



Session Descriptions



Keynote 9 – 10:15 AM, Auditorium

It Only Takes One: The Power of Connection, *Dr. Shekila Melchior, George Mason University*

Professional counselor and kinship caregiver Dr. Shekila Melchior opens the 10th annual Spring Forward Family Fun Day with an inspirational keynote presentation. Building on research that confirms the power of connection, Dr. Melchior will share how strong relationships with even just one caring adult can foster huge gains for children and youth. Participants will gain new strategies for promoting mutual empathy, empowerment and growth in their families and communities.

Breakout Sessions

10:30- 11:40 AM, Auditorium

Movie Time: Screening and Discussion of “Unseen” with Moms in Motion, *Shalini Mikos, Moms in Motion and facilitator Bianca Martin, Formed Families Forward*

This session features a screening of the 40-minute *Unseen* documentary which follows the Ronnes, a blended family with 8 children, including Lucas, who has profound disabilities requiring total care. Their situation has gotten more and more challenging as Lucas gets older and stronger. With limited resources and support, caregiving takes a toll on their physical and mental health. It’s a common story among parent caregivers: the isolation, uncertainty about the future, lack of options, and a never-ending daily to-do list means the role of caregiver overpowers nearly every other facet of life. Following the film, Shalini Mikos of *Moms in Motion* will overview options for families of children, youth and young adults with disabilities to secure personal assistance, respite and other care options through Medicaid long term care waivers.

10:30- 11:40 AM, Room 110A

How to Care for You: Self Care and Kinship, *Monique Lilakos, DSW, LCSW, kinship caregiver, Higher Purpose Coaching and Mentoring, LLC*

Dr. Lilakos will present on challenges faced by kinship caregivers, how self-care can support resilience, and offer specific self-care techniques.

10:30- 11:40 AM, Room 110H

Positive Parenting, *Nina Manganaris, LCSW, Deputy Director, Formed Families Forward*

Parenting young children can be demanding. This session will explore what’s behind children’s behavior, present some positive ways to address common behavioral challenges and support strengthening family

routines. Consideration for children with special needs will be included. Based on the “Positive Solutions for Families” curriculum.

10:30- 11:40 AM, Room 110L

Community Safety Considerations: Positive Interactions with Law Enforcement, Trooper Henry Vasquez, VA State Police

Interactions with law enforcement may be scary for some members of a community, especially those who have disabilities, mental health conditions, trauma histories or come from other challenging circumstances. Trooper Henry Vasquez of the Virginia State Police will share insights on how law enforcement procedures and practices may specifically impact youth, teens and young adults who have disabilities and mental health challenges. Trooper Vasquez will offer parents, caregivers and professionals practical tips to ease fears and increase positive outcomes when interacting with law enforcement.

11:40 AM – 12:50 PM, Auditorium

At the Crossroads: New Resources for Recognizing and Addressing Trauma in Children and Youth with Disabilities, Beth Spivack, MSW, Family Support and Outreach Director, Formed Families Forward

Children with disabilities and other special needs are much more likely to be exposed to traumatizing events and circumstances than their nondisabled peers. However, resources specific to trauma and its impact on children with disabilities are limited. In this session, we share new videos and print resources that feature voices of families impacted by trauma and disability. Tools for trauma informed education evaluations and IEPs are offered.

11:40 AM – 12:50 PM, Room 110A

Just What Your Family Needs: Navigating FFF Resources, Renee Myers, NCSP, Content Specialist, Formed Families Forward

In this interactive session, participants will be introduced to three popular Formed Families Forward resources. *Learning Your Way* is FFF’s online, self-paced learning system for those who are looking to expand their knowledge. We will also demonstrate how to make the most of FFF’s Resource Directory, a free searchable tool for finding organizations, agencies and private providers offering programs and services for children, youth and families. And, we will introduce participants to Formed Families Together peer led support groups that meet monthly in-person and virtually.

11:40 AM – 12:50 PM, Room 110L

Understanding and Addressing Sexualized Behavior in Children and Youth, a clinician from the Gil Institute for Trauma and Recovery and Education

In this session, participants will be introduced to sexualized behavior in children and youth and receive tips on how to address it. A more detailed description will be provided soon.

11:40 AM – 12:50 PM, Room 110H

Family Road Map: A Resource Guide for Navigating Systems of Care and Services for Children and Youth with Disabilities, *Kelly Henderson, PhD, Executive Director, Formed Families Forward*

Parents and caregivers of children, youth and young adults with disabilities and other challenges often find themselves overwhelmed when it comes to finding a resource or service from a system of care. They spend a lot of time traveling down several paths before finding the right provider or service in the systems needed to care for their child or young adult. In this session, we will explore how to use the *Family Road Map*, a step-by-step guide, to set goals, learn system basics, build relationships, manage information and find support to successfully navigate systems of care.

Presenter Biographies

Keynote Speaker:

Dr. Shekila Melchior, NCC, LPC-MHSP (TN), LPC (VA) is a scholar-activist-practitioner and serves as the Director of DEI Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at George Mason University. She is a Nationally Board-Certified Counselor, an LPC-MHSP in TN, an LPC in VA and a Licensed Professional School Counselor in Virginia. She has over 10 years' experience working with children, adolescents and adults in clinical and school settings. She is active in her local, state and national organizations and has delivered over 100 presentations. Dr. Melchior's research interests include social justice identity development, undocumented students/immigrants, the professional identity development of school counselors and wellness for front line activists as well as wellness for Black Women. Lastly, Dr. Melchior was the 2021 recipient of the Counselors for Social Justice Mary Smith Arnold Anti-Oppression award, which recognizes counselors and counselor educators who have an exemplary record of challenging multiple oppressions in the counseling profession.

Breakout Session Presenters:

Kelly Henderson, PhD is Executive Director of Formed Families Forward. Kelly is a former public school teacher of students with emotional and behavioral disorders, and has worked in national and federal special education policy and research settings. Kelly's family is formed in part through public foster care and adoption. Her teen and young adult children have a range of learning, behavioral, medical and cognitive disabilities. Kelly has trained adoptive, foster and kinship families and agency personnel on special education-related needs of children and has provide information and support to many individual families. She serves on numerous advisory boards and committees.

Dr. Monique Lilakos, DSW, LCSW is a mother of two children and a grandparent caregiver for her 16-year-old grandson who she has raised. Monique is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with over 22 years of experience. She works with the federal government and has a private practice. Monique works with individuals across the lifespan, with a focus on adolescents, young adults, and kinship families. Many of her clients have found great success managing life changes. Monique is particularly sensitive to people facing issues related to mental health, finding resources, anxiety, depression, trauma, and family wellness. Monique's approach is rooted in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Dialectical Behavior Therapy, Attachment Theory and Family Systems Theory, which are evidence-based approaches to treatment that focus on helping clients holistically, mind, body, and spirit.

Nina Manganaris, LCSW has a Master's Degree in Social Work from Virginia Commonwealth University. She is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who brings experience from the private sector, nonprofit agencies, the federal government, and the military in addressing family needs. Nina is the proud mother of three grown children and a grandmother of two. She has personal experience navigating the special education system as she helped her own child obtain the support and services she needed. Nina has worked with adoptive, foster and kinship families over the years providing support, information, and guidance as they work to help their children be successful. She has additional expertise in trauma, parenting education and grief. Nina is passionate about working with families and children and believes in a strength-based approach.

Bianca Martin, CPRS is a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist who serves the community by using her lived experience. Bianca and her husband are former kinship foster parents with Fairfax County and have legal custody of their nephew, who has mental health and learning challenges. Bianca has experience navigating special education for her family as well as those with whom she works as a Family Support Partner at another nonprofit organization. At FFF, Bianca co-facilitates a peer-led support group of foster, adoptive and kinship parents and caregivers.

Shalini Mikos, is a Community Outreach Coordinator for Moms in Motion, a Virginia Service Facilitation provider.

Renee Myers, NCPS is a graduate of the University of Maryland and The Pennsylvania State University. She is a Nationally Certified School Psychologist who worked in both the Prince William County, VA and Charles County, MD school systems before “retiring” to become a full-time mom and community volunteer. In addition to her professional training and experience with special education, Renee has personally navigated the system for two of her children, one of whom was adopted from China. At FFF, Renee is committed to providing parents and caregivers with user friendly resources to help them access the special education and disability services their children need to be successful.

Beth Spivack, MSW worked in marketing communications at large corporations and nonprofits before making a career change and earning a MSW from Virginia Commonwealth University. The career change was inspired by the adoption of her daughter from Ethiopia. Beth has worked in schools, as an addiction specialist and in therapeutic foster care. At Formed Families Forward Beth supports families and professionals through training and consultations, especially around topics related to childhood trauma, traumatic stress and building resiliency. She also supports family engagement efforts in our Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports work. Beth is especially passionate about working with underserved populations and providing equitable services across all systems.

Senior Trooper Henry Vasquez is the Field Training Officer for the Virginia State Police. He presents a variety of topics related to the work of law enforcement and safety in the community.