

**2025 LIFE CONFERENCE SESSION DESCRIPTIONS**

**Wednesday, January 29, 2025**

**Welcome Remarks**

**8:30am-8:45am**

**Speaker:**

**S. Hope Vella, BSW, MS,** Decision-Making Advocate, Community Legal Aid Disabilities Law Program

**Speaker Bio:**

**S. Hope Vella, BSW, MS**, is the Decision-Making Advocate with Community Legal Aid’s Disabilities Law Program. She works with the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDDS) service recipients statewide to help them understand their decision-making options and assists them with creating supported decision-making agreements, powers of attorney, and advance health care directives. Hope is a Child of a Deaf Adult (C.O.D.A.) and believes disability happens.

She has advocated for children and adults with children with invisible disabilities like Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia across the country for almost 35 years. Hope has testified before the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and lobbied Congress challenging both to “put her out of a job” and is also a published author. She has also volunteered extensively for organizations working to create inclusive social environments for Delawareans with disabilities.

**2025 Keynote Address – We Are Worthy**

**8:45-9:30am**

**Speaker:**

**Kayla Kosmalski,** Miss Delaware Teen USA 2024, Wilmington University Cheerleader, TikTok star, Actress, Model, and Motivational Speaker

**Keynote Address Description:**

Did someone ever tell you no? Did they ever say that your dream was not good? Did a person ever not give you the same choices others get? Were you judged before you ever had an opportunity to say what you wanted?

I am here to tell you that you are worthy! You deserve your dreams, and you can make them happen!

My life was full of moments when people told me no. People did not believe in my potential. People wanted to make life easy for me. They did not want to see me get hurt. They thought they knew what was best for me before asking me what I wanted. I learned how to speak up for myself. Tell people what I want. I learned that it is possible to go for your dreams if you work hard and never give up. Through the story of my life, I am going to show you that we all are worthy of our dreams. There will be many times that are hard, and people who try to stop you. I am going to share how I motivated myself, and how I shared my vision with others. I believe that the real disability in life is a bad attitude. With the right mindset we can improve our lives and lives of those around us. Your potential is what you believe. If you believe you can’t, or you believe you can – you are right.

**Speaker Bio:**

**Kayla Kosmalski** is an 18-year-old actress, model, speaker, TikTok star and college student. Kayla is Miss Delaware Teen USA 2024, the first person with Down syndrome to earn this title in a state pageant. She is also a cheerleader for Wilmington University, a recent graduate of Middletown High School. During her time in high school, Kayla was a Varsity cheerleader, Competitive cheerleader, Varsity swimmer, in the theatre program, and member of National Honor Society. Kayla lobbies locally and nationally to help improve the lives of people with disabilities. She has helped pass several laws, including the ABLE Act which is named Kayla’s Law in Delaware. Kayla appears in the feature film “I Win” which will be released soon. One of Kayla’s most recent modeling jobs is for Zappos as their brand ambassador.

**Session Objectives:**

1. Attendees will understand that we are worthy of our dreams.
2. Attendees will learn how to motivate ourselves.
3. Attendees will learn how to keep moving forward. Most importantly, we will learn the secret to our own happiness.

**10:30am – 11:45am Concurrent Session 1**

**A Seat at the Table: Make Your Voice Heard by Key Delaware Decision Makers!**

**Speakers:**

**DE State Senator Eric Buckson, BS, MS**

**DE State Senator Trey Paradee, BA, MBA**

**DE State Senator Marie Pinkney, MSW, LCSW, CCM**

**DE State Representative Kevin Hensley**

**Session Description:**

The “table” can be looked at as a symbol of a safe place to talk, listen, ask questions and share as a group or community. Offering a seat at the table gives individuals a chance to be heard and respected. A seat at the table creates a place to make a difference and a place to share only what you know, your experiences. Those who share the table know it is only for individuals who share the responsibility to be certain their influences are for the good of everyone.

Please join us in meeting with some of the important individuals in Delaware who are able to assist with making decisions about laws and regulations, especially as they relate to those with disabilities. Make your voice heard! Ask questions! Come and share a “seat at the table” to speak up or advocate for yourself and others, join the conversation!

**Speaker Bios:**

**Senator Eric Buckson, BS, MS,** is a lifelong resident of Delaware graduating from Caesar Rodney High school and the University of Delaware. He has a masters in fitness management and taught at Polytech High School for 30 years. Senator Buckson was a Kent County Levy Court commissioner for 16 years and chaired the land use department during those years. He is finishing up his first term as a state senator and serves on the Health/Social services, Education and Energy committees. Senator Buckson lives in Magnolia, Delaware with his wife of 25 years and has four children.

**Representative Kevin Hensley** has served the residents of the Middletown/Odessa/Townsend area since 2014.

Since being elected to the House, he has been a champion for issues that impact the lives of those with disabilities – from co-sponsoring legislation to create ABLE Savings Accounts, to leading the charge for the McNesby Act. Kevin has always advocated for our community. His passion is largely driven by his adult daughter, Jules, an individual with intellectual disabilities.

As a member of the Joint Finance Committee, he continues to push for more funding for Direct Support Professionals as well as increased employment opportunities for those with disabilities. Prior to being elected to the House, Kevin served as a founding board member of the MOT Charter School as well as a board member on the Appoquinimink School Board of Education.

**Senator Trey Paradee, BA, MBA,** represents the 17th Senate District, which includes most of Dover and the towns of Camden and Wyoming. He was first elected to the Delaware House of Representatives in 2012 and was elected to the State Senate in 2018.

Senator Paradee serves as co-chair of the budget-writing Joint Finance Committee and vice chair of the Senate Banking, Business, Insurance & Technology Committee. He also serves as a member of the Senate Agriculture, Environment, Energy & Transportation, and Veterans Affairs committees.

He lives in Dover with his wife Meghan. Trey and Meghan have three children: Cassie (29), Charlie (25), and Isla Garrison (10). They also have three dogs (Teddy Bear, Lulu, and Basil) and two cats (Rosie and Stormy).

**Senator Marie Pinkney, MSW, LCSW, CCM,** represents the 13th District. She earned her master’s degree in social work from Delaware State University. Senator Pinkney worked as a social worker/case manager at ChristinaCare until 2024, when she left to pursue a second master’s degree in Africana Studies from the University of Delaware. Senator Pinkney became the first African American LGBTQ+ person ever elected to the Delaware Senate in 2020. She is dedicated to fighting the negative impacts of racial and socioeconomic inequalities, as well as the stigmas and hurdles faced by formerly justice-involved individuals and those with limited educational backgrounds. Senator Pinkney lives in Bear with her with her wife and their German Shepherd Gandhi and cat Penelope, aka Penny Proud.

**Session Objectives:**

1. While participating in this session, the attendees will learn how to better advocate for themselves and the disability community by asking questions pertaining to laws and regulations impacting Delaware.
2. After participating in this session, attendees will have better knowledge of the types of policies that the four members of legislature in Delaware on the panel can speak to and assist with moving policy forward.
3. By participating in this session, attendees should be able to compare one similarity and one difference noted in the answers provided by speakers on the panel to have better knowledge of which legislators they should educate and inform on any given topic so that the policymaker can make a well-informed decision.

**Be Ready for Emergencies: Prepare Everyday**

**Speakers:**

**Beth MacDonald**, **BA**, **ED,** Vulnerable Populations Coordinator, Division of Public Health, Emergency Medical Services and Preparedness Section (EMSPS), Office of Preparedness

**Lizzy MacDonald**, Self Advocate

**Laura Strmel, MPA**, Vulnerable Populations Planner, Division of Public Health, Emergency Medical Services and Preparedness Section (EMSPS), Office of Preparedness

**Session Description:**

It is everyone’s role to be ready for emergencies and disasters. We all have different needs and now is the best time to prepare. This session will focus on the four steps to being prepared for emergencies, disasters and staying safe while away from home. Meet advocates who will share their lived experience, participate in a fun activity about building your custom emergency kit and learn about resources and support to get started on your personal emergency plan.

**Speaker Bios:**

**Beth Macdonald, BA, ED,** is the Vulnerable Populations Coordinator for the Delaware Office of Preparedness and an unrelenting Parent Advocate. Her professional role is focused on disaster preparation and response for People with Disabilities and Access and Functional Needs. Beth’s daughter, Lizzy, was hospitalized for the first 10 months of life and was the first infant in Delaware to come home on a ventilator. Beth has held positions as first-grade teacher, the Special Needs Alert Coordinator, Chair of the ICC Birth to Three Council, Delaware Family Voices Coordinator,Delaware EMS for Children FAN National Heroes Award recipient, contributor to *Bright Futures: Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children & Adolescents,* and a Partners in Policymaking graduate. Beth holds a BA in Elementary and Art Education**.**

**Lizzy MacDonald** was born in 1989 with a rare type of dwarfism called Spondyloepiphyseal Dysplasia Congenita. At 30 inches tall, Lizzy has a unique perspective on the world, has never backed down from a challenge and focused on accomplishing her goals. Lizzy graduated from Caesar Rodney High School in 2007 and continued to higher education at Delaware Tech Community College, completing her Associate Degree in Human Services in 2013. She volunteered to work at Accessible Festivals as consultant for inclusive music festivals from 2016-2017. Lizzy was elected to and held the position of President for Little People of America, Ches-Del Bays Chapter. Towards the end of 2023, Lizzy was invited to work as subject matter expert for Major League Baseball, the Philadelphia Phillies to improve accessibility features around Citizens Bank Ballpark.

**Laura A. Strmel, MPA,** has 25 years of professional experience supporting individuals with disabilities and access and functional needs in Delaware, gained via public social services roles and nonprofit disability support leadership. As a Planner at the Office of Preparedness, she facilitates existing projects forwarding the inclusion of people with disabilities in the emergency planning process. Laura holds a Master of Public Administration (MPA) from the University of Delaware, is an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Leadership Network Trainer, and former Certified Employment Support Professional (CESP). She lives in Wilmington, Delaware, and enjoys thrift shopping, any beach, and cheering on the Philadelphia Eagles (Go Birds!) while away from work.

**Session Objectives:**

1. Individuals will learn four (4) steps to being prepared for emergencies and disasters.
2. Individuals will explore what they personally need to survive if away from home during an emergency or disaster.
3. Individuals will be provided resources to get started on a personal emergency plan and continue this conversation with their support networks.

**Social Security Benefits & Paths to Gaining Financial Independence**

**Speakers:**

**Jillian Mathews**, Public Speaker, Advocate

**Alan Scott, AAS, WIP, CPWIC,** Assistant Director of Benefits, Community Integrated Services (CIS)

**Session Description:**

There are many paths that can lead to financial independence for a person with disabilities. This session will help you understand Social Security Benefits, Work Incentives, State Waiver programs such as Pathways to Employment and Life Span Waiver, Medicaid and Medicare, as well as Miller Trust and ABLE accounts. During the session we will review the Social Security programs and Delaware-specific waivers so participants and families can make informed decisions about employment and earnings, allowing them to become financially independent. Hear from someone who is employed and receives Social Security benefits and how they used benefits counseling to maintain eligibility while working.

**Speaker Bios:**

**Jillian Mathews** is a 2016 graduate of the Charlton Program through Caesar Rodney High School and Wesley College. While at Charlton she loved performing in the Very Special Arts (VSA) Delaware performances, along with students from Kent County Community School and also as an alumnus. In 2018, she was a member of the legacy cast of “Boundless! A Musical Journey.” Jillian has enjoyed working for DelDOT in the Planning Department since 2017. In her spare time, she stays active with Special Olympics Delaware where she is a 5-sport athlete, a Health Messenger and an Athlete Leader for the Kent Wild Kats. She also speaks on behalf of Special Olympics Delaware at various events across the state. Jillian will be sharing how she maintains her benefits while increasing her financial independence.

**Alan Scott, AAS, WIP, CPWIC,** works for Community Integrated Services (CIS), a Supported Employment Agency that focuses on integrated, community-based employment. Alan began work as an Employment Specialist for CIS and has an in-depth understanding of both the employment search and benefits counseling, which allows him to address issues in detail. Alan counsels’ individuals and actively works to advise the community about benefits counseling. Alan provides Social Security Benefits guidance and counseling to participants from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), the Division for the Visually Impaired (DVI), the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDDS), Promise Program, and school districts. Alan earned his Business Degree from Johnson and Wales University. He is certified as a Work Incentive Practitioner through the Employment and Disability Institute at Cornell University and a Community Partner Work Incentive Counselor from Virginia Commonwealth University.

**Session Objectives:**

1. Understand the process of applying for Social Security benefits.
2. Understand the various Social Security programs, Delaware-specific waivers, and financial accounts.
3. Understand how employment earnings will affect Social Security benefits for financial planning.

**1:45pm – 3:00pm Concurrent Session 2**

**Accessing Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Across the Lifespan**

**Speakers:**

**Julie Conway, SLPD, CCC-SLP, ATP,** Co-Director HMS Connect, HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy

**Jessica Davenport, B.S.**, Community and Advocate Liaison Trainer/Educator I, Delaware Developmental Disabilities Services

**Beth Mineo, Ph.D., CCC-SLP,** Director, Center for Disabilities Studies, Associate Professor, School of Education, University of Delaware

**Session Description:**

Imagine if you couldn't talk like most people do. That's the reality for some folks with speech problems. Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices allow individuals with speech impairments to engage in meaningful communication that is written and auditory. The device can let the individual type words or use pictures to talk to others.

While AAC can be a prominent feature of speech therapy for children with disabilities, unfortunately, not everyone gets the chance to easily acquire AAC. Adults have many barriers getting AAC. This makes things unfair for them. They can't express themselves well, find jobs, or even get proper medical help.

Our panel will chat about this problem. We have professionals and someone who uses AAC. We'll talk about why it's tough for adults to access AAC. The panelists will talk about ideas for fixing the problem. Together, we can help more people use AAC and be heard.

**Speaker Bios:**

**Julie Conway SLPD, CCC-SLP, ATP** is the Co-Director of HMS Connect and a Speech Language Pathologist at HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy. Julie has been with HMS School for nine years. Prior to working at HMS School, Julie worked in public school and medical settings. She specializes in AAC/assistive technology and language development. Julie graduated with a Master of Science at Penn State University and a Doctor of Speech Language Pathology from Northwestern University. She is a Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA) certified Assistive Technology Professional (ATP). Julie is passionate about the use of interprofessional practice in AAC and assistive technology. Julie has presented at conferences including Closing the Gap, ASHA, and ISAAC.

**Jessica Davenport,** **BS** has been an AAC user since 2005, although her disability occurred in 2004. Since acquiring her AAC she has accomplished many goals that she didn’t think were possible anymore. Jessica has written a book, gotten her bachelor’s degree, and maintained full time employment with the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDDS) since 2023. Her job responsibilities include assisting with DDDS Social Media communication, advocating for the disability community, and managing a campaign for AAC etiquette. None of those accomplishments would be possible without her gaining access to her AAC.

**Beth Mineo, Ph.D., CCC-SLP**, is Director of the University of Delaware's Center for Disabilities Studies (CDS) and an Associate Professor in UD’s School of Education. She’s also Co-Director at UD of the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) program. Dr. Mineo has taught courses about assistive technology, augmentative and alternative communication, clinical practices in speech-language pathology and a senior seminar on disability studies, the capstone of UD’s Disability Studies minor. She also directs the assistive technology unit at CDS, which includes the Delaware Assistive Technology Initiative (the state AT program), the Delaware AIM Center and several equipment distribution programs. She received her Ph.D. in Communication Sciences and Disorders from the University of Pittsburgh.

**Session Objectives:**

1. Raise awareness about the importance of AAC technology for individuals with speech impairments, emphasizing its role in enabling meaningful communication and participation in various aspects of life.
2. Identify the barriers that prevent disabled adults from accessing AAC technology and training, such as financial constraints, lack of awareness among healthcare professionals, and insufficient support systems for transitioning from pediatric to adult services.
3. Generate actionable strategies and solutions to improve access to AAC for disabled adults, including advocating for increased funding, enhancing education and training for healthcare professionals, and developing tailored support programs to assist adults in utilizing AAC effectively.

**Claiming Your Power: Protecting Civil Rights for People with Disabilities**

**Speakers:**

**Marissa Band, Esq., MPAP,** Project Director, Disabilities Law Program of Community Legal Aid Society, Inc.

**Maitri Campbell,** Advocate, Chair, DDC Policy and Law Committee

**Christina O’Connor,** Training and Education Manager, Division of Medicaid and Medical Assistance

**Session Description:**

Join us to understand more about the rights of people with disabilities. People with disabilities have the right to live where they choose. They have the right to be supported with services that meet their needs. People with disabilities have the right to be treated with respect. Sometimes, people with disabilities may feel unhappy with their support services. Learn about how to handle times when you feel like your rights are not being respected.

**Speaker Bios:**

**Marissa Band, Esq., MPAP,** is the Project Director of the Disabilities Law Program “DLP” of Community Legal Aid Society, Inc. “CLASI”. The DLP serves as Delaware’s Protection & Advocacy System. Marissa has been an attorney at CLASI since 2008; she has worked in both CLASI’s DLP and Medical-Legal-Partnership.  In those roles, Marissa has assisted children and adults in special education, disability rights, public benefits, immigration and other matters. Marissa has furthered the rights of Delawareans with disabilities via service on many councils, committees and task forces. Marissa obtained a B.A. from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, a Master’s in Public Affairs and Politics from the Rutgers University Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, and a Juris Doctor, *Magna Cum Laude,* from the Rutgers University School of Law.

**Maitri Campbell** is a person whose life is all about resilience, determination, and speaking up for herself and others. Born with Cerebral Palsy, Maitri always knew she was meant to live independently in the community. While living in an institution, Maitri fought for her freedom and independence. With the support of friends and advocates, she moved into her own apartment, taking charge of her life.

Today, Maitri is not only living independently but also advocating for others. As a member of the Delaware Developmental Disabilities Council, she is a leader. Maitri serves as the Chair of the DDC Policy and Law Committee. Maitri has received awards for her advocacy and been in several documentaries. Maitri's story shows that with determination, you can overcome any obstacle.

**Christina O’Connor** is currently the Training and Education Manager for the Division of Medicaid and Medical Assistance (DMMA). Prior to this position, Christina was a Sr. Social Worker with DMMA where she worked with community members to help find the best Medicaid program that would meet their needs. She has sixteen years’ experience with DSS and DMMA working with the community, discussing program options, and determining eligibility for many programs. She has a passion for using her knowledge and experience to help Delawareans reach their best quality of life.

**Session Objectives:**

1. Learn about people with disabilities’ civil right to live, work, and play, and be supported where they want
2. Hear directly from a person who moved from living in an institution to living on her own about how she did it
3. Build your knowledge about what kind of support services are available for people with disabilities and family members in Delaware
4. Learn what to do if you are a person with a disability or a family member and you feel like your rights aren’t being respected
5. Hear practical tips about how to address concerns

**“Everything to Somebody”: A Documentary Focused on Disability and Mental Health**

**Speakers:**

**Greg Gouge,** Advocate and Activist

**Karyn Harvey, Ph.D.**, Author, Speaker

**Nancy Lemus**

**Joey Melvin**, Director, Center for Safe Schools

**Phoenix**

**Laura Thien**, Advocate and Activist

**Session Description:**

“Everything to Somebody" is a documentary where we meet five strong people from Delaware with different lives and stories. These brave people share their struggles and how they have coped with mental health challenges. From feeling alone to finding help, they will take us on a journey through their feelings and experiences.

Join us as we uncover the truth about the lack of mental health services in Delaware for persons with disabilities and explore the impact it has on individuals and families. By listening to these stories, we can understand why good mental health care is so important for everyone and how we can support each other. The film will be followed with a panel discussion with the talent in the film.

**Speaker Bios:**

**Greg Gouge** is a graduate from both Partners and Jr Partners in Policymaking programs and was an Assistant Instructor for the Jr. Partners in Policymaking program. Greg expresses himself through drawing, needle felting, and creating art of all types. He is a brain injury survivor.

**Karyn Harvey Ph.D.** is an author and speaker who has been working in the field of developmental disabilities for over 30 years. She has published three books, and numerous articles about trauma and disabilities as well. Dr. Harvey’s book topics have presented both theory and guidance for clinicians doing therapy with individuals with IDD and a trauma-informed care approach to working with individuals with IDD both programmatically and clinically. She has a master’s degree in clinical psychology and a Ph.D. in Applied Developmental Psychology from the University of Maryland.

**Nancy Lemus** is a community leader among the Latino Community. Nancy is a mom of a young man with complex medical needs. She also works as a Medical Interpreter. Nancy is involved in many disability and Latino advocacy organizations.

**Joey Melvin**, Director, Center for Safe Schools has extensive experience as a School Resource Officer (SRO) in several school settings with children with disabilities. Mr. Melvin is an instructor for the National Association of School Resource Officers and has taught police officers nationwide, including significant content related to students with disabilities. Mr. Melvin has navigated the challenges as a police officer while educating himself and others to understand and be respectful of people with disabilities.

**Phoenix**, Advocate and Activist is a person with Autism, other mental health diagnosis, and trauma survivor. Phoenix advocates for herself and others through her art to bring awareness to different causes/cultures.

**Laura Thien**, Advocate and Activist has spent several years working on political campaigns throughout the State of Delaware, former Governor Jack Markell, and U.S Senator Chris Coons would be the highlights for her. She also served on the national level as the National Committee Woman for the Delaware Young Democrats. Laura even had the privilege of serving Young Democrats with Disabilities as the Disability Caucus Chair. Her true passion is to be a voice for all. She loves living in a state where it is easy to make an impact!

**Session Objectives:**

1. Identify ways disability and mental health intersect.
2. Identify individuals’ lived experience in the health care system.
3. Identify experiences of trauma related to mental health challenges.
4. Identify resources for someone in mental health crisis in Delaware.
5. Identify ways to advocate for change in Delaware.

**3:15pm – 4:30pm Concurrent Session 3**

**Aging with Dignity**

**Speakers:**

**Rebecca (Becky) Bradbeer**, Self-Advocate, HMS School Board Chair, Art-Reach Board Member

**Karin Roseman, MSW, LCSW**, Co-Director of Jefferson FAB Center for Complex Care

**Dr. Mary Stephens, MD, MPH, FAAFP, FAADM**, Co-Director of Jefferson FAB Center for Complex Care

**Session Description:**

People with disabilities are living longer lives nowadays, which is great! But here's the thing: most of the support services we have are designed for helping folks when they're younger. These services often focus on things like getting a job after school. But as people with disabilities live longer, they have new questions. Like, what does retirement look like for me? How can I still be a part of my community as I get older? And what about money? This panel will talk about all of these questions and more. We'll discuss things like planning for money, understanding Medicare and Medicaid, making decisions about healthcare, and getting the right support as you get older. The goal is to make sure everyone can grow old with dignity, no matter what challenges they face.

**Speaker Bios:**

**Rebecca (Becky) Bradbeer** lives in the tri-state area, is a Performing Arts Ambassador, and Cabrini University alumni (Class of 1994). She proudly uses her own experiences as a woman with Cerebral Palsy to show others how to age with dignity. She relies on assistance from a Personal Care Attendant due to her mobility disability. Becky serves on the board of HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy as the new Board of Trustees Chair, and plays an active role on the Executive Committee and Board of Directors of Art-Reach. She also serves on the board with the Citizen Advocacy of Chester County, finding fulfillment in this work. She's passionate about arts and culture, locally and globally, and strongly advocates for the performing arts.

**Karin Roseman, MSW, LCSW** is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and co-director of the Jefferson FAB (For Adolescents and Beyond) Center for Complex Care, a primary care practice for teens and adults with complex childhood onset conditions located in Philadelphia, PA. Karin holds a Bachelor's of Science in Therapeutic Recreation and a Master's of Social Work and has over a decade of experience working with children and adults with complex healthcare needs, Intellectual and Developmental disabilities. At the FAB Center she provides psychosocial education and support to patients and their caregivers, educates students from various disciplines on working with this complex population, supports growth of the program through research and grants, and supports the overall expansion and direction of the center.

**Dr. Mary Stephens, MD, MPH, FAAFP, FAADM**, is a family physician and Professor of Family and Community Medicine at Jefferson. In 2015 she co-founded the Adult Down syndrome program at Christiana Care in Wilmington, DE and continues to serve as the clinical leader. In 2018, Dr. Stephens returned to Jefferson to help launch a new primary care practice for teens and adults with complex childhood onset conditions which has become the Jefferson FAB (**F**or **A**dolescents and **B**eyond) Center for Complex Care. Dr. Stephens is on the Board of Directors of the Down Syndrome Medical Interest Group (DSMIG) and a member of the volunteer committee for the Global Down Syndrome Foundation's adult healthcare guidelines. She has 25+ years of experience in clinical care teaching and is the mom of a teen with Down syndrome.

**Session Objectives:**

1. Name at least 3 opportunities that older adults with disabilities in Delaware have to stay meaningfully engaged in their communities as they age.
2. Identify financial planning and healthcare coverage options for aging disabled adults in Delaware.
3. Name the service planning and transition services that are available in Delaware to support adults with disabilities as they age.

**The Journey to Employment…including Owning Your Own Business**

**Speakers:**

**Stacey Bragg, MS,** Deputy Director, Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)

**Deb Cordrey,** Owner/Digital Marketing Virtual Assistant, Virtual Assistance Dragonfly LLC

**Lillian Harrison,** Executive Director, Independent Resources, Inc.

**Session Description:**

This session will discuss the challenges individuals with disabilities often face when they try to find employment in Delaware. As an Employment First State, it is important to understand the resources that are available to individuals looking to find a job in Delaware. The speakers will share a general list of local and national resources available and some of the supports and tools available from those agencies that can be shared for your use after the conference. In addition, attendees will hear about the LaunchSpace program which is a program offered by Independent Resources Inc. that is geared towards teaching individuals with disabilities the skills and resources they need to become business owners and allow them the opportunity to present business ideas to statewide decision makers and potential investors. Attendees will hear from one business owner who has started her own successful business. She will share highlights of some of the challenges/struggles she faced and how she overcame them to become the successful business owner she is today. Owning your own business is a possibility for everyone.

**Speaker Bios:**

**Stacey Bragg, MS,** is the Deputy Director for the Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and has over 27 years of experience working with individuals with disabilities. DVR provides individualized services to employers and people with disabilities, resulting in greater independence and a more inclusive workplace. Stacey began working in the field of vocational rehabilitation with DVI for 13 years and has spent the last 14 years at DVR, moving through various positions of Secretary, VR Counselor, Employment Specialist, District Administrator and Deputy Director. Stacey is also an Adjunct Instructor for DTCC in both the Human Services and Social Sciences programs. Stacey holds a Master of Science Degree in Administration of Human Services from Wilmington University. She is an avid supporter of Special Olympics of Delaware!

**Deb Cordrey** is the founder of Virtual Assistance Dragonfly (VA Dragonfly), an LLC empowering solopreneurs and micropreneurs with digital marketing support. Leveraging her social media and email marketing expertise, Deb not only runs her own business but also shares her knowledge as a contracted instructor for Independent Resources, Inc., specializing in courses for entrepreneurs, many of whom live with disabilities. She has been working with Donna Duffy of 3E Marketing Solutions since the fall of 2020. She serves as an implementor of visibility/marketing strategy for Donna's coaching clients. Donna has been a tremendous mentor in helping her develop her digital marketing legs.

A passionate advocate for accessibility and support services, Deb's firsthand experience, coupled with her role as a mom to an adult son with autism, motivated her to participate in the Partners in Policymaking program (Class of 2021). Deb understands the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities and is dedicated to encouraging others to find their path to independence.

**Lillian Harrison** champions independent living for individuals with disabilities. As Executive Director of Independent Resources, Inc., she provides exceptional leadership. She serves on the Delaware State Rehabilitation Council, the Governor’s Council on Housing, and the Housing Alliance Delaware Continuum of Care Board. She is also involved with the Delaware Community Reinvestment Action Council and True Access Capital.

Lillian coaches for the Women's Business Center and serves on the Sussex Economic Development Action Committee. She leads Elevated Community Development Corporation, focusing on community and housing development. As a Realtor, investor, and developer, Lillian enhances her community’s economic vitality. Her mission is to ensure independent living and a better quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

**Session Objectives:**

1. Attendees will learn of various resources available to them to gain employment as well as become a successful entrepreneur.
2. Attendees will understand the steps needed to become a successful business owner.
3. Attendees will feel empowered to gain successful employment or start their own business if they feel empowered to do so.

**Unlocking Potential: The Life-Changing Impact of Comprehensive Literacy**

**Speakers:**

**Mateo Moreno**

**Tina Moreno, M.A., CCC-SLP, ATP**, Speech-Language Pathologist, UCP of Greater Cleveland and Co-Director, Camp ALEC

**Session Description:**

This session explores the impact of comprehensive literacy instruction for students with disabilities. Literacy is a basic skill that helps people communicate, understand, and take part in the world. For students with disabilities learning to read, write, and get access to learning can be hard.  Who better to talk about how important literacy is than Mateo Moreno, whose quick wit, empathy, and passion to connect with people are evident the moment you meet him? Mateo has used Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) since the age of four and, because of his ability to write, he’s able to say anything on his mind. Tina Moreno, a speech-language pathologist specializing in AAC and literacy, will explain evidence-based strategies and best practices that improve literacy and communication skills. She will explain the needs of emergent and conventional literacy learners, give a broad overview of how to teach, and equip attendees with tools and references.

Attendees will learn how to adjust teaching methods, allow for the use of assistive technologies, and create learning environments to support both literacy and communication skills. This session combines life experience with professional knowledge to show how comprehensive literacy improves educational outcomes and empowers students to achieve their full potential.

**Speaker Bios:**

**Mateo Moreno** has used AAC since the age of 4. He uses a Saltillo NovaChat 8 with Wordpower 108 as his primary communication system, plus his iPhone, speech, gestures, signs and facial expressions. He reminds us that everyone is a multimodal communicator. He is a member of the U.S. Society for AAC and plays an active role in the AAC Speaker Connection. He presents for universities nationally to share his story about his AAC journey, recommendations for communication partners, his pet peeves and what it's like being the only AAC user in the room. Mateo visits classrooms to talk with students about his lived experiences, how everyone can work together to ensure inclusion happens, give students pointers talking with their peers who use AAC and more. For the past two summers, he worked as a mentor at Talking with Technology Camp in Empire, Colorado. He is a PRC-Saltillo Ambassador.

**Tina H. Moreno, MA, CCC-SLP, ATP** is a speech-language pathologist who specializes in augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). She serves UCP of Greater Cleveland LeafBridge Alternative Education Program while maintaining a private practice, Voices4all LLC, in Avon, Ohio. She has 15 years of experience working with children and adults who use AAC in a variety of settings. Tina is a member of ASHA and an Assistive Technology Professional through RESNA. She is the Vice President of People Who Use AAC and their families of the U.S. Society for AAC. Tina is co-founder and co-director of Camp ALEC, a summer literacy camp for children with significant disabilities who use AAC. She presents locally, statewide, and nationally. Assessment, core vocabulary, promoting authentic communication, and literacy are her areas of specialty in the broader field of AAC.

**Session Objectives:**

1. Describe 3 risks that face individuals who do not obtain functional reading and writing skills.
2. Differentiate the literacy and communication skills of emergent and conventional literacy learners.
3. Name three instructional activities for emergent literacy learners.
4. Name three resources for families and educators seeking to provide evidence-based, effective and comprehensive literacy instruction for students with significant disabilities.