



The Coalition's 29th Annual New York State Foster Care and Adoption Conference

Thursday, May 10 – Saturday, May 12, 2018 at the Hilton Albany in Albany, New York

Our Workshop Presenters:

Dena Adler began her career as a special education teacher, expanded into the field of expressive therapies and, for more than 30 years has worked as an art therapist in schools and residential treatment centers. Adler also provides in-home therapy for home and community based programs. For the past seven years, she has focused on working with children in foster care and their families and caregivers. She works at Hillside Children's Center, supervising specialists in family-finding and permanency. Her passion is supporting life story telling to honor the compassion, resiliency and strengths in individuals, families and communities.

Zak Anolic is a Licensed Social Worker specializing in trauma-based therapy with children and teens – specifically those who have been sexually abused. Before coming to Kingsbridge Heights Community Center's Changing Futures Program, he worked for SCO Family of Services in the Treatment Family Foster Care (TFFC) program, providing services to traumatized children placed in foster care. He worked with families to reunify or work toward adoption and worked as a case planner and supervisor within TFFC. Currently, he is working to bring together various forms of therapy to increase the efficacy of treatment.

Suzanne Bachner is an award-winning playwright and director and is herself an adoptee. *The Good Adoptee*, her play starring Anna Bridgforth, is the totally true story of Bachner's riveting and outrageous search for her birth parents in the face of New York State's sealed records. The show has won awards for Best Autobiographical Script and Best Actress at New York City's United Solo Theatre Festival. It was named a Best Play by Indie Theater Now (ITN) and is included in ITN's Plays and Playwrights 2017 anthology. Bachner holds a Master of Fine Arts from the Actors Studio Drama School at the New School University. For more information, visit www.TheGoodAdoptee.com and www.JMTCTheatre.com.

Suz Bednarz-Kish surrendered her first born child to a traditional closed adoption in 1986 after a five-month stay in a maternity home 1,000 miles from her family home. In 2006, she started blogging at *Writing My Wrongs* about her experiences as a birth mother in a tentative reunion. She also successfully facilitated over 200 reunions for those separated by the Kurtz network of agencies. She is currently a content strategist and project manager. She lives in Connecticut with her family.

Mike and Kristin Berry are authors, bloggers, speakers, adoptive parents and former foster parents. They are passionate about conveying a message of hope and transformation to adoptive, foster, and special needs parents around the globe. They are the creators of the award-winning blog *Confessions of an Adoptive Parent*, which has a global audience of more than 100,000 every month. The site also hosts *The Honestly Adoption Podcast*. In 2015, the Berrys co-authored the books *The Adoptive Parent Toolbox* and *The Weary Parent's Guide To Escaping Exhaustion*. Kristin Berry also authored the best-selling book *Born Broken: An Adoptive Journey*, which chronicles her and her husband's journey in raising children from extreme trauma. Their newest book, *Confessions Of An Adoptive Parent: Hope And Help From The Trenches Of Foster Care And Adoption*, was released in February. They have been married for eighteen years and have eight children, all adopted. They reside in suburban Indianapolis.

Barbara Bisig is the Family Peer Support Advocate Supervisor for Hillside Children's Center. She works with GLOW/Waiver Programs as well as B2H as a family peer advocate. She has worked with the foster care system for 25 years. She is the mother of eleven children, two of whom are adopted. She facilitates a Grandparents Raising Grandchildren's Group.

Bob Brader is an award-winning actor, writer, storyteller and monologist. *Spitting In The Face Of The Devil*, his acclaimed solo show, toured all over the U.S. and Canada and won seven "best of" awards, including Best Show at the London Fringe and Best Script and Best Encore at the United Solo Theatre Festival, in New York City. *Spitting In The Face Of The Devil* was the featured theatrical event and a sold out crowd favorite at the Inaugural Woodstock Memoir Festival. Brader is the Executive Director of JMTC Theatre. He trained with the Stella Adler Conservatory at the Tisch School of the Arts and is a member of SAG-AFTRA, the Dramatists Guild and the United Solo Academy. For more information, visit www.spittinginthefaceofthedevil.com.

Nikki Calhoun is a parent, aunt and local activist. She has worked with lawmakers throughout the state and country to revamp the definition of kinship care, mental health reform and the rights of children in the system. Raising her niece, she has learned the difficulties that families face when caring for a child with disabilities. She had advocated for children placed in the foster care system and is caregiver for one.

Emily Collins has worked in the field of foster care and adoption for over fifteen years. She has worked with youth in foster care, birth families, and foster/adoptive families as a therapist, an administrator, and a support worker. In 2010, she became the foster mother and permanent parent of a sixteen-year-old boy. Her professional and personal experiences have provided her with extensive knowledge about trauma, attachment, and the struggles and joys of parenting children with difficult backgrounds.

Joseph Connors, Esq., is Director of Albany Law School's Health Law Clinic, an experiential course through which second- and third-year students provide representation to individuals with chronic health conditions. He served as Director of Albany Law School's Clinic and Justice Center from 2009 to 2012. He is the 2007 recipient of the Distinguished Excellence in Teaching and Distinguished Excellence in Service awards from Albany Law School. He is also a recipient of the NYS ARC Robert Hodson/Augustus Jacobs Disability Law Award. A former staff attorney at the Monroe County Legal Assistance Corporation, Connors has a range of research interests, including preserving the integrity of families affected by health challenges and removing barriers to access to justice for individuals with disabilities.

Max Corrigan was relinquished to adoption in Massachusetts when he was four days old. Placed with his adoptive family through a traditional closed, private adoption, he later became a big brother to a brother through adoption and a sister through IVF. When he was seventeen, he was "found" by his birth mother on MySpace, which led him to two more brothers and another sister. Since then, he has enjoyed a relationship with his entire family.

Josette Crean is a special educator. Through private adoptions, both transracial, she is the mother of two boys. For 10 years, she has been co-leader of a successful support group, Long Island Adoptive Families, helping support and educate many pre- and post-adoptive families, open adoption, positive adoption language, special needs education, transracial adoption and much more. She is the event planner for the support group, planning large events for the families, the adults and children.

Scarlett Fiona D'Arcy is currently a junior in high school. She enjoys history, art classes, the theater program and taking part in her school's highly competitive marching band as a member of the color guard. She was six years old when she first met her oldest brother, who had been adopted out of the family at birth. Now, over a dozen years later, she speaks to the adoption community as a "parented biological sibling of an adoptee" about her experience living in a now "open" adoption.

Claudia Corrigan D’Arcy has been a birth mother since 1987, when her oldest son, Max, was relinquished to adoption. Since 2001, she has written extensively about her own experiences as a birth mother, including the search and successful reunion with her son on her website, *Musings of the Lame* (www.adoptionbirthmothers.com). Her writings on adoption issues have been published in *The New York Times* and *Adoption Today Magazine*, and she has been interviewed by Dan Rather and Montel Williams and has appeared on *Huffington Post*. Extremely passionate about restoring the rights of adult adoptees to their original birth certificates, she is now the Director of Outreach and Advocacy at the Coalition.

April Dinwoodie is a nationally recognized thought leader on adoption and foster care. She is committed to improving laws, policies, practices and perceptions through research, education and advocacy. Her personal connection to adoption inspired her to create AdoptMent (Adoption+Mentoring), a specialized mentoring program through which adults who have been adopted and/or spent time in foster care mentor young people currently in foster care, and those who have been adopted from foster care and/or who may have a plan for adoption. Before she entered the non-profit world, she served as a senior level executive within the marketing and communications departments of some of the most recognized fashion retail companies. Transracially adopted, Dinwoodie grew up in Rhode Island and currently lives in Harlem. She shares her personal journey and explores adoption, identity and family via her podcast, *Born in June, Raised in April*.

Dr. Andrew Fitz-Gibbon is Professor of Philosophy, Chair of the Philosophy Department, and Director of the Center for Ethics, Peace and Social Justice at the State University of New York at Cortland. He is the author, co-author or editor of 13 thirteen books and numerous book chapters and articles in peer reviewed journals. Fitz-Gibbon and his wife, Jane, founded the Welcoming Strangers Project, an initiative of the Center for Ethics, Peace and Social Justice (CEPS) at SUNY Cortland, which trains foster parents and caseworkers in the principles and practice of intentional nonviolence. They have developed a method—“loving nonviolent re-parenting”—for providing

children in foster care a nonviolent and caring environment in which to heal from violence-induced trauma. Together they have cared for over 100 children in a foster care career spanning more than three decades.

Dr. Jane Hall Fitz-Gibbon is Coordinator for the Welcoming Strangers Project at the State University of New York at Cortland, where she is a Visiting Scholar in the Center for Ethics, Peace and Social Justice. She holds a PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies and has worked in crisis support at TST BOCES for over fifteen years. She has extensive experience in teaching GPS-MAPP and courses on child sexual abuse. Her latest book, *Corporal Punishment, Religion, and United States Public Schools*, was published last year. Since 1982, she and her husband have had over 100 children in foster care in their home.

Susan Gagnon, Esq., is a managing attorney for the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York, Inc., (LASNNY) based at LASNNY's Plattsburgh, New York regional office. After spending over a decade holistically representing survivors of domestic violence in a myriad of family law matters, she now supervises LASNNY's family law attorneys and oversees LASNNY's Canton and Plattsburgh offices. In addition to her work with domestic-violence survivors, she has passionately represented many caregivers in administrative hearings as well as in Article 6 and Article 10 proceedings. She has been the keynote speaker for the Child Care Coordinating Council of the North Country's annual celebration for Kinship Caregivers in Clinton County, New York. She earned her Juris Doctorate at the University at Buffalo School of Law and resides in Keene, New York.

Stephanie Garde is the Adoption and Trauma Network's (ATN) Support Director and Membership Director as well as its bookkeeper, CRM administrator, and website administrator and the mother to two sons. She also volunteers with local post-adoption support organizations in Massachusetts, frequently serving as a speaker or mentor to parent groups. A former disability-law attorney, she left practicing law to pour her energies into the attachment-focused, trauma-informed, therapeutic parenting of her older

son, whom she adopted through foster care. She lives with her family on Massachusetts's southern coast.

Sarah Gotowka is a visual artist living in Trumansburg, New York. She is adopted Korean-Polish-Italian-American, and grew up in the suburbs of Rochester. She received her BFA from the Cleveland Institute of Art, majoring in Fiber and Material Studies, in 2007, and graduated with an MFA from Concordia University's Fiber and Material Practices in 2013. With the help of adult adoptees, Gotowka hosts Painting Adoption Weekend (PAW) at her Luna Fiber Studio, where youth adoptees connect through making art. Realizing the power of PAW and how invaluable her friendships of adult adoptees were to her understanding of her identity, she continues working to foster and support this community. She serendipitously became part of the Coalition team in July of 2017, and is now, more than ever, dedicated to serving families who have been touched by adoption.

Brieanna Hayes entered foster care when she was fifteen years old. Now 22, she recently was granted an Exception to Policy and is still in care, awaiting her apartment. She plans to attend college to study culinary arts and business management. She is a member of the Youth Collaborative of You Gotta Believe, a New York City-based organization dedicated to finding permanent families for young adults, teens, and pre-teens in foster care. As such, she helps educate prospective permanent parents about what it is like to be a teenager in foster care and how they can best prepare for the responsibility they are about to take on. She also meets with young people in care and helps them open up to the possibility of having a lifetime family.

Christin Haynes is a native of Tallahassee, Florida and holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology with an emphasis in Black psychology and a Master of Social Work degree from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, in Tallahassee. Her professional experience includes years of field social work in subjects such as foster care, targeted case management for children with mental health disorders, geriatric long-term care, hospital case management and youth workforce development. Her personal experiences

include working with rural and inner-city youth with positive identity development and the performing arts. She is a first-year doctoral student in Family Studies and Human Development at Montclair State University, in Montclair, New Jersey. Her research interests include identity development of transracially adopted African American children and child outcomes of African American children adopted internationally.

Nicole Hayward is Permanency Specialist for You Gotta Believe and the parent of two children with special needs who were adopted from foster care as older youth. Prior to coming to You Gotta Believe as the Training Coordinator in 2015, she volunteered with the agency after adopting her children. She is a NYS GPS2/MAPP Certified Trainer and is Youth Module Certified in Mental Health First Aid by the Association for Mental Health and Wellness. She and her family are on the Speaker's Bureau for AdoptUSKids and have been featured in their videos, media launches for Adoption Month and magazine articles.

Richard Heyl de Ortiz joined the Coalition team as Executive Director in January 2015, but he is not new to the field of adoption and foster care. Richard is the former Executive Director of Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children (CASA) in Ulster County. He is also a member of the board of directors of CASA of New York State. Prior to his work with CASA, he was Executive Director of the Youth Resource Development Corporation in Poughkeepsie. He has held leadership positions with the American Civil Liberties Union, the YWCA, Head Start and Philadelphia's William Way Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Community Center. He is a Public Scholar with Humanities New York and is also an adoptive father. Richard and his husband, Anthony, live in New Paltz, NY.

Amy Ingram, Esq., has practiced in Ulster County Family Court since 2011. She has represented hundreds of children, parents and families in a variety of family court matters, including neglect proceedings and adoptions. She has owned her own practice since 2011. It has been her desire to help the children of Ulster County have happy and safe homes.

Annie Jacobs came to the world of adoption when she relinquished her son seven years ago. Since then, she has focused on creating a foundation for an ongoing relationship with her son and his family. She also has written and spoken about her experiences in creating a support network and giving visibility to biological families and their experiences. She contributed to the anthology *It's Not About You* and has spoken on panels at several conferences and with the Donaldson Adoption Institute. When not focusing on adoption, Annie spends her time working as a theater professional at two award-winning theaters in New York City.

Shamele Jenkins is President of Miami Dade County Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (FAPA). She has been that association's president for more than eight years. She was honored as the leader of Florida's top foster and adoptive parent association in 2011 and a leading FAPA in the state for many years. She has been a foster and adoptive parent for over 35 years. She has toured internationally, speaking on parenting, time management and life skills and has taught time management workshops for the National Foster Parent Association and other groups in the United States, Europe, Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. She is a professional poet and storyteller.

Karen Kelly is the parent of seven, four of whom are adopted. As the case manager for Hillside Children's Center, she is responsible for providing support, advocacy, education and parenting advice to pre- and post-adoptive families. She facilitates the Erie County Adoption Resource Center (ECARC), a foster and adoptive parent support group.

Richard LeFebvre is fluent in all things technology. Serving as the Coalition's Administrative Coordinator and working out of the organization's Long Island office, he helps the Coalition navigate the modern era of technology and keeping things online. In addition, LeFebvre is a Nobody Ages Out youth movement advocate at You Gotta Believe. As a youth advocate, he helps connect teens to permanent, "unconditional" families. He is a certified MAPP trainer and coaches prospective parents on the skills they'll need to parent a teen coming out of the foster care system. As a foster care alum himself, he

provides a unique perspective on the subject. He works directly with youth in care, stressing to them that everyone deserves and has a right to a family and reassuring them that they are not alone.

Ana Maria Leon Gomez is a Licensed Mental Health Clinician with 25 years of experience specializing in the assessment and treatment of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), learning disabilities and early childhood developmental issues. Bilingual in English and Spanish, she has an expertise in diagnosing and treating ADHD in children. Through years of training and experience working with adoptees, she is uniquely qualified to work with adopted children diagnosed with ADHD. She is trained in dyadic developmental psychotherapy and play therapy and is one of the few certified trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapists (TF-CBT) in New York City. She works at Spence-Chapin's Modern Family Center.

Catherine Lewis is co-director of the Ackerman Foster Care and Adoption Project. She has extensive experience working with families who have experienced trauma and has served in leadership positions at several New York City social-services agencies. She has presented nationally and internationally on the best practices of working with families. Lewis maintains a small, private practice in New York City and Westport, Conn., working with families, couples and children. In Connecticut, she serves as co-director of the Fairfield Chapter of A Home Within, a national network of volunteer mental health professionals who provide therapy for children in foster care.

Tess Mahnken-Weatherspoon is the manager of Family Finding Services and Post-Adoption and Guardianship Permanency Center services at Hillside Family of Agencies. She provides family finding training, coaching and mentoring, and supervises post-adoption and guardianship services at Hillside Children's Center. She is chairperson of the Monroe County Youth Services Quality Council Cultural Diversity Committee and is a frequent workshop presenter at national professional conferences. Prior to working in family finding and permanency, she served as the director of an

emergency runaway/homeless youth shelter and was the regional leader of community-based services in Monroe County.

Nicole Mariani, Esq., was admitted to the New York State Bar in January 2005. In November 2005, after working for a Hudson Valley law firm, she began her own practice. Her law office concentrates its practice on family and matrimonial law, including all areas of family law, guardianship, custody, adoption and child-support. Mariani has also been an Attorney for the Child and has been providing legal consultations for the Cornell Cooperative Extension's Orange County Relatives as Parents Program. She has conducted well over 150 legal consultations for kinship caregivers; has co-taught Kinship Care CLE's and many legal seminars, addressing topics such as custody and visitation, self-representation and advocacy in family court; and has taught the legal portion of the award winning Parenting A Second Time Around course to the Orange County Relatives as Parents Program.

Lisa D. Maynard is a social worker who for nearly 30 years has worked with families and children in the child welfare arena, and who has worked extensively with women and children with trauma histories. She holds a Master of Social Work, a Trauma Certificate from the University at Buffalo, certificates in Adoption Therapy from Hunter College School of Social Work, Traumatic Studies and Trauma Center-Trauma Sensitive Yoga through the Justice Resource Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She is an implementation specialist with the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.), co-owner of Adoption Center of Upstate New York and Spiral River, and senior consultant with the National Center on Adoption and Permanency. She serves on the advisory committee of the Adoption and Foster Family Coalition (AFFCNY) and volunteers with the Mental Health Association and R.A.I.H.N. She is a frequent presenter at local, state and national conferences, conducting workshops on adoption-related issues as well as stress-reduction, spirituality, self-compassion and self-care.

Yasmin Mistry is an Emmy-nominated animator and filmmaker who uses her art to create social change. She is the founder of the Foster Care Film and

Community Engagement Project (FCFCEP), a documentary film series that gives current and former foster youths a chance to be heard. She was inspired to create FCFCEP when she realized the voices of the children she worked with were not being heard and their stories never told. Youth in foster care share their stories on camera and work behind the scenes, as writers, camera operators, musicians, producers and more, to provide an authentic voice to the face of child welfare. Her first foster care film, *Feeling Wanted*, was an official selection of more than 35 film festivals. The film won thirteen awards and was nominated for Best Short Film of 2015 by Adoption At the Movies.

Megan Montgomery has been International Adoption Coordinator at Adoption STAR since 2012. She works with families who have chosen the international adoption path to parenthood, from initial inquiry through the completion of their post-adoption reports. She obtained her master's degree in social work from the State University of New York at Buffalo. After a few years working with children with social-emotional disorders and/or behavioral challenges and their families, she moved into the international adoption field, with an agency in Boston. Montgomery has presented at conferences such as the Adoption Initiative, at St. John's University, and the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC). She is the author of a number of blog posts and articles for well-known adoption-related organizations and magazines.

Elvira Northington is President of the Western New York Foster and Adoptive Families Association (WNYFAPA), a mother of eight, a grandmother of seven and, since 1996, a foster parent. She has served in the community and in schools and church ministries for many years and is blessed with her husband, Calvin, who shares and supports her work. She is a former Coalition Board Member and a current member of AFFCNY's Advisory Committee.

Tomasine Oliphant holds a bachelor's degree in Community Health Education and a master's degree in Social Work from Stony Brook University,

on Long Island, New York. She has experience in serving children in foster care, advocating for at-risk youth and helping families from Long Island to Texas—including those in the Hudson Valley—access services. Oliphant herself was raised in kinship care and has a deep understanding of the complex needs that children and families face following adoption and guardianship. She is extremely passionate about providing trauma-informed care and using creative arts as therapeutic intervention for youth. She is the AGAPE Hudson Valley Director. A new mother, she resides with her family in the Hudson Valley.

Michael Olivieri was a child in the foster care system for three years. During that time, he lived by turns in ten different homes. Olivieri decided to share his story of bullying, addiction, homelessness, foster care placement, drug and alcohol addicted parents and a physically, emotionally and mentally abusive step-father to show that it's possible to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds. Olivieri works with several foster care agencies, sharing his story to encourage foster parents, potential foster parents and children in foster care.

Joanie Eberstark Ollis has been an OB technician since 1999. She has witnessed thousands of babies find their way into this world and has taken care of many mothers and babies postpartum. She is a mother of four and grandmother of three. Her two older siblings—a sister and a brother—were relinquished to adoption before she was born, but later, as an adult, she searched for and was reunited with both.

Wendy Padilla is a bilingual trauma child/family therapist with the Changing Futures Program, at Kingsbridge Heights Community Center. She has fostered innovative ideas since her graduation from Fordham University with a Master of Social Work degree. One of her passions is animal therapy. She began to explore creating a first-of-its-kind animal-assisted therapy program at Kingsbridge Heights Community Center. She rescued a dog, Dolly, and is training her to work with clients. She has begun to introduce a multitude of clients to Dolly, who is a hypoallergenic Labradoodle.

Dr. Joyce Maguire Pavao is a lecturer in psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and has served as a consultant to various public and private child welfare agencies, adoption agencies, schools and community groups. She has worked closely with individuals and families touched by adoption, foster care and other complex, blended family constructions. She has done extensive training, both nationally and internationally, as the founder and CEO of Center for Family Connections, in Cambridge and New York, and founder and Director of Riverside after Adoption Consulting and Training, Pre/Post Adoption Consulting and Training (PAC) and All Adoption Consulting and Training. She has developed models for treatment and for training using her systemic, intergenerational and developmental framework, *The Normative Crises in the Development of the Adoptive Family*. Her book, *The Family of Adoption*, has received high acclaim.

Meryl Phipps, Esq., is a foster and adoptive mom of 10 kids, ages 2 to 26. She and her husband live in Danby with their children and a variety of pets that all seemed like good ideas at the time. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Sarah Lawrence College, and a Juris Doctor degree from Cornell Law School and works as a staff attorney/ manager for Citizens Concerned for Children, representing children in family court in Tompkins County.

Susan Rausch has been working in human services for 35 years in Tompkins County, NY. She is also an Adoptive Parent and, since 1991, a foster parent. She now has seven amazing young adult children and three grandchildren. Rausch works part-time as a Family Support Specialist in the Southern Tier Region. She also owns and operates Camp Earth Connection – a Natural Campground, Retreat Center and Specialized Youth Programs and Camps. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Cornell University and a Master of Science degree from the State University of New York at Cortland. She is grateful to be able to share her experience and knowledge and to serve adoptive and guardianship families throughout the Southern Tier Region. Rausch values diversity and community and believes that all people need a safe space where they are accepted and valued for who they are.

Pamela Rothfeld is a special educator, literacy coach, mother of two boys through private open adoptions and a former foster parent. As the owner of 2Boys Adoption Social Media Marketing, she has been teaching teachers and adoptive families how to use the internet to connect with others for more than seven years. She is also the leader for three multinational Facebook support groups – Single Parent Adoption Support, Adoptive Parents of Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) Kiddos and Foster Parents of NAS Kiddos. She is a longtime member of Long Island Adoptive Families and helps our members as one of the administrative team members.

Danielle Skelly is the mother of ten – four biological children and six through adoption – and a longtime foster parent. She is a staunch advocate for all children. She spent eight years as a MAPP trainer and caseworker with You Gotta Believe, helping older teens find permanent homes. She also has served as a trustee on the South Country School Board of Education. In May 2017, she joined the Coalition as a Long Island Family Support Specialist for AGAPE, the Coalition’s post-adoption and post-guardianship support program.

Katie Skelly is a twenty-year-old junior at the State University of New York at Old Westbury, where she majors in criminology with a minor in women’s studies. She is the biological child of parents who are also foster and adoptive parents. She has several biological siblings as well as several siblings who have been either morally or legally adopted into her family. She is prepared to offer insight into being raised in a home that is diverse and non-traditional and the impact it has had on her life.

John Sobraske, who himself was adopted, is a stepparent of adopted children and an adoption psychotherapist in private practice living in Rochester. He regularly provides training and consultation on foster care and adoption. His research interests related to adoption include anthropology, media and mythology and the application of natural medicine and body-mind methods of healing. As a graduate fellow at the University of Minnesota, he participated in research on open adoption and early stress. His research

interests include adoption, foster care, attachment, trauma and executive function. For his community work, he was voted “best clinician” by the Monroe County Youth and Family Partnership. John is a former Coalition board member and a current member of the AFFCNY’s Advisory Committee.

Charell Star is a journalist and online media personality and a contributor and featured lifestyle expert for on-air, on-camera and online video shows and segments. She has contributed to broadcast and digital media outlets such as *Marie Claire*, Fox 5’s Good Day New York morning show, NBC 4’s New York Live daily lifestyle show and Second Look TV. She is also the founder, publisher and writer of *Not Just a Girl in a Dress*, a highly popular lifestyle blog that shares inspiring stories and trending news that help women readers define their own versions of success. As a foster care alum, Star knows firsthand the challenges facing the foster care population. She serves on the board of directors of Court Appointed Special Advocates of New York City (CASA) and City Living NYC, two organizations dedicated to helping youth in foster care in the five boroughs. She also advocates on behalf of foster youth by sharing her powerful stories through the Foster Care Film and Community Engagement Project, using her voice to raise awareness and create change in the child welfare system.

Pamela Talbott received her Master of Social Work from Marywood University. Since 1988, she has worked for The Franziska Racker Centers, in a program for mentally ill children at TST BOCES. In that work, she saw a correlation between trauma, attachment and severe behavioral and school problems and foster and adopted children. Through a grant between Tompkins County Department of Social Services and the Racker Centers, Talbott took over facilitating the Tompkins County Foster and Adoptive Parent Group, offering counseling services and supports to parents. She later attended Hunter College and received a certificate in Post Adoption Therapy. She and a foster parent continued to offer the support group, which continues to meet monthly. She currently has a small private practice where she primarily works with foster/adopted children and their families.

Dr. Douglas Waite, a physician and professor, is the medical director of the Keith Haring Clinic at Children's Village, a community foster care agency and residential treatment center established in 1851 that has locations in Harlem, the Bronx and Dobbs Ferry. Dr. Waite holds an appointment of Assistant Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at Mount Sinai Hospital and is a member of the board of directors for the National Organization for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, the Child Welfare League of America and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), District 2. Dr. Waite is a participant in two expert panels formed by the AAP, Center for Disease Control and federal Administration for Children and Families to develop protocols for screening children in child welfare and the general pediatric population for fetal alcohol and drug exposure. He is board-certified in developmental-behavioral pediatrics and is a member of the Society of Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics and was elected one of ten FASD National Regional Education and Advocacy Liaisons for the AAP in 2016. He has special interests in fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder and the effects of child abuse and neglect upon child development and uses his time in clinical practice to teach medical students and residents to care for children in foster care and the juvenile justice system. He was recently elected to the New York Academy of Medicine. Dr. Waite lives in Manhattan with his wife. He has two children.

Rosie Williams entered foster care at eight months old, and spent the next twenty years placed in more than thirty foster care placements, including foster homes, group homes, residential treatment centers and hospitals. When she was nineteen, Williams met a woman named Danielle, who made to her a commitment of unconditional love and support, earning the right to be called Mom. With that support and encouragement (and late-night tutoring), Williams earned her GED. Now twenty-four, she serves as an advocate for youth with You Gotta Believe's Nobody Ages Out youth movement, sharing her powerful, thoughtful message that family is every youth's right.

Dawn Wilson is Director of the National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI). She has 30 years of experience in child welfare, mental health and prevention work, with expertise in program development,

implementation and management. As the director of the federally funded National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative, Wilson oversees the development, pilot implementation, evaluation and national launch of two state-of-the-art, web-based trainings for child welfare professionals and mental health clinicians to effectively address the mental health and complex challenges of children, adolescents and their families moving to permanency through adoption or guardianship.

Chemene Vizzi is a mom of two sons, one through adoption and one biologically. She has been the leader of Long Island Adoptive Families for ten years and has grown the group from about fifteen families to 280. While helping families from the early stages of considering adoption to bringing home their child and beyond, she has learned how to support and educate pre-adoptive families from all backgrounds and on all paths to adoption. The group has slowly transitioned from pure adoption journey support into an adoptive parenting and resource group that now includes a special needs group, a children's group, an adult social group, a book club, a single parents group and a group for parents of Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) children facilitated by members of the larger main group.