



2025
State
Conference
Thursday
October 23, 2025



WELCOME!!

It is with great joy and purpose that I welcome you to the 2025 Wisconsin CASA Statewide Conference. This annual gathering is not just an event, but a celebration of the strength, resilience, and dedication each of you brings to improving the lives of children in Wisconsin who need a voice.

This year's conference highlights both the progress we've made and the urgent work still ahead. As challenges evolve, so too does our commitment—and your advocacy continues to shine as a beacon of hope for the children we serve.

Over the course of this conference, you'll have the opportunity to learn from distinguished experts, engage in thought-provoking discussions, and take part in breakout sessions designed to expand your perspective and energize your practice. Our keynote will challenge us to spark new ideas and remind us all why this work is so vital.

As we participate in these sessions, let us keep at the center of our minds the children whose lives are touched by our efforts. Every connection made, every idea shared, and every strategy explored here has the power to positively impact a child's journey.

I am deeply grateful to our sponsors, speakers, board members, and the Wisconsin CASA team for making this conference possible. Your support and expertise ensure that our mission continues to thrive.

To our CASA volunteers, staff, and partners in the child welfare system: thank you for your unwavering dedication. You are the heart of this movement, and your commitment ensures that every child has a voice.

As we gather today, I encourage you to fully embrace this experience, ask questions, share your wisdom, build connections, and leave with renewed energy for the vital work ahead.

Wishing you a meaningful and inspiring conference!

Melissa Skalecki
State Director, Wisconsin CASA Association

Thank You
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**Children's Court
Improvement
Program**





Conference Agenda

9am to 10am- Check In

10am-11:30am- Welcome and Keynote

11:30am-12:30pm- Lunch

12:30pm-12:45pm- Break

12:45pm-2:00pm- Breakout Session 1

2:00pm-2:05pm- Short Break

2:05pm-3:20pm- Breakout Session 2

3:20pm-3:30pm Break

3:30pm to 4:30pm— Out of the Box Thinking:
Join us for discussion with your fellow CASA
Advocates on different ways to help your CASA
kids and wrap up our day together!

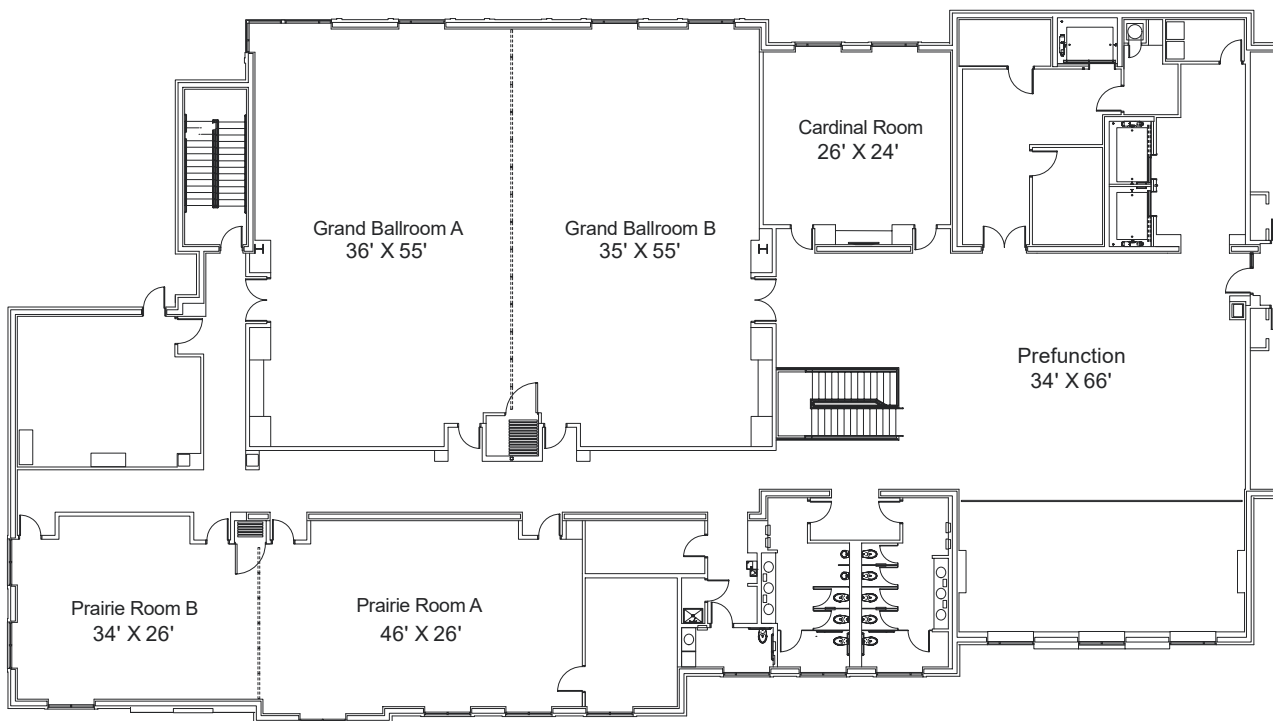
Breakout Sessions

Session 1

1. DEI and Trauma Informed Care- Grand Ballroom B
2. Disenfranchised Grief and Behavioral Health Considerations with Families- Grand Ballroom A
3. Advocate Supervisor Networking- Pre-function Space
4. Best Practices on How the Board and Executive Director Partner Together- Prairie Room A

Session 2

1. How CASAs and GALs can Work Together- Grand Ballroom B
2. Best Practices for Advocating in an Education Setting to Access Educational Services and Supports- Grand Ballroom A
3. Addiction, Trauma, and the Role We Play!- Prairie Room A



From Trauma to Triumph; A Story of an Overcomer

Join MelissaRoshan (MelRo) Potter a, "Lived Experienced Ambassador" of foster care as she explores the power of allowing your light to shine, then sharing it with the world so that we all can ignite the light in others.

MelissaRoshan. One word, no space.

As unique as her name, (also affectionately known as MelRo) is an uncommon talent who has modeled internationally for over 20 years. Her work has been seen on more than five magazine covers, billboards, print ads, national commercials, and runways. She has acted in several indie films, and represented General Motors as a national auto show narrator. But what this respected servant leader is most proud of, is owning the title of Sur'THRIVER, and that she refused to become like those she experienced harm from.



From the days of her tumultuous childhood spent in the foster care system, MelRo knew she was meant for more than the abuse she faced sometimes on a daily basis. Vowing to overcome, she not only later embarked on her own journey toward healing, but also became committed to encouraging others to rise from their painful pasts.

She is involved with several international campaigns that benefit youth in foster care, and she works tirelessly as a full-time advocate for said youth.

MelRo has keynoted at schools, national child welfare conferences, youth summits, women's prisons, juvenile detention centers, faith based organizations, and more her, "voice" has been seen on/in TED Talks, T.D. Jakes Show, Harvard.com, The OWN Network, CNN, NBC, Cosmo Girl, The Today Show, Hollywood TV, and more. She has also built a school in Ghana, West Africa and recently started her own foundation, "MelRo's Foundation" which will support youth globally.

MelRo's firm belief is that through the power of choice, one can flip their past painful experiences to purpose. Wounds to wisdom, and Traumas to Triumph. She also believes that the very events that once broke you, can lead to your breakthrough when you engage in the work to heal yourself.



Breakout Sessions 1

1. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and Trauma Informed Care Training.

Training is for service providers. DEI training help create a more inclusive and equitable workplace for all servant leaders, and the children/families they serve. The trauma informed care training (TIC) is designed to promote safety, trustworthiness, collaboration, and empowerment within the internal support network/ as well as youth/families served.

DEI Project Objective:

- Identify Biases
- Address unfair practices
- Improve communication
- Promote inclusion
- Understand cultural humility, and competency • Foster innovation
- Increase retention

Presented By: MelRo Potter

2. Disenfranchised Grief and Behavioral Health Considerations with Families

Families who are involved in the child welfare system often experience disenfranchised grief and behavioral health challenges. This session helps CASA advocates understand how grief, trauma, and conditions like PTSD, substance use, and depression affect parents, children, and caregivers. Through a trauma-informed lens, advocates will gain tools to recognize emotional distress, hold space without judgment, and advocate effectively while keeping the child's best interest at the center. This session will also help advocates by providing them with emotional regulation skills to address compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma.

Presented by: Kalie Bach is a military service member, advisor, advocate, scholar, and mother of three who lives with intention and purpose. She connects with others through shared humanity, offering support and education to individuals, groups, and organizations. Kalie blends her lived experience with professional training in behavioral health to create spaces for healing, growth, and empowerment. She specializes in helping individuals and families impacted by trauma, grief, and systemic stressors, particularly within care giving, parenting, and high-responsibility roles. With a focus on trauma-informed care and emotional resilience, Kalie is committed to transforming pain into purpose and guiding others to live in alignment with their values.



3. Rowing Together: Best Practices for Board and Executive Director

Partnerships: A strong, collaborative relationship between the Board and Executive Director is one of the most important drivers of nonprofit success. In this interactive session, Gregory Nielsen of Nielsen Training and Consulting will share practical strategies, real-world examples, and proven best practices to help Boards and Executives strengthen trust, clarify roles, and align around mission and strategy. Designed for both Board members and senior staff, this session will provide actionable tools to enhance communication, decision-making, and partnership at the highest levels of your organization.

Presented By: Gregory Nielsen is an experienced nonprofit CEO and consultant committed to helping leaders and organizations excel. Gregory has earned the prestigious BoardSource Certificate in Nonprofit Board Consulting. He is also a frequent public speaker on nonprofit leadership and governance. Gregory previously served as CEO of the Center of Nonprofit Excellence (CNPE), expanding the reach of the organization to serve more than 500 nonprofit organizations through consulting and professional development. During this time, Gregory also helped launch Destination:Excellence, a 6 month leadership development program for nonprofit executives and Circles of Excellence, a peer-to-peer learning program for nonprofit leaders. The growth and accomplishments of CNPE under his leadership were recognized locally and nationally, and the organization was honored with awards from the Better Business Bureau for Ethics and the Louisville Urban League for championing diversity. Gregory is a military veteran, having previously served as an officer and attorney in the United States Army Judge Advocate General's Corps. He holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Government and International Relations from the University of Notre Dame and a Juris Doctorate from Notre Dame Law School.

4. Advocates Supervisors Networking:

Calling all advocate supervisors! There have been multiple requests to connect with each other, meet the new staff and share ideas. Join each other to gather and network!

Hosted by Cheri Dvorack, CASA of Dane & Columbia County Program Director.



Breakout Sessions 2

1. How CASAs and GALs can Work Together:

CASA Advocates and Guardian ad Litem (GALs) are a team as we serve the youth on child in need of protection cases. Hear from CASA Directors and GALs on what are the best practices when working together.

Presented By:

Christy Keele, JD graduated from law school at University of Missouri - Kansas City in 2004. She was a staff attorney supervising 30+ CASA advocates at Voices for Children in St. Louis, Missouri, where she represented children placed in the foster care system from 2004-2010. Keele started her own law practice in Wausau, Wisconsin in 2010, taking Guardian ad litem appointments. She has served on many local and state boards, including: Wisconsin CASA Association, Marathon County Social Services, Rise Up Central Wisconsin and United Way of Marathon County. Keele is excited to bring this great child-service agency to her community as the Executive Director of CASA of Marathon County.

Dainey M. Thomas has been practicing law since 2019 and is licensed in Wisconsin and California. Prior to going to law school, she worked in the early childhood field for twenty years. Dainey originally planned to practice business law or some type of transnational law but after an internship at Kids Matter as well as volunteering as a CASA, she knew her heart was drawing her to work with families and children. She worked at Legal Aid Society for two years as a Guardian ad Litem. In 2021, she started her own firm. She continues to do GAL work for children and at risk adults and also represent parents in CHIPS cases. When not working, Dainey enjoy playing with her cats, fostering cats, baking and cooking and gardening.

Lance Jones is a 1989 graduate of the University of Michigan Law School. He has an extensive background in child welfare and poverty law. Lance taught legal ethics, trial advocacy and child welfare law for three years as a Clinical Assistant Professor in the multidisciplinary Child Advocacy Law Clinic at the University of Michigan. He has also been a staff attorney and interim executive director of the Children's Law Center of Grand Rapids, Michigan and a staff attorney with the Child and Family Law Center of Wayne County Neighborhood Legal Services in Detroit. Lance was executive director of Community Legal Resources, a pro bono legal assistance program serving nonprofit community development organizations throughout metropolitan Detroit.

In 2012 Lance received his Master of Divinity degree from McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. He has been a member of the federal team reviewing Wisconsin's child welfare system and served on the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families' Secretary's Advisory Council on Child Welfare under Republican and Democratic governors. He has been with the Court Appointed Special Advocate program in Milwaukee since 2006.



2. Access to Educational Services and Supports: Three Things to Know:

When advocating for students with IEPs, it's essential to start with a strong foundation. This session will introduce three key areas every advocate should understand: the basics of special education, school attendance requirements, and student discipline. Participants will gain practical information and one essential resource for each topic. We'll also provide an overview of additional resources and leave time for Q&A.

Presented by: Eva Shaw is a special education consultant at the Wisconsin DPI. Her role focuses on services and supports related to autism, emotional behavioral disabilities, social and emotional learning for students with IEPs, and alternatives to exclusionary practices. She has worked in the field of special education for over 30 years, and has had the privilege to serve children, families, and schools in several states and in a wide variety of roles. She has served as a special education teacher, as a program support teacher, a diagnostician, and in an administrative role as a special education supervisor.

3. Addiction, Trauma, and the Role We Play!

In this session you will learn about addiction as a brain disease, how it intersects with trauma, and the struggle to rewire the brain. We will discuss the difficulty in remaining abstinent from drugs and alcohol, including how trauma and stress complicate the healing process. All systems that are built on or become dysfunctional result in each person taking on a role within the system. You will learn what these roles are and how to navigate a relationship with those in each role. Finally, you will walk away with resources and skills to use daily with those you support.

Presented By: Sandy Shaffer is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Independent Clinical Supervisor, Clinical Substance Abuse Counselor, and owner of Shaffer Counseling & Consulting LLC a part of Collaborative Wellness. She has worked in the field of mental health and substance use disorder for over 20 years. She has a passion for guiding others to become the best version of themselves, for each to have a voice to speak their truth, and to discover the beauty and strength within. Sandy has worked diligently to bridge mental health and substance use disorder treatment and to decrease the stigma attached to these disorders both locally and nationally.

She engages in a wide range of modalities, including EMDR and trauma-informed healing. In addition, she serves on the Board of Directors at Christine Ann Domestic Abuse Services Inc, in Oshkosh, is the Treatment Provider representative for Winnebago County Drug Court, is involved in the Oshkosh Area School District Student Wellness Committee, SUD Counseling Program Advisory Committee at Fox Valley Technical College, and the Community Advisory Committee of the UW-Oshkosh Social Work Department. Sandy is an active member of NASW and NAADAC at the state and national level.

Thank you!

Our deep appreciation to you all as advocates for taking the time to expand your knowledge and continuing to help the children of Wisconsin!

Thank you to our planning committee:

Anna Bonkoski - CASA of St. Croix County
Cheri Dvorak- CASA of Dane & Columbia County
Lance Jones— Kids Matter CASA
Sean Kinsella- CASA of St. Croix County
Lori Kornblum
Sherri Valitchka

Thank you to the Wisconsin CASA Board of Directors:

Gale Denis-President
Christine Olsen -Secretary
Mark Haakenson-Treasurer
Gina Angeli
Kristen Jonas
Lori Kornblum

Join us for a Milwaukee Bucks Game on March 15th. Proceeds from ticket sales go to benefit Wisconsin CASA!

MAR 15

2:30PM

FISERV FORUM





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YOUR TICKETS!**

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Any questions, please contact Katherine Trumble at katherine.trumble@bucks.com or 414.294.4919

Thank You for
Attending!

Please Provide Your
Feedback Here:

