

Speaker Biography



Alice Abrokwa
Senior Attorney, National
Center for Youth Law

Alice Abrokwa pursues impact litigation on behalf of low-income and marginalized children and youth in areas

including mental health, education, disability rights, and juvenile justice. Prior to joining NCYL, she worked as a trial attorney for the Disability Rights Section of the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division and as a Skadden Fellow at the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, where she represented children with mental health disabilities in special education matters. Abrokwa has published a law review article with the Michigan Journal of Race & Law, and, in 2019, was selected as a Wasserstein Public Interest Fellow at Harvard Law School.



Alonzo Kelly
Principal, Kelly
Leadership Group

Alonzo is recognized as one the nation's leading experts on leadership development, strategic

thinking, planning, and acting. Alonzo has delivered training and keynotes to a plethora of Fortune 500 companies, colleges and universities, institutions of higher learning, foreign countries, and nonprofit organizations. He currently serves on the State Board of Directors for the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union), National Board of Directors for SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted), and the Fire and Police Commission for the city of Howard.



Amber Nelson
Director of Arts and
Education, The Arc of the
Capital Area

Amber has an extensive background in nonprofit program development and

management, including over a decade of directly developing, planning, and serving individuals in need through compassionate programming. Her passion for developing community programs has grown as she has created and developed programs that include art education for urban youth, camps serving low-income families, and education programs for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



Annie Acosta
Director of Fiscal and
Family Support Policy,
The Arc

In her role, Annie Acosta covers budget and

appropriations, education, Developmental Disabilities Act programs, autism, technology, prevention, and family support issues. She serves as a Co-Chair of the Consortium for Citizens (CCD) Task forces on Fiscal Policy, Education, and Developmental Disabilities, Autism, and Family Support. Prior to joining The Arc, Annie was the Director of Communications and Grassroots Advocacy for The Arc and UCP's Disability Policy Collaboration and served as the Program Director for the National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (NOFAS) and as a government project officer for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).



Ariel Simms
Senior Program
Manager & Attorney
for Access, Equity, &
Inclusion, The Arc

Ariel Simms advocates

for people with developmental disabilities who become entangled in the U.S. criminal justice system as victims, suspects, defendants, witnesses, and incarcerated persons through The Arc's National Center on Criminal Justice & Disability. Ariel also works to advance The Arc's work in promoting full access, equity, and inclusion, ensuring that The Arc's advocacy is intersectional and responsive to the needs of multiply marginalized communities. She is also a Scholar in Residence with the Philosophy Department of American University in Washington, DC, where she teaches Human Rights & Disability and Disability Law & Ethics.



Bethany Lilly
Director of Income Policy, The Arc

Bethany Lilly specializes in public policy related to Social Security, income supports, paid family and medical

leave, and poverty. She joined The Arc in May 2019 after six years at the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, where she worked on public policy impacting people with mental health disabilities. Prior to joining the Bazelon Center, Ms. Lilly was a law clerk with the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions; a legal fellow at the Center for Medicare Advocacy; and, while completing her J.D. at Duke University School of Law, worked at the Duke AIDS Legal Project.



Daniel Strick
CEO, New Star Services

Dan Strick successfully led New Star through a merger of two nonprofits providing similar services. He has over 30 years of

human service experience in Illinois in nonprofit program development, community organizing, nonprofit senior management, and with the Illinois Department of Human Services. He has also served as the staff director of the Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission and testified numerous times on legislative issues. Prior to that, he served as a consultant to various state human service agencies and held leadership positions in several nonprofit organizations.



Bianca Casanova Anderson
Director, ProInspire

Bianca is an educator, nonprofit leader, and social justice practitioner with expertise in interpersonal

communication, racial equity facilitation, and human development. Bianca found her passion for human-centered change as an educator—cultivating inclusive learning environments that center relationships, uplift marginalized voices, and disrupt racism. As the founding Director for the Dallas-Fort Worth site of the Center for Racial Justice in Education, she trained and advised over 3,000 community leaders and educators in racial equity. In her current role, Bianca leads trainings that center race equity and leadership development. Most importantly, Bianca lives and leads through a lens of radical love, deep inquiry, and transformative justice. She is committed to creating spaces where every person feels safe, smart, and significant.



Donald Redden
Executive Director, Developmental Services of Dickson County

Redden has been employed at DSDC (an affiliated chapter of The Arc) since 1979. He has

served in a variety of leadership roles in Tennessee, including president of The Arc Tennessee, the Tennessee Disability Coalition, and the Tennessee Community Organizations (TNCO), a professional trade association for home and community-based service providers. He currently serves as president of TNCO and represents The Arc on the board of the Council on Quality and Leadership.



Claire Manning
Director of Advocacy & Mobilization, The Arc

Claire Manning brings 15 years of experience in grassroots organizing, campaigns, and issue advocacy. She works

closely with chapters across the country to support grassroots engagement on key issues for people with disabilities and their families.



Edison McDonald
Executive Director, The Arc of Nebraska

McDonald's leadership has led to the passage of legislation improving access to employment, health care, civil

rights, community supports and services, protection against harmful procedures, expansion of parental rights, election accessibility, and a strategic statewide plan. His work on coordinating collection of the largest national data set on disability election issues ensured national precedent-setting election protection legislation, increased community investment, and a deeper understanding of accessibility issues. His coalition organizing work helped decrease the Vocational Rehabilitation Waiting List by 1300 people. McDonald's leadership has led to several awards, including Civic Nebraska's Defender of Democracy and People First of Nebraska's Professional of the Year.



Elizabeth Bostic,
Mother/Advocate

Elizabeth (Beth) Yancy Bostic has two children with special needs, one of whom is medically complex. Before becoming trained by the

Federation for Children with Special Needs (FCSN) as a special education advocate and trainer, she was a Project Manager for a training and consulting firm where she gained extensive knowledge and expertise in facilitating diverse teams. Over the past 15 years, she has brought these skills into her work in special education consulting and special healthcare needs advocacy. She is well respected by parents, school administrators and disability stakeholders across the state. Beth is currently a member of the Special Needs Advocacy Network (SPaN) and the FCSN Board of Directors. She is also a LEND Fellow through the Eunice Kennedy Shriver Center at UMASS Medical School and a Charting the Life Course Ambassador. She has served as the President of SPaN, as well as a member of the IMPACT: Ability Steering Committee, the Arc of Massachusetts Board of Directors and the Reading Special Education Parent Advisory Council.



Gabrielle Szarek
Director of Transition
Services, St. Louis Arc

Gabrielle Szarek oversees the St. Louis Arc's Transition Services, supporting individuals to successfully

transition from adolescence to young adulthood (16 to 26 years of age). In this role, Gabrielle effectively deploys supports in the areas of education, employment, independent living and social development. Gabrielle started as an intern with The Arc in 2012 and has worked in Leisure Services and Supported Employment before taking on her role as Director of Transition Services.



John Nash
Executive Director,
The Arc of North
Carolina

John has over 38 years of experience in leadership roles working with for-profit,

not-for-profit and community development organizations. John has expertise public policy, project development, budget, investment management, fund raising, volunteer coordination, staff development, training and education, grant writing, marketing, advocacy, manufacturing, and retail sales. He has worked collaboratively on numerous boards and committees in a variety of settings.



Julie Ward
Senior Executive Officer
of Public Policy, The Arc

Julie Ward has over 30 years of experience representing people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities

before Congress, the federal agencies, and state legislatures. She has expertise in policies related to the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid, Medicare, private health insurance, Census, budget and appropriations, employment, and transportation issues. Prior to joining The Arc, she spent 18 years with the Epilepsy Foundation, the last ten years as the Senior Director of Government Affairs, overseeing the Foundation's federal and state advocacy program.



Karrie Wozniak
Senior Vice President of
Marketing, OneCause

Karrie has spent more than a decade bringing innovative technology and fundraising strategies to the nonprofit

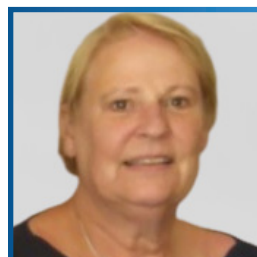
industry. As one of the first executives at OneCause, Karrie combines her 20 years of experience in marketing with her passion for helping nonprofits expand their reach, leading industry research, marketing strategy, and fundraising consulting initiatives. She is also an active speaker on donor and fundraising trends, and has been featured on Forbes.com, Philanthropy Journal, and Nonprofit Hub.



Kelly Velasquez-Hague
Vice President of
Content Marketing &
Engagement, OneCause

Kelly Velasquez-Hague brings over 20 years of fundraising, nonprofit management, and

marketing experience to her role. Prior to starting her career in nonprofit fundraising technology, Kelly worked in the nonprofit sector as a Development Director and Event Coordinator. She is an active speaker and thought leader, sharing insights on donor trends and fundraising best practices at nonprofit industry conferences and webinars. Kelly is passionate about empowering great missions and helping nonprofits reach new donors and raise more funds for their causes.



Kerry Mahoney
Director of Outreach &
Education, The Arc of
Massachusetts

At The Arc of Massachusetts, Kerry coordinates as well

as provides training in a number of topic areas, including future planning, transition, and navigating state and federal benefits and resources.



Kristen McKiernan
Senior Executive Officer
of Communications and
Marketing, The Arc

Kristen McKiernan leads the organization's media relations efforts, focusing on national media coverage for The Arc's public policy, advocacy, and programmatic work. Kristen also leads the team that manages all marketing functions, including branding, websites, and social media. Kristen joined The Arc in 2011 after working on Capitol Hill and on various Congressional campaigns over ten years.



Lauren Frary
Executive Director,
The Arc of Somerset
County

Lauren started her career with The Arc of Somerset County in November of 1990 as a group home manager. For the past 26 years, Lauren has held a variety of positions with the organization. By working in various capacities at her chapter and rising through the ranks to Executive Director, Lauren is in a unique position to understand all levels of an organization. She uses this perspective and experience to positively influence the outcomes of the employees and the organization. In addition to her position at The Arc of Somerset County, Lauren is an adjunct professor at Raritan Valley Community College.



Leanne Mull
Co-Director, Blue Tower
Solutions, Inc.

Leanne has been supporting people with disabilities to achieve their dreams since 1999. In her previous career, Leanne hired someone who used a job coach. The experience completely changed the course of her life, and she spent the next 15 years in a variety of roles ranging from job coach to QIDP, Day Services Manager to Director of Employment and Advocacy, and everything in between. In her current role, Leanne serves as a national speaker, writer, and consultant improving organizations and systems supporting people with I/DD. She also serves as Vice-President on the Board of The Arc of Illinois and as a Quality Enhancement Specialist for The Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL).



Liz Ford
Executive Director,
The Arc of the Mid Ohio
Valley

Liz oversees the daily operations and as many as 30 programs of The Arc of the Mid Ohio Valley, which also operates The Arc of West Virginia. Liz has over two decades experience working with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. She worked for the Washington County Board of Developmental disabilities in a variety of positions as an advocate. Liz was previously the marketing and stigma reduction coordinator at Westbrook Health Services before coming to The Arc.



Liz Mahar
Director of Family &
Sibling Initiatives,
The Arc

Before joining The Arc, Liz was a Managing Supervisor for Fleishman-Hillard, managing stakeholder relations for government-funded public health campaigns on topics including binge drinking, drug abuse, and chronic diseases. She brings social policy expertise from five years of working on Capitol Hill. Liz is the sibling of a younger sister with I/DD.



Mary Van Haneghan
Chief Executive Officer,
The Arc of the Capital
Area

Mary Van Haneghan started her career in the human services field two decades ago as a DSP. During her tenure she has worked across the country in various capacities: day and residential habilitation; post-secondary education; transitional services; case management; supported employment; behavioral health, and nursing. Her academic research has ranged from historical institutional models to the benefits of post-secondary. She currently sits on The Arc's National Conference of Executives (NCE) Steering Committee. In her community, Dr. Mary is involved in the Aging and Disability Resource Center of the Capital Area Steering Committee, the Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities Alliance of Central Texas, Williamson County Institute for Excellence in Nonprofits, Candlelight Ranch, Divine Canines, and One Voice Central Texas.



Michael Hammond
Vice President, Product
and Partnership
Development, Optum
Behavioral Health

Michael Hammond has 30 years of public sector health care experience, serving as a health/ social service policy advisor and speechwriter for two Kansas Governors. Following his State service, he served as Executive Director of a large behavioral health provider trade association, overseeing two subsidiaries and a provider-sponsored Medicaid managed care plan. He also served as a consultant to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Mr. Hammond joined Optum in 2018, leading efforts to bring Optum's I/DD solutions to market. His main focus at Optum is on Medicaid solutions for complex populations, including behavioral health, foster care, and the justice system.



Mike Nagel
Program Associate,
The Arc

Mike Nagel currently contributes to several initiatives at The Arc, including federal public policy,

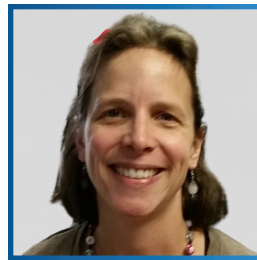
advocacy, the 2020 Census, and a grant project for The Arc Wisconsin. On the policy team, his primary policy focus areas are emergency management and employment. He joined The Arc as a Paul Marchand Public Policy Intern in Public Policy in 2015 before entering his current position in 2016. Prior to working at The Arc, Mike was an intern for U.S. Senator Kent Conrad in Fargo, ND and U.S. Senator Heidi Heitkamp in Washington, DC. Additionally, he served as Assistant Sergeant at Arms of the North Dakota Senate during the 2015 legislative session.



Molly Burgdorf
Director of Rights Policy,
The Arc

In addition to her role as the Director of Rights Policy, Molly serves as the policy lead on housing and transportation

issues. Most recently, Molly was the Senior Policy Attorney at the Center for Public Representation. She previously served as a Civil Rights Analyst for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office for Civil Rights, a Senior Advisor with the HHS Administration on Community Living, and a Senior Advisor for HHS in the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. She also served as Congressional Legislative Consultant with the National Council on Disability.



Molly Cooney
Employment Outreach
Specialist, Wisconsin
Board for People
with Developmental
Disabilities

Molly Cooney has worked on projects related to transition and employment, including Employment First and the WI Promise grant. She is interested in the benefits of peer supports, engaging communities through community conversations, and finding ways for service systems to more intentionally use peers with lived experience to provide support to people with disabilities and their family members.



Nicole Jorwic
Senior Director of Public
Policy, The Arc

Prior to joining The Arc's national public policy team, Nicole served as Senior Policy Advisor for the state

of Illinois and CEO/President of the Institute on Public Policy for People with Disabilities, where she assisted the leadership of the state of Illinois in developing public policy-driven best practices in serving individuals with disabilities. Nicole is also an accomplished special education attorney and an advocate for students with disabilities, with a focus on transition-aged youth. Nicole is also a sibling. Her brother Chris is 30 and has autism.



Pam Verborg
Executive Director,
The Arc of Greater
Boone County

Pam Verborg started her career supporting persons with disabilities as a college student and has since held a variety of roles with provider organizations. Her experience ranges from providing direct supports to executive positions within both for profit and nonprofit organizations large and small. Pam has delivered presentations throughout her career on a variety of topics surrounding providing services to persons with disabilities, including the development of organizations, programs, and staff.



Sara Goscha
National Director,
Complex Care
Populations,
UnitedHealthcare

Sara Goscha has dedicated her 20-year career to children, families, and adults needing human services. In her current role, she has built enhanced models of care to transform how we assist people with developmental disabilities, children, and youth in foster care as well as people with long term service needs and people who are dually enrolled in Medicaid/Medicare. Prior to her role with UnitedHealthcare, Ms. Goscha spent 12 years in Nebraska's state government before joining PCG as a Senior Consultant working with states to enhance their programs and operations to help people served through government agencies.



Shira Wakschlag
Director of Legal
Advocacy & Associate
General Counsel,
The Arc

In addition to her role at The Arc, Shira is on the board of the Disability Rights Bar Association and past chair of the ABA's Disability Rights Committee. Prior to joining The Arc, Shira worked on disability rights litigation in the Bay Area as a Skadden Fellow at Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund and as an attorney at a plaintiff's side employment firm. She organized a conference at Berkeley Law entitled Rebranding Disability Rights Law: The Intersection of Disability, Gender, Race, and Class, presented at several conferences on disability rights issues, and published articles with the Denver Law Review and Human Rights Magazine.



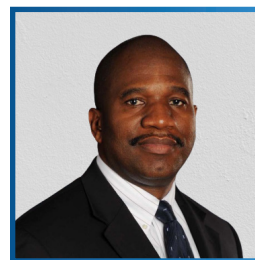
Sarah Swanson
Assistant Professor
at the University of
Nebraska Medical
Center (UNMC) Munroe
Meyer Institute, Family
Support Coordinator

In addition to her role as Assistant Professor, Sarah Swanson is the PI of a program that places Parent Resource Coordinators (parents of children with disabilities who have specialized training) into primary care clinics to help families get connected to early intervention services, navigate health care and education, and learn about community resources. She is also Program Associate for MMI's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) grant, where she monitors policies that impact individuals with disabilities and their families. She currently serves on Nebraska's steering committee for the Title V Maternal Child Health program and recently completed a virtual fellowship at the Association of University Centers for Disabilities.



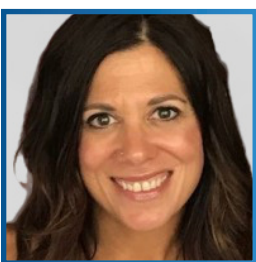
Stacey Ramirez
State Director, The Arc
Georgia

Stacey Ramirez has built her 20+ year career advocating for the civil and human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She is most proud of being a mother of three young men, one of whom has autism.



Stanford Perry
Executive Director, AHRC
Nassau

Under Perry's leadership, AHRC Nassau has been recognized for the highest level of person-centered services by New York State's Office for People With Developmental Disabilities and CQL | The Council on Quality and Leadership. For nearly 30 years, Perry has been a dedicated human services executive creating outstanding outcomes for the people he supports. He is a member at large of The Arc's National Conference of Executives (NCE) Steering Committee and serves on the NCE Summer Leadership Institute Planning Task Group. He also volunteers as vice president on the board of the New York State Industries for the Disabled, Inc. (NYSID).



Shannon Webb
Consultant, InControl
Wisconsin

Shannon Webb has over 25 years of experience working in the field of employment and community services for people with disabilities. Since 2005, she has been fostering innovation and systems change as a subject matter expert for state and federal initiatives to increase integrated employment for youth and adults with disabilities. Over the years, she has collaborated extensively with self-advocates, family members, service providers, schools, and funders and has received the Wisconsin Rehabilitation Leadership Award. Shannon is creative and an excellent problem solver and believes everyone can work.



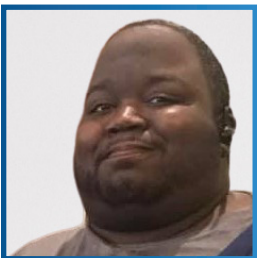
Tashiana Stafford
Notre Dame Legal
Fellow, Chicago Lawyers'
Committee for Civil
Rights

Tashiana Stafford is a Legal Fellow working on education equity issues and advocating for policies to ensure services for school-aged children in Chicago that suffer from gun violence-induced trauma. In January of 2019, Tashiana moved to the United Kingdom in pursuit of International Human Rights Law objectives. In London, she worked at the Islington Law Centre in the Asylum & Immigration Department. In addition to direct asylum and immigration cases, Tashiana assisted in immigration policy hearings regarding the UK's State Department's policies involving unaccompanied minors seeking asylum.



Veronica Chavez Neuman
Executive Director,
The Arc of New Mexico

Veronica Chavez Neuman has professional experience working in the public and private sector as a technology professional and administrator, with over 20 years in New Mexico higher education. Inspired by her daughter's education process, she was an early adopter of innovative teaching and learning with technology and online education which provides access to education for rural, home-bound students with disabilities. She also has extensive experience in public policy and the legislative process and has served on various boards or executive management teams. Veronica is a parent of a daughter with I/DD, a sibling of a family member with DD.



Tavarus Wesley
Self-Advocate, New
Star Services/Illinois Self
Advocacy Alliance

Tavarus Wesley is President of the self-advocacy group PossABILITY Partners. He also serves as the Alliance board chair, is a member of The Arc of Illinois Board of Directors, and is a member of the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities. Tavarus is a graduate of the Alliance Ambassador self-advocacy training program and a Partners in Policymaking-IL graduate. Tavarus is an accomplished presenter, regularly speaking at the Illinois Speak Up and Speak Out Summit and has presented at the National Self Advocates Becoming Empowered Conference and at the Tennessee Mega Conference. In addition to his advocacy work, Tavarus is a long-time staff member on the maintenance team at New Star Services.



Vicki Smead
Executive Director,
The Arc of Multnomah
Clackamas

Vicki Smead began her career in the disability field with The Arc in 1983 in the Tri-County Respite program and continued until 2005 in various leadership roles for the agency. Vicki has spent her entire career working for non-profits including 25 years with The Arc, three years with The American Red Cross and, eight years with Bethesda Lutheran Communities. In 2015, she returned to The Arc as the Executive Director where she currently oversees the agency. Vicki has a lifetime of personal experience in the disability field as a sibling, parent, and grandmother of family members with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



Teri Hawthorne
Executive Director,
The Arc of Greater
Beaumont

Teri is committed to working each day to carry out The Arc's mission, to improve the quality of life for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to grow, live, and learn in their community. She has served on the NCE Steering Committee since 2019. She is also a member of the Spindletop Rotary Club, serves as treasurer of The Lumberton Education Foundation, and is a newly installed member of The Lamar University Alumni Board. In 2016, she was honored as one of Southeast Texas' top 40 under 40 professionals.