



Session Descriptions

Spring Forward Fun Day

May 3, 2025



Today's Theme is ***Together We Can: Strengthening Your Family Through Community***

Welcome and Keynote 9 – 10:15 AM, Auditorium

Fostering Community: Overcoming Isolation, Finding Strength in Connection & Building Your “Tribe” with *Leigh C. McInnis, LPC, Executive Director – Newport Academy, Virginia*

Together, we will explore factors that can contribute to a sense of isolation as a foster, adoptive or kinship parent – and specific strategies for building a sense of belonging, community and accountability within your tribe. “Tribe” in this sense is in reference to the book, *Tribe: On Homecoming & Belonging* by Sebastian Junger which “explains why we are stronger together when we come together and how that can be achieved”.

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

Breakout Sessions

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

Early Childhood Building Blocks, *Melissa Lebling, Formed Families Forward; Beth Stribling, SLP, Something to Say; Cindy Connors, Discovery Toys*

Join us for an informative and engaging session on key building blocks in early childhood education! We'll explore essential topics such as speech development, fine and gross motor activities, and how to choose developmentally appropriate toys for children of all abilities. Additionally, we'll provide a practical checklist to help families and professionals identify preschool and childcare programs that are inclusive, trauma-informed, and supportive of children with disabilities.

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

Create a Community of Care, *Leigh C. McInnis, LPC, Executive Director - Newport Academy, Virginia*

Utilizing Eco-Maps as a tool, we will take a closer look at your current “tribe” of supports, resources, and connections. We will explore strengths and challenges associated with utilizing these resources, including the messages that you tell yourself about what it means to depend on a community, to experience conflict within your community and how to build trust with your community.

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

Special Needs Trusts and Able Accounts: What You Need to Know, *Cortney Heykoop, ChSNC*

For families supporting a child with a disability, ABLE Accounts and Special Needs Trusts can be critical tools for future planning. They allow the family to pass down money to support the child without impacting access to governmental programs. But both ABLE Accounts & Special Needs Trusts can be confusing and overwhelming. This presentation will outline the different types of trusts, who can establish, how they are administered, a variety of ways to fund a trust and how to determine how much is needed in the trust for your child

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

11:50 AM – 1:00 PM, Room 110A

From High School to Adulthood; Exploring Available Resources and Services, *Renee Myers, NCSP, Formed Families Forward, host; George Mack, Project Life; Margaret Hoffer & Christian, Project Belong's Don't Go Alone program; Tracy Harrington, Department for Aging & Rehabilitative Services (DARS)*

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, Project Belong's Don't Go Alone program, and the Department for Aging & Rehabilitative Services (DARS) will discuss their programs and answer questions.

11:50 AM – 1:00 PM, Room 110H

Stares, Glares, and Hurtful Words, *Gary Shulman, MS.Ed.*

When your child is perceived to look or behave in a way that brings on unwanted attention from others, it can be uncomfortable. Let's share strategies to educate, sensitize and react to these experiences. Let's dive into this sensitive topic and share our feelings, thoughts and emotions.

11:50 AM – 1:00 PM, Room 110L

Finding the Best Fit: Understanding Different Therapy Modalities, *Regi Corbie, LCMFT, Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.)*

This workshop will explore the complexities of selecting and applying therapeutic approaches tailored to the unique needs of children and youth in adoptive, kinship, and foster care families. Attendees will gain a deeper understanding of the emotional and psychological challenges these children face, including attachment issues, trauma, and identity development. The session will highlight various therapy modalities and intervention strategies, focusing on fostering resilience, building healthy relationships, and promoting emotional healing. Attendees will leave with practical tools and knowledge to better support and empower these vulnerable youth in their journey toward stability and well-being.

Presenter Biographies

Keynote Speaker Leigh McInnis, LPC is a licensed therapist and licensed clinical supervisor who is currently employed as the Executive Director at Newport Healthcare's Virginia location where she oversees the operations and programming of 4 Adolescent facilities and 3 Young Adult residential treatment 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. Leigh recently completed the Training for Adoption Competency with the Center for Adoption Support & Education (CASE) and is certified as a Brain Health Professional by the Amen Clinic.

Breakout Session Presenters:

Christian is twenty-one years old and recently aged out of foster care. During his time in foster care, he lived in multiple foster homes, group homes and residential. His experience has given him a unique perspective on the strengths and challenges of the system and he has a passion to use his story to positively impact those currently in care. Christian works as a security guard and is pursuing his dream of joining the military and becoming a motivational speaker.

Cindy Connors has a BA in Communications from Michigan State University and spent the first part of her career working at advertising agencies and selling radio advertising. After having her 1st child, Cindy was looking for a job she could work at home around her family's schedule and happened upon Discovery Toys in 1986. Cindy was impressed with the quality of the toys and how the mission of the company was helping children learn through play. Her 3 children grew up as "toy testers" and loved their "job!" Cindy is a Team Leader and manages her group of Play Advisors all over the US. She has been in Discovery Toys President's Club, received the Heart Award and has taken her husband on over 20 incentive trips around the world. She also has worked with many charities over the years including an Easter Basket drive for the Ronald McDonald House the past 7 years. One of Cindy's favorite parts of her job is working with the Special Needs community and assisting therapists and parents to pick developmentally appropriate toys, books and games to help their children achieve milestones in their cognitive, motor and social-emotional development while having fun. Cindy has thoroughly enjoyed "playing for a living" the past 38 years with her Discovery Toys business.

Regi Corbie, LCMFT, serves clients throughout the state of Maryland. Regi received his undergraduate degree in Electronic Media & Film from Towson University. He earned his master's degree in Couple & Family Therapy from the University of Maryland, College Park. Regi has provided individual, couple, and family therapy to youth and adults. Regi's experience includes working with clients of varying family and couple relationship structures, and he specializes in working with LGBTQIA+ youth and adults. Maintaining a culturally competent and trauma-informed lens is imperative to Regi's work with his clients, as he believes the intersectionality of our identities can play a significant role in our experiences and view of self. Regi works collaboratively with his clients and uses a strength-based approach.

Cortney Heykoop is a Special Needs Mom and Financial Advisor. She opened her own firm 6 years ago with a focus on serving families impacted by disability. Cortney loves working with other families like hers. She not only brings a breadth of financial knowledge but a comprehensive, holistic approach that includes helping families navigate the complexities of governmental resources, disability planning, estate planning and of course their financial plan.

Margaret Hoffer works for Project Belong, a nonprofit organization that inspires, recruits and resources the local church to care for vulnerable children. She is the director of Don't Go Alone, a program that connects young adults aging out of foster care to caring adults who provide connection and support to help them reach their full potential. She is also the proud adoptive mother of eight children and currently a foster home in Loudoun County. She also enjoys running marathons and jelly belly jellybeans, except for the

popcorn flavor.

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.

Renee Myers, NCSP 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.

Gary Shulman, MS.Ed. has spent a lifetime supporting vulnerable families and children. He began his career working with children with and without disabilities in an inclusive Head Start program in Brooklyn NY. He then transitioned to become the Special Needs and Early Childhood Coordinator for the Brooklyn Children's Museum for 10 years. His passion for advocacy grew as he worked more and more with parents of children with disabilities. For over 24 years he passionately advocated for the needs of these parents as the Social Services and Training Director for Resources for Children with Special Needs, Inc. in NYC. The last years of his working life, Mr. Shulman served as a private Special Needs Consultant conducting hundreds of training sessions throughout NYC and beyond to help parents and professionals find and access the services and systems required to facilitate maximizing the potential of their children with disabilities. Now retired in Arlington VA but still supporting vulnerable families serving as an Advisory Commissioner for the Partnership for Children, Youth and Families, Gary continues his workshop presentations and now also enjoys sharing his poetry that he passionately writes with the goal of leaving this world a better place one word at a time.

Beth Stribling has been a pediatric Speech Language Pathologist for 23 years. She has worked at Children's Hospital of Richmond VA, Infant Toddler Connections of Virginia, and the public school system. She currently owns and operates Something To Say, a private speech therapy practice in Warrenton Virginia and surrounding areas.