



## Session Descriptions

Spring Forward Fun Day

April 13, 2024



### Welcome and Keynote 9 – 10:15 AM, Auditorium

**Reignite Your Why!** with *Jessica Sinarski, LPCMH, BraveBrains*

Jessica Sinarski opens the 11<sup>th</sup> annual Spring Forward Family Fun Day with an inspirational keynote presentation. Do you remember how you felt when you first started this journey? You were ready for the challenges ahead and eager to jump in with a helping hand. If you've felt that motivation waning, you are not alone! In the face of stress and trauma, the brain can go into "survival mode." Take some time to get your spark back! We will put neuroscience in practice to renew your passion and refresh your weary heart and mind.

**10:15 – 10:30 AM - BREAK, visit exhibit tables.**

### Breakout Sessions

**10:30 - 11:40 AM, Auditorium**

**Transitions Panel**, *George Mack, Project LIFE; Dr. Takesha McMiller, Great Expectations; Beth Hall, HopelinkTIP; Jacqueline Guilford, WIOA Youth Program, Fairfax County DFS, and facilitator Renee Myers, Formed Families Forward*

The transition from high school to adulthood can be an unsure and even scary time, especially for youth and young adults who have experienced kinship care, foster care, or adoption. Hear from a panel of experts about the tools, resources, and services available to help young adults live and thrive after high school. Representatives from Project LIFE, Great Expectations, Hopelink, and WIOA will discuss their programs and answer questions.

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

**Tips and Tricks for Parenting Young Children**, *Melissa Lebling, Formed Families Forward*

Parenting young children is exhausting but critical work! This workshop offers some fresh tips and tricks you can start implementing right away to make it a little easier. We will explore challenging behaviors through a trauma lens, and learn how to teach our children (and ourselves) ways to better self-regulate. You will gain positive parenting strategies to ease the journey.

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

**SIM Vocabulary LINCing Routine**, *Mary Murray Stowe, M.Ed., Strategic Instruction Model (SIM); Judith Fontana, Ph.D., George Mason University*

Students need a deep and wide knowledge of vocabulary to be successful as they progress through the grades. Join us to learn an evidence-based instructional routine to support your child in learning the vocabulary associated with their school courses.

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

#### **Communicating Effectively: The Hard & The Easy, Ashleigh Conrad & Sammy Carr, *Girls on the Run***

This workshop will explore diverse communication styles and give attendees skills to convey tough topics, such as emotions, in a more clear and concise manner. Attendees will participate in an experiential exercise to identify different communication styles, then learn clear tools to implement with themselves and the youth in their lives to foster better communication.

### **11:40 - 11:50 AM- BREAK, visit exhibit tables.**

### **11:50 AM – 1:00 PM, Auditorium**

#### **At the Crossroads: Resources for Recognizing and Addressing Trauma in Children and Youth with Disabilities, Beth Spivack, MSW, school social worker**

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.

### **11:50 AM – 1:00 PM, Room 110A**

#### **Special Education Boot Camp, Rachel Hamilton, M.Ed, Education Specialist, Formed Families Forward**

Attention! You've been recruited for a special education boot camp!

March to this workshop and learn about special education laws, the five steps to the special education process, tips and strategies for your students' IEP meetings, and more! By the end of this workshop, you will be armed with the tools and knowledge to advocate for your children to get the services they need.

### **11:50 AM – 1:00 PM, Room 110H**

#### **Navigating Kinship Care: Resilience, Resources and Advocacy Essentials, Sarah Smalls, Kinship Family Consultant, Formed Families Forward and Jamarl D. Clark, Assistant Director, National Center on Grandfamilies**

Kinship families are formed when extended family and close friends take primary care of children and youth. Kinship families face unique challenges and may benefit from specialized supports. In this session, participants will get to know the national organization Generations United (GU) and their Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network. Practical tools and resources that benefit kinship caregivers will be shared, and presenters will offer strategies for increasing advocacy for kinship care.

### **11:50 AM – 1:00 PM, Room 110L**

#### **Navigating Stormy Waters: Resources/Interventions to Stay Afloat While Managing Unsafe Behaviors in Children/Adolescence, Leigh C. McInnis, LPC, Executive Director, Newport Healthcare**

In this session, we will explore ways to mitigate unsafe behaviors occurring within the home. Specific topics addressed will be signs of risk, interventions for parents, and resources within the community.

## Presenter Biographies

**Keynote Speaker Jessica Sinarski, LPCMH** is a highly sought-after therapist, speaker, and change-maker. Weaving user-friendly brain science into everything she does, Jessica ignites both passion and know-how in audiences. Extensive post-graduate training and 15+ years as a clinician and educator led her to create the resource and training platform BraveBrains. She partners with school districts and child welfare agencies around the world to unlock resilience in children and adults alike. Jessica makes social emotional learning (SEL) practical, equipping parents and professionals with deeply trauma-informed tools. She is the author of numerous books including the award-winning *Riley the Brave* series, Your Magic Backpack series, and Light Up the Learning Brain. She also shares her expertise as a contributor to magazines, blogs, and podcasts. Jessica lives in Pennsylvania with her husband and three busy boys.

### Breakout Session Presenters:

**Sammy Carr** currently serves as the Communications Coordinator for Girls on the Run of Northern Virginia (GOTR NOVA), where she actively promotes the organization's identity as being more than just a running program. A GOTR Coach since 2019, she developed a passion for GOTR NOVA's mission of inspiring kids to be healthy, joyful, and confident, and pursued an internship with GOTR NOVA, leading to her current role. With a bachelor's degree from Longwood University and a background in supporting sports teams, Sammy is committed to helping today's youth build key life skills through active lifestyles and team collaboration.

**Jamarl D. Clark**, Assistant Director of Generations United's National Center on Grandfamilies, is responsible for helping direct the Center's work, including overseeing grandfamilies' engagement, creating and ensuring the quality of the Center's publications and resources, conducting federal advocacy, and leading the kinship navigator collaborative. For over a decade, Clark has served as a trusted thought partner to non-profit organizations with a focus on leadership, team building, and strategic planning. Through his work as a nonprofit and program development leader for national organizations, Clark brings an arsenal of well-developed management tools to Generations United. Prior to coming to Generations United, Clark served as the Executive Director of Jack and Jill of America, Inc., Program Manager for Plaza West, the first grandfamily residential affordable-housing project in the District of Columbia, and worked with corporate and government agencies to support the co-founding of the Community Corps program for Jumpstart for Young Children, in Washington D.C.

**Ashleigh Conrad** is the Engagement Manager and Coach with Girls on the Run of Northern Virginia (GOTR NOVA). In her role, she spearheads the organization's GOTR for Grown Ups workshop series, bringing the life skills cultivated in the GOTR NOVA curriculum to adult learners from diverse backgrounds, empowering them to continue their own growth. With a strong background in both the nonprofit and for-profit sectors, Ashleigh brings insight into child development, mentorship, and education. A graduate of the College of Charleston with dual degrees, Ashleigh is dedicated to fostering leadership potential among Northern Virginia's youth.

**Judith Fontana, Ph.D.** is Professor Emerita at George Mason University. She worked for 20 years at the Virginia Department of Education's Training and Technical Assistance Center (TTAC) at George Mason University where she provided an array of services related to literacy. Judith has been an adjunct for both the Special Education and Literacy Programs and developed and managed a Dyslexia Certificate Program. She is currently working as an adjunct for Marymount University, and as a consultant for the National Council for Improving Literacy (NCIL). Dr. Fontana is a Professional Developer for the Strategic Instruction Model (SIM) and has been a LETRS facilitator. She continues to work with and advocate for students with learning disabilities. [jfontan1@gmu.edu](mailto:jfontan1@gmu.edu)

**Jacqueline Guilford** has been a WIOA Youth Case Manager with Fairfax County since 2023. Her favorite aspects of her work are her clients and WIOA's holistic mindset. Jacqueline excels at building rapport with youth and guiding them on their career journey. Jacqueline earned her masters in library information science from North Carolina Central University and bachelors in marketing from Appalachian State University. Outside of work, Jacqueline can be found at farmer's markets with her wife and on long walks with her cat.

**Elizabeth “Beth” Hall**, LCSW is a licensed clinical social worker currently serving as the Director of Youth and Family Services for HopeLink, a nonprofit providing behavioral health, crisis intervention and suicide prevention services. For 13 years in the DC Metroplex, Beth has served young people and their families with experience and interest spanning a broad range of child, youth and family issues and services. A commitment to high quality service led Beth to earn her MSW from Virginia Commonwealth University and gain professional certifications in many areas including cognitive behavioral therapy, resolution of suicidality, community reinforcement, trauma and more. Beth’s passion for person-centered care based in strengths and evidence drives her work as a thought and professional leader in the youth and family space in Northern Virginia.

**Rachel Hamilton** is the Education Specialist at Formed Families Forward. She is a former teacher who has taught various grade levels and subjects in the United States and in three foreign countries. She holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education and Masters in Education in Instructional Technology. She and her husband, who is a retired Army officer, have three children, who were adopted through domestic and international adoptions. Throughout Rachel’s professional and personal experiences, she has helped others navigate supports for mental health, physical health, learning difficulties, and frequent military family relocations. She gained extensive experience with developing 504 Plans and Individualized Education Programs (IEP) both for her children and others. Rachel has years of experience helping her teen and young adult children deal with a broad range of learning, behavioral, medical, and cognitive disabilities. Rachel is highly involved in her community by serving on a state board that advocates for mental health, working as a family support group facilitator, and serving as an instructor. She has also served as a Master Trainer with Army Family Team Building, a Master Trainer with the Girl Scouts of America and a teacher and leader of children and adults in her church.

**Melissa Lebling** is the Family Support and Outreach Specialist at Formed Families Forward. She has a bachelor’s degree from the University of Maryland. She has spent most of her career in Early Childhood Education, leading and directing preschool programs. In 2014, her and her husband started doing foster care. They have had over 19 children live in their home and hearts and have adopted four children through Fauquier County Department of Social Services. Melissa is currently enrolled in two different programs aimed at helping parents and educators to support children who have been affected by trauma through foster care, adoption, and children with vulnerable nervous systems. As an adoptee, a former foster parent, and an adoptive mother, she is passionate about helping others through this journey. She also enjoys working with educators and parents to help them understand the complexity of children, their behaviors and how to meet them where they are.

**George Mack** is the project manager of Project LIFE and Northern Virginia Independent Living (IL) consultant at UMFS. George has worked as a youth counselor in residential care as a behavioral specialist. He has held several roles at UMFS. He was a mentor with the Central Region’s Mentoring Program, the Project Life Central Region IL Consultant, a TFC social worker, and most recently the Project Life Northern Region IL Consultant for the past five years. Now George has become the Project Manager for the Project LIFE program. George brings with him over 15 years of experience in working with youth in foster care, mental health services, and independent living programs.

**Leigh McInnis, LPC** is the Executive Director at Newport Healthcare’s Virginia location where she oversees the operations and programming of 4 Adolescent facilities and 3 Young Adult facilities. Before finding her professional home at Newport Healthcare, Leigh worked in many public mental health arenas, including nonprofit crisis prevention and response for adults, intensive in-home care for children and adolescents, and residential treatment facilities for children and adolescents where she supported in the development of the clinical milieu for a non-suicidal self-injury unit. Leigh is passionate about partnering with families and communities to support sustainable healing for our clients. Leigh holds a Master’s degree in Community Counseling and has training and experience with Attachment Based Family Therapy, Suicide Risk Prevention/Management, and Dialectical Behavior Therapy.

**Dr. Takesha McMiller** is the Interim Associate Vice President for Student Support Services at Northern Virginia Community College. She oversees the NVCC Great Expectations program.

**Renee Myers, NCPS** is the Content Specialist at Formed Families Forward. She 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.

**Sarah Smalls** is a kinship caregiver to three grandchildren in the northern Virginia area. Formerly an executive administrator with the federal government, Sarah has worked part time as a parent liaison in a local Fairfax County elementary school and is the past Vice President of Kinship for FACES of Virginia Families (now NewFound Families). She is a member of the federal Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren convened by US Department of Health and Human Services. Sarah served as Formed Families Forward’s Family Resource Coordinator from 2011 to 2020; she now consults with FFF on issues related to kinship care regionally and statewide.

**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 overseas. Beth has worked in therapeutic foster care and at Formed Families Forward as a Family Support and Outreach Director. She is currently a social worker in Prince William Public Schools. Beth's interests include childhood trauma, special education and building resiliency. She is especially passionate about working with underserved populations and providing equitable services across all systems.

**Mary Murray Stowe, M.Ed.** works with teachers, administrators, instructional coaches, directors, and coordinators of Special Education through the Training and Technical Assistance Center at William & Mary and the Virginia Department of Education as an educational specialist. Mary is certified as a SIM™ Certified Learning Strategy Professional Developer, Certified Local LETRS Classic Trainer, LETRS Third Edition Facilitator, and a SIM™ Content Enhancement Routine Professional Developer in Training. As a technical assistance consultant, Mary supports the National Center for Improving Literacy and Educational Testing Service. Currently, Mary is a doctoral candidate in Special Education and serves as the President of the Virginia Branch of the International Dyslexia Association.