraska. As you step into the Ardis Ballroom, please feel free to make yourself at home. Help yourself to a delicious meal from the buffet, settle into your table, and enjoy the chance to connect and catch up with one another. Alex Stowe, Nebraska CASA Board President, will serve as our luncheon emcee. After time to enjoy your meal, Alex will take the stage to honor our wonderful award winners. The Voice That Stays: Advocacy, Belonging, and the Power of Showing Up by Tristian Smith Author, former foster youth, and CASA volunteer, Tristian Smith will explore how one consistent voice can shape the course of a child's life. Drawing from his memoir <i>Against All Odds</i> and his work advocating for children and youth, Tristian reflects on the lasting impact of the adults who showed up, spoke up, and stayed present when it mattered most. Centered on advocacy, belonging, and the life-changing power of consistency, this keynote will challenge attendees to see that their voice is not just heard in courtrooms and case files, but felt in the daily lives of children who need someone to remain steady during uncertainty.	 Tristian Smith is an award-winning author, keynote speaker, and child welfare advocate whose journey from foster care to military leadership shapes his work with audiences across the country. Tristian holds a B.A. in History from Fort Valley State University, an M.S. in Emergency Management from the University of Maryland Global Campus, and an M.S. in Intelligence Analysis from Johns Hopkins University. He is the author of <i>Against All Odds</i>, an Amazon Best Seller and award-winning memoir that explores resilience, mentorship, and the life-changing impact of steady support systems.
1:45pm - 2:00pm	Break	Merlin/Perkins/Douglas Room
2:00pm - 3:00pm A. Rodgers Room	Session Breakout 3: A. Building Bridges: Practical Strategies for Supporting Youth Aging Out of Foster Care, Tristian Smith Learn practical strategies aimed at empowering youth who are transitioning out of the foster care system. Drawing from personal experiences detailed in <i>Against All Odds</i>, participants will learn actionable methods to foster independence, resilience, and stability among young adults.	 A. Tristian Smith, Lunch Keynote Speaker.



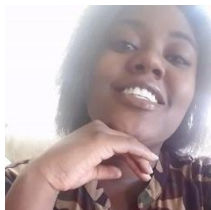


3:15pm - 4:15pm

Ardis Ballroom



Cindy Reed, Moderator, is a seasoned youth advocate with over 15 years of experience in empowering young people, fostering meaningful partnerships, and guiding nonprofit leaders.



Arvoni Johnson, Youth Voice and Lived Experience Speaker

Panel: ***Making It Matter: How The Power of One Can Champion Youth Voice in the Courtroom***

This closing panel brings together judges and individuals with lived experience in the child welfare and court system for an honest, cross-perspective conversation about what it truly means to elevate youth voice in proceedings. The dialogue in questions cultivated from the field, the trending needs of youth, and what panelists themselves believe the child welfare community most needs to hear.

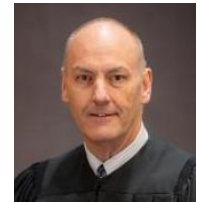
Bring the questions you have always wanted to ask people who have experienced the child welfare system first-hand AND the Judges who make decisions affecting these lives.

Participants will leave with concrete strategies they can apply immediately in their own role, a sharper lens for examining where current practices may limit youth participation, and an invitation to ask harder questions about whether the policies and culture within their courts and agencies truly support youth voices.

**Scan to complete our
Conference Survey Online**



Hon. Linda A. Bauer has served on the Jefferson County Court bench since 2014. A member of the Nebraska Bar, she was also the Jefferson County Attorney from 1996 – 2014 and in private practice from 1996-2014. In 2025, she received the Distinguished Judge for Service to the Community.



Hon. Roger J. Heideman has served on the Lancaster County Court bench since 2006 after practicing law for several years. Since 2010 he has been the Presiding Judge for Family Treatment Drug Court. A member of the Nebraska Bar, in 2016 he received the Nebraska Supreme Court Distinguished Judge Award for Improvement to the Judiciary.

Thank you for your tireless dedication, your fierce advocacy, and your unwavering belief in the potential of every child. Together, we are changing lives, one child at a time. **Go forward, be bold, and continue to be that one vital voice.**