



BUILDING BRIGHTER FUTURES
SPRING CONFERENCE

May 21-23, 2025

Sheraton Westport

Lakeside Chalet

St. Louis

2025 SPRING CONFERENCE

PLENARY SPEAKER HIGHLIGHT



DAVE PELZER

Dave is the author of nine inspirational books. Dave's first book, *A Child Called "It"* was on the New York Times Best Sellers List for a record setting 6 years. His books were on the same Best Sellers List well over 12 years. Dave was the first author to have four # 1 International Best Sellers and to have four books simultaneously on the New York Times Best Sellers List.

Dave is a living testament of a self-made man. Dave's unique and intriguing outlook on life, coupled with his comedic like wit and sense of humor entertain and encourage all of us to deeply commit to overcome any challenge. Dave has literally dedicated his life to helping others . . . to help themselves.

Conference Topics:

The Real Heroes - This presentation pays tribute to those who have dedicated their lives to making a difference in the life of a child, while at the same time educating the general public about the challenges faced by those in their chosen field.



LISA DANIELS

Lisa is a dedicated advocate for Restorative Justice and Pain Transformation, driven by the tragic loss of her son, Darren, to gun violence in 2012. As the founder and Executive Director of the Darren B. Easterling Center for Restorative Practices, she advances trauma-informed solutions to help communities of color affected by violent crime and mass incarceration. Through her leadership, The Center offers support and resources to those impacted by the aftermath of gun violence and incarceration, embodying her commitment to healing and justice.

Conference Topics:

From Theory to Practice: Deepening the Impact of Restorative Justice in Juvenile Justice System
Restorative Justice: Healing Trauma, Restoring Communities, and Reimagining Accountability



JOHNNY CROWDER

The founder and CEO of the globally-utilized, positive psychology startup *Cope Notes*, Johnny Crowder gives audiences practical self-care tools and mental health strategies that people can start using now to improve their emotional health and wellbeing. With infectious positivity, humor and authenticity, this trauma survivor and Certified Recovery Peer Specialist shows audiences why talking about mental health topics is key to coping, and why the most resilient organizational cultures proudly prioritize and support mental health for all.

Conference Topics:

Beyond Coping: A Candid Conversation about Resilience, Connection and Happiness in the Workplace



KARYN HARVEY

Karyn has worked as a clinician in the field of intellectual disabilities for over 35 years. She has her Ph.D. in Applied Developmental Psychology from the University of Maryland. She has written three books: *Positive Identity Development*, *Trauma -Informed Behavioral Interventions* and *Trauma and Healing*, as well as several chapters in various publications and a variety of articles. Karen currently has a private practice and does therapy with people with intellectual disabilities.

Conference Topics:

Trauma-informed Supports for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
Positive Identity Development

Conference Registration Fees:

MJJA Member rate: \$250 Non-Member rate: \$320

Conference day rate: \$150 Guest fee for meals ONLY: \$125

Corporate Sponsors NO CHARGE!!!

\$425—Exhibit fee—Private Vendor main representative (required)

\$125—Exhibit fee—Additional representative (no workshop)

\$250—Exhibit fee—Additional representative including workshop (MJJA Member Rate)

\$320—Exhibitor fee—Additional representative including workshop (Non-Member Rate)

Note: Only registered attendees, guests, faculty and exhibitors will be permitted to participate in conference meals, refreshment breaks and events!!

- ◆ **The courses are MO Bar accredited for CLEs—Pending**
- ◆ **University of MO, Columbia—School of Social Work CEUs—Pending**
- ◆ **Post Hours—Pending**

**MJJA's Spring Conference is being held at the
Sheraton Westport Lakeside Chalet, St. Louis, MO**

Room rate is \$150

Click on the link below to make your reservation now!

[Sheraton Westport Lakeside Chalet reservation link](#)

WHO SHOULD ATTEND:

Juvenile and Family Court Personnel, Juvenile Detention Professionals, Judges, Attorneys, Children's Division, Division of Youth Services, Law Enforcement, Guardians ad Litem, Court Appointed Special Advocates, Educators, Child Advocacy Centers, Child Care Providers, Youth Service Professionals, Social Workers, Private Practitioners, School Representatives, Parents, Community Leaders, State Lawmakers, Policymakers, School Resource Officers

A very special THANK YOU to our

MJJA Corporate Sponsors:



AGENDA

Wednesday, May 21st

11 a.m. Registration Opens

12:30—1:00 p.m. Opening Remarks

Abby Sapp, MJJA Board President

Honorable Jason Dodson, Administrative Judge, 21st Judicial Circuit

Presentation of 2025 MJJA Board of Directors and Officers

1:00—2:30 p.m. PLENARY: Restorative Justice: Healing Trauma, Restoring Communities, and Reimagining Accountability

2:30—2:45 p.m. Refreshment Break

2:45—4:30 p.m. Workshops:

Understanding the Requirements of Youth Entering a Licensed Residential Care Facility; the Missouri Landscape

Rules of Eligibility for Student Athletes

Certification Procedure and Best Practices w/Case Law Updates

Fentanyl: Who, What Where, When and Why?

A Potentially Dangerous Intersection: Social Media, Substance Use, Mental Health, and Online Exploitation

7:00—10:00 p.m. Music Express DJ's

Thursday, May 22nd

7:30—8:15 a.m. Breakfast

8:15—8:30 a.m. Morning Remarks

Abby Sapp, MJJA Board President

8:30—10 a.m. PLENARY: Beyond Coping

10:00—10:15 a.m. Refreshment Break

10:15 a.m. —12:00 p.m. Workshops:

Beyond Coping: A Candid Conversation about Resilience, Connection and Happiness in the Workplace

Leaving Your Baggage Behind—Ensuring Fairness, Accountability, and Integrity through the Use of Object-Based Inquiry (Part One)

From Theory to Practice: Deepening the Impact of Restorative Justice in Juvenile Justice Systems

Skin DEEP: Don't Forget to Lay the Foundation

12:00—1:30 p.m. Lunch

Presentation of Awards and Scholarships

MJJA Board President

1:30—2:30 p.m. PLENARY: The Real Heros

2:30—2:45 p.m. Refreshment Break

2:45—4:30 p.m. Workshops:

Leaving Your Baggage Behind—Ensuring Fairness, Accountability, and Integrity through the Use of Object-Based Inquiry (Part Two)

Reducing Gang Violence through Law Enforcement and Community Partnerships

Missing: Males in Our Response to Trafficking and Child Sexual Exploitation

MPACT's Tools that Challenge the School to Prison Pipeline

Medical Mimics of Child Maltreatment

7:00—9:00 p.m. Social Event

Friday, May 23rd

7:30—8:15 a.m. Breakfast

8:15—9:45 a.m. PLENARY: Trauma-informed Supports for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

9:45—10:00 a.m. Break

10:00—11:30 Workshops:

Positive Identity Development

Preventing Low-Level Juvenile Offenses from Escalating into Higher-Level Adult Crime

Confrontation Clause and Other Unique Hearsay Issues in Juvenile Law

Listening Like an Anthropologist: Why deep listening matters for supporting transgender Missourians

Juvenile Lifer Without Parole Speaks

Wednesday Plenary & Workshops:

Plenary: Restorative Justice: Healing Trauma, Restoring Communities, and Reimagining Accountability—Lisa Daniels

In this impactful plenary session, Lisa D. Daniels, founder and executive director of the Darren B. Easterling Center for Restorative Practices, shares her deeply personal journey from tragedy to healing and how it led her to become a leading voice in restorative justice. Through storytelling and expert insights, this session will explore the profound impact of unresolved trauma on youth and communities, emphasizing its generational effects within the juvenile justice system.

Participants will gain a deeper understanding of how restorative justice provides a practical framework for fostering healing, accountability, and community restoration. Lisa will highlight the innovative programs developed by her Center and provide real-life examples of how restorative practices can break cycles of harm and empower both those who've caused harm and those who've been harmed. Attendees will be inspired to reimagine accountability and equipped with strategies to integrate trauma-informed, restorative approaches into their work.

Workshop: Understanding the Requirements of Youth Entering a Licensed Residential Care Facility; the Missouri Landscape

This workshop will provide an overview of residential care facilities licensed by the Department of Social Services (DSS), the Independent Assessment (IA) process, and the placement process by DSS. Ensuring that youth are placed in the right setting, with the right services, at the right time—in the least restrictive setting possible is the priority of locating appropriate placement.

Faculty: Dawn Rector, Residential Services Unit Manager; Jennifer Richter, Residential Licensing Unit Manager; and Kate Watson, Specialist

Fentanyl: Who, What, Where, When and Why"?

Most people have heard of Fentanyl and many have heard misinformation circulating regarding Fentanyl. This misinformation can be very dangerous to various professionals including law enforcement, children and youth, as well as potential overdose victims themselves. The speaker will share the ins and outs of Fentanyl, it's history, it's appearance both in licit and illicit forms, debunk misconceptions, and provide examples from across the country. By having accurate information, people can feel safe when working in the field.

Faculty: Gary Goldberg, Forensic Chemist (Retired) with the Drug Enforcement Administration and contract instructor for the National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children.

Rules of Eligibility for Student Athletes

The Missouri State High School Activities Association (MSHSAA) is a voluntary, unincorporated association of member schools. The schools have established a set of rules regarding the terms and conditions for the schools as members, and also the eligibility standards for students to participate in the interscholastic sports and activities. Among the standards are citizenship, which includes directives on eligibility after interaction with law enforcement. Due to the fact the majority of students in member schools are juveniles, juvenile officers are often in the middle of eligibility issues, even though they are not part of a member school. The rules and implications will be discussed in order to provide greater understanding.

Faculty: Dr. Jennifer Rukstad, Executive Director of the Missouri State High School Activities Association (MSHSAA).

Certification Procedure and Best Practices w/ Case Law Updates

A Potentially Dangerous Intersection: Social Media, Substance Use, Mental Health, and Online Exploitation

Social media is a permanent fixture in our world and there are a lot of bright spots to it – social media connects us, makes us laugh, introduces us to new ideas, and provides support. However, there are also negative and potentially dangerous effects related to substance use, mental health, online grooming, and human trafficking. This session will discuss emerging data related to the intersection of the four topics, as well as empower attendees to be a trusted adult in the lives youth by understanding the risk factors and learning ways to counteract them with protective factors.

Faculty: Rikki Barton-Founder/Lead Consultant of Onward Consulting

Thursday a.m. Plenary & Workshops:

Plenary: Beyond Coping—Johnny Crowder

Crippling burnout. Chronic absenteeism. Rampant resignations. The multi-headed monster of compassion fatigue, longer working days and employee isolation are damming up the rivers of productivity at thousands of companies, and employers are concerned. Leveraging insights from his own decade-long mental health journey, Johnny Crowder shows audiences why talking about mental health should be as straightforward as talking about physical health, even in the workplace. And he shares the hard-won strategies for emotional wellbeing that led to the creation of his science-based breakthrough mental and emotional support app, Cope Notes, which is now in use in more than 90 countries.

Beyond Coping: A Candid Conversation about Resilience, Connection and Happiness in the Workplace

Join Johnny for a deeper dive/discussion about resilience, connection and happiness in the workplace.

Faculty: Johnny Crowder

Leaving Your Baggage Behind – Ensuring Fairness, Accountability, and Integrity through the Use of Object-Based Inquiry (Part One)

This hands-on workshop, will, through the use of object-based inquiry activities, help participants create a space to discuss issues related to access to justice, diversity and inclusion, procedural fairness, and mitigation of bias in decision-making when working with youth and families served by the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.

Faculty: Bill Prince, JD, Family Court Administrator/Chief Juvenile Officer, 31st Judicial Circuit

From Theory to Practice: Deepening the Impact of Restorative Justice in Juvenile Justice Systems

This interactive workshop expands on the Wednesday plenary session, offering a deeper dive into the core principles and practices of restorative justice and their transformative potential for youth and communities. Led by Lisa D. Daniels, founder of the Darren B. Easterling Center for Restorative Practices, the session will explore how restorative justice shifts the focus from punishment to repair by addressing the root causes of harm and fostering accountability through healing.

Participants will engage in a restorative circle simulation and learn practical strategies for implementing restorative practices in their professional roles. The session will also address common barriers to implementation and provide actionable solutions for building institutional support. Attendees will be equipped with new insights and tools to create more compassionate, trauma-informed systems that promote healing and resilience.

This workshop is designed for juvenile justice stakeholders seeking to make meaningful shifts toward restorative approaches in their work.

Faculty: Lisa Daniels

Skin DEEP: Don't Forget to Lay the Foundation

How can racial equity for families move beyond an aspiration and become a part of an organization's culture? The answer is building a foundation of the cultural ABC's. But too often, no strategy exists, and organizations are left ill-prepared. Join strategic connector Shanelle Dupree as she shares legal, social, and community insights on what it takes to begin laying a cultural foundation.

Faculty: Shanelle Dupree is the inaugural Executive Director of the Racial Equity Collaborative (REC)

Additional information coming soon!

Thursday p.m. Plenary & Workshops:

Plenary: The Real Heros—Dave Pelzer

This rare heart-felt program is given by a man whose life was saved by a system that many ridicule as being useless and incompetent. This highly emotional presentation pays tribute to those who have dedicated their lives to making a difference in the life of a child, while at the same time educating the general public about the challenges faced by those in their chosen field. Dave carefully weaves the story of how his life was saved by teachers, a school nurse, the police department, social services, and the foster care system. This is the perfect keynote for those within the system who are in need of a positive shot in the arm from a man who, too, has dedicated his life to helping others.

Leaving Your Baggage Behind – Ensuring Fairness, Accountability, and Integrity through the Use of Object-Based Inquiry (Part Two)

This hands-on workshop, will, through the use of object-based inquiry activities, help participants create a space to discuss issues related to access to justice, diversity and inclusion, procedural fairness, and mitigation of bias in decision-making when working with youth and families served by the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.

Faculty: *Bill Prince, JD, Family Court Administrator/Chief Juvenile Officer, 31st Judicial Circuit*

Reducing Gang Violence through Law Enforcement and Community Partnerships

During this session, the presenter will first describe characteristics of gang members and different types of gangs. Next, different comprehensive models aimed at preventing gang membership and reducing gang crime will be presented. Lastly, the presenter will provide examples of implementing law enforcement-community partnerships and the vital role that the public's legitimacy of police in preventing or reducing gang violence.

Faculty: *Moisés Próspero, Ph.D.*

Missing: Males in Our Response to Trafficking and Child Sexual Exploitation

Males are frequently overlooked in efforts to address trafficking and child sexual exploitation, leaving a critical gap in both prevention and intervention strategies. This course examines how adolescent males are impacted by domestic sex trafficking and the ways in which male children of all ages are targeted for sexual exploitation. From elementary school-aged boys being groomed on gaming platforms to adolescent males falling victim to sextortion schemes, this session sheds light on the unique vulnerabilities of this often-overlooked population. Additionally, the course will explore the heightened risks faced by LGBTQ+ youth, who are disproportionately affected by both trafficking and online exploitation.

Presenters: *Cindy Malott & Sgt. Adam Kavanaugh (Ret.), Crisis Aid International*

MPACT's Tools that Challenge the School to Prison Pipeline

This training explores the impact of zero-tolerance discipline policies on students with disabilities and those from low-income backgrounds, highlighting how these policies influence suspension and graduation rates. Participants will gain practical insights into developing and implementing Positive Behavior Intervention Plans (PBIPs) and conducting effective Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs). Additionally, the training will provide strategies for identifying and addressing challenging behaviors using three key approaches: Self-Awareness, Cultural Awareness, and Trauma-Informed Practices.

Presenter: *Nakatia Clay, MPACT Program Coordinator*

Medical Mimics of Maltreatment

This session aims to educate juvenile court professionals on the medical conditions that can mimic signs of child maltreatment. By understanding these medical mimics, legal staff can make more informed decisions, ensuring interventions are appropriate and justified. By the end of this session, participants will have a deeper understanding of the medical conditions that can mimic child abuse and the importance of a careful, collaborative approach in these cases. This knowledge will help legal professionals make more informed decisions, ultimately protecting children and families more effectively.

Faculty: *Dr. Adrienne Atzemis, MD St. Louis Children's Hospital*

Friday Plenary & Workshops:

Plenary: Trauma-informed Supports for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities—Karyn Harvey

This session will explore the sources of trauma in the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and the effects of that trauma. It will then explore the key ingredients to healing and approaches that facilitate trauma-informed recovery and post-traumatic growth.

Positive Identity Development

This session will address the need for a positive sense of self and identity for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities in order to heal from past traumas. Additionally, in this session the importance of identity and how identity development can be supported will be explored.

Faculty: Karen Harvey

Listening Like an Anthropologist: Why deep listening matters for supporting transgender Missourians

This session is for those who work in the juvenile justice system who desire to increase their understanding of what it is like for those who identify as trans in Missouri (and the unique challenges they face). The majority of the session will be spent reflecting on video interview from our local trans community. If you have limited experience working with individuals who are trans, this session is specifically designed for you!

Faculty: Matt Scott, Licensed Professional Counselor

Preventing Low-Level Juvenile Offenses from Escalating into Higher-Level Adult Crime

Low-level offenses committed by young persons may escalate into future higher-level crime if the cause for the behavior is not addressed. A structured protocol should be developed by schools, juvenile courts, law enforcement and community-based service providers to identify the appropriate interventions to address the needs of the young offender and prevent future offenses. The presenter will discuss definitions of low-level offenses, MOU's and different types of interventions, to include accountability, skills development, mental health services and community connections. A specific example will be presented to describe in detail how to implement a school-justice partnership.

Faculty: Moisés Próspero, Ph.D.

Confrontation Clause and Other Unique Hearsay Issues in Juvenile Law

This workshop will explore how the COVID-19 pandemic really challenged what we know about the Confrontation Clause of the Sixth Amendment and cases such as Crawford v. Washington. Attendees will also engage in a discussion of hearsay in juvenile law and any changes that have occurred to hearsay exceptions in juvenile law in the last five to ten years.

Faculty: Alex Martinez, Legal Director, St. Louis County Family Court

Juvenile Lifer Without Parole Speaks

Where did our juvenile justice system go wrong? How can we reach our most vulnerable youth? Bobby Bostic can help us answer those questions. Bobby was sent to prison at the age of 16 for a sentence of 241 years. Now, Bobby is a free man mentoring youth in local detention centers to help them make better decisions than he did. Come and have a candid conversation with a juvenile lifer without parole and ask all the questions you've never been able to ask.

Faculty: Bobby Bostic, Author/American Writer