

# 3rd Annual Rock County Foster Parent Conference November 15, 2025



The Third Annual Rock County Foster Parent conference promises to be both informative and engaging for all attendees. The day will kick off at 8:30 a.m. with doors opening, registration, and morning refreshments. The Welcome and Opening Remarks will be given by Shelbey Shelton, CPS Lead Supervisor and Katarina Craig, Substitute Care Supervisor. Welcomes will be followed by a conference icebreaker. The morning keynote address will be given by award winning author and speaker, Emi Nietfeld. Emi is joining us from New York! She will talk about The True Meaning of Resilience. Participants will then head to their pre-selected morning break-out sessions.

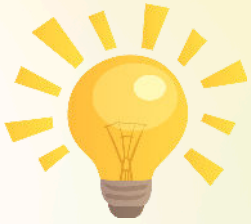
We will come back together for a catered lunch from Hacienda Real of Janesville. We will then participate in a group activity. Pre-selected afternoon break-out sessions will follow. Our afternoon will wrap up with a Keynote address given by Associate Professor of Human Development & Relationships, Patricia Carroll.

The conference is a great opportunity to obtain 8 hours of training credit, network with other foster parents, and gain insights from experts in the field. Please see the entire schedule below, as well as more information about the speakers and their presentations.

## Schedule:

- 8:30-9:00 a.m.: **Doors Open, Registration, Morning Refreshments**
- 9:00-9:15 a.m.: **Welcome and Opening Remarks** (Beckman Mill Conference Room)
- 9:15-9:30 a.m.: **Conference Icebreaker** (Beckman Mill Conference Room)
- 9:30-11:00 a.m.: **Morning Keynote: The True Meaning of Resilience** (Beckman Mill Conference Room)
- 11:10-12:00 p.m.: **Morning Break-Out Sessions** (Please rank your top 3 choices when registering)
- 12:00-1:2:30 p.m.: **Catered Lunch** (Beckman Mill Conference Room)
- 12:30-1:30 p.m.: **Group Activity** (Beckman Mill Conference Room)
- 1:40-2:30 p.m.: **Afternoon Break-Out Sessions** (Please rank your top 3 choices when registering)
- 2:40-4:00 p.m.: **Closing Keynote Address** (Beckman Mill Conference Room) : **The Importance of Parental Confidence**

# 3rd Annual Rock County Foster Parent Conference November 15, 2025



## Keynote and Breakout Session Info:

### Morning Keynote: The True Meaning of Resilience with Emi Nietfeld

Emi Nietfeld rejects the easy label of an “overcomer.” Even though she kept her dreams alive against the odds and attended a top college, she knows it wasn’t solely due to resilience: success required luck, privilege, and support. In this passionate talk, Nietfeld asks her audiences to throw away the American fantasy that poverty, illness, or any other adversity can be conquered through sheer grit and bootstrapping ingenuity. She urges us to shift our focus from encouraging “resilience” and instead address the underlying social problems and provide individuals the support they need to persevere

### Morning Break-Out Sessions (Please choose ONE when registering)

#### **A. Prevention and Intervention Strategies for Adolescent Risky Behaviors with Annie Lisowski**

*Join us for an engaging Badger Talk that highlights the unique strengths and challenges of today’s youth and adolescent generations. This presentation will aim to bridge research with real-world applications, highlighting lessons learned from implementing theory in community youth development programs across the state. Discover effective prevention and intervention strategies for fostering resilience and cultivating a restorative mindset and lens, especially with young people exhibiting risky behaviors. Designed for parents, coaches, educators, and community leaders, this presentation offers practical strategies and tools that can be immediately put into action to empower the next generations of young people as we help to prepare them to navigate post-secondary pathways and transition to adulthood.*

#### **B. Creating Affirming Environments with Jennifer Edds & Amy Harsh**

*Parenting is a journey, often with unexpected twists and turns.*

*Over the past two years the Dane County Out of Home Care unit has partnered with Abra Vigne, Ph.D. of Inner Compass Counseling and Consulting LLC to create three Creating Affirming Home guides to support caregivers and youth in foster care.*

*Caring for children is one of the most meaningful things we can do. It's also one of the hardest. Parenting has many surprises. No two children are alike, and just as our children are on a journey of discovery, we, too, are learning about ourselves as parents.*

*In the first volume of **Creating Affirming Homes**, we explain how gender and sexuality help us to understand how and where we fit in the community. Figuring out our place in the community is a critical developmental milestone of childhood. First, we will cover some terminology for understanding gender that may be new to you. Then, we explore the ages and stages of gender identity development. After that, we will explore how we teach children about gender. Finally, we will provide several ways to create a healing and nourishing home that is supportive of a secure attachment between you and your foster child. This is particularly important for foster parents because, on top of navigating all the typical challenges of growing up, foster children are also working to integrate and heal the trauma of being removed from their family of origin.*

*Making sure your home is welcoming and affirming to all the different ways children understand themselves is the best strategy for creating the safety necessary to heal from the wounds of separation. This includes welcoming a child's racial identity, ethnicity, disability, religion, gender identity, and sexual orientation*

### **C. Family Ties: A Reflective Journey to Connection & Healing with Brontae, Felicia, & Meg (Parent Partners)**

*Come and learn about **Parents Supporting Parents** and participate in a powerful and reflective family mapping activity. During this activity we'll take a closer look at the connections in our lives, the strong ones that keep us grounded and the broken ones that still hold space in our hearts. Together, we'll explore how these connections shape us, how to strengthen the bonds that matter most, and how to begin healing the ones that have been strained. This is a safe, supportive space to share, grow, and gain clarity as we build stronger foundations for ourselves and our families.*

### **D. Youth Advisory Council Panel Presentation with Ariel, Mike, & Gabi**

*Join former foster youth as they present in a panel format. They will be discussing their overall experience in care: the importance of maintaining connections (including with siblings), significance of normalcy activities, and how to help a youth feel welcome in your home. The hope is to leave foster parents feeling empowered to incorporate this new information into their practice.*

### **E. Infant/Toddler CPR & Choking with Matt Diehls**

*Please join Matt as he explains the basics of Child and Infant CPR, AED usage, and choking protocols. He will offer educational tools and resources during class. This is one session we hope you never have to use, but it is often a necessity for everyday life.*

### **F. Addiction from the Eyes of Those With Experience with Holly Seals & Jean O'Brien**

*In this session, my mom and I will share our personal journey through addiction, loss, and healing. I'll speak openly about my experience as a former addict—what led me there, what recovery has looked like, and how I continue to grow. We'll also talk about the heartbreaking loss of my sister to addiction, and how that shaped both of us. Together, we offer a unique dual perspective: one from someone who lived through addiction and one from a parent who supported and suffered alongside her children.*

*This is a rare opportunity to get inside the mind of someone who has battled addiction firsthand. We'll talk about the reality that there is no one-size-fits-all path to recovery—*

what works for one person may not work for another. While we don't claim to have all the answers, we'll share honest insights and suggestions that might help others support a loved one who is struggling. We'll also briefly touch on harm reduction strategies and why they matter. The session will end with an open Q&A, creating a safe space for honest, judgment-free conversation.

### **Learning Objectives:**

- a. **Gain insight into the lived experience of addiction and recovery** from both a personal and family perspective.
- b. **Recognize the emotional and behavioral signs of substance use** and how they can affect relationships.
- c. **Understand that recovery is not linear or universal**, and explore different approaches that may support healing.
- d. **Learn practical, compassionate strategies** for supporting someone in active addiction or recovery.
- e. **Explore the concept of harm reduction** and how it can be a life-saving part of the recovery journey.
- f. **Engage directly with a former addict** to ask questions and better understand the mindset, challenges, and turning points of addiction and recovery.
- g. **Encourage open, stigma-free conversations** about addiction, grief, and mental health.

### **G. Internet Safety with Detective Luke DuCharme**

With the ease of access to digital devices and social media, it has brought new challenges to the forefront of parenting. During this presentation, we will discuss the prevalence of sextortion among our youth and how suspects are using social media to engage and defraud our youth. We will also discuss ways for parents and youths to face this disturbing trend head on and empower them to act.

### **H. When to Worry: Red Flags in Behavior, Learning, and Development with Lígia Nobrega Barbossa**

As foster parents, it's common to wonder if a child's challenges are signs of something more serious—or just part of their unique developmental journey. In this session, we will explore how to identify when to be concerned about a child's behavior, learning, or development, and when it might simply reflect individual pace and life experience. Through real-life examples and practical language, Ligia will help you recognize early red flags that may indicate a need for support, especially in children with trauma histories.

Ligia will also share insights from her children's book *Little Monsters in My Mind*, which introduces topics like anxiety, intrusive thoughts, and childhood OCD in an accessible, compassionate way. This brief segment will help foster parents understand how mental health challenges can appear in daily life—and how to talk about them with the children in their care.

### **I. Safe Sleep with Kristi Ferrara & Abbi Brown**

Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID), which includes Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), is the leading cause of injury death in infancy. Sleep is a big challenge for families with babies, but following safe sleep recommendations can prevent many SUID fatalities. During this presentation, attendees will learn how babies can sleep safely so parents can sleep soundly. Attendees will also learn about the Period of PURPLE Crying. The period of PURPLE Crying is an evidence-based shaken baby syndrome/abusive head trauma prevention program. This program aims to support parents and caregivers in

*their understanding of early increased infant crying and reduce the incidence of shaken baby syndrome and abusive head trauma.*

## **J. Trust and Boundaries: Building Strong Relationships with Birth Parents with Tiffany Meredith**

*Trust is a powerful tool in the foster care and adoption journey—especially when built between caregivers and birth parents. When foster and adoptive parents establish respectful, trusting relationships with a child’s birth family, it can ease transitions, reduce trauma, and support better outcomes for everyone involved.*

*This workshop explores how to cultivate trust with birth parents while upholding clear and healthy boundaries. Participants will learn about the benefits of these relationships, what boundaries are essential to maintain safety and emotional well-being, and what intentional actions caregivers can take to build trust over time.*

*With a focus on practical tips and real-world examples, this session helps foster and adoptive parents navigate these complex dynamics with clarity, empathy, and confidence.*

## **K. We All Carry Something: A Conversation about Mental Health for Foster Youth and Caregivers with Emi Nietfeld**

*In this interactive discussion, led by former foster youth Emi Nietfeld, caregivers will share best practices for supporting youth mental health -- and taking care of themselves. Come away from this series of exercises and guided conversation with the goal of forging connections, building community that will last after the conference, while gathering ideas for how to help you and your youth thrive.*

## **L. Creating a Mosaic Masterpiece with Darcy Siefert**

If you were asked to make a mosaic that tells the story of your life, what materials would you use to make your masterpiece? The petals of the tulips that bloomed in your grandmother’s yard each spring? The ribbon your favorite coach pinned to your jersey when you scored the winning goal? The blanket your mom wrapped you in the day you were born, that still comforts you during thunderstorms? The gravel you scraped your knee on chasing your best friends around the playground? The clippings of your dog’s fur you cut off because you wanted matching bangs? Do you know where to look for these things, or know who to ask about them?

For many children involved in the child welfare system trauma and transitions interrupt connections to their treasured past, which can leave them feeling lost as to how all the pieces of who they are come together (or confused where those pieces came from). In this presentation, Permanency Specialist Darcy Siefert will share how her expertise in Family Find and Engagement practices is used to identify, locate, and reconnect families with the people and places of the past, the opportunities for belonging, healing, and community these connections provide youth while in out of home care, and the ways caregivers can collaborate with these connections to pave a path forward. In doing so, we (parents, providers, professionals, and more) help children craft a modern family mosaic that will support them for a lifetime.

## **Group Activity with Rock County Substitute Care**

*Join us for time for networking with other foster parents. Have there been some situations that you wish you could bounce off each other? Let's take advantage of having a room full of foster parents with countless experiences to share!*

## **Afternoon Break-Out Sessions** (Please Choose ONE when registering)

### **A. Basic First Aid & DCF 56 Safety with Matt Diehls**

*Join Matt as he explains the importance of escape plans, fire extinguisher usage and other common household safety precautions. In addition, there will be an overview of Basic First Aid. Matt will offer educational tools and resources to make this session applicable to everyday life.*

### **B. Prevention and Intervention Strategies for Adolescent Risky Behaviors with Annie Lisowski**

*Join us for an engaging Badger Talk that highlights the unique strengths and challenges of today's youth and adolescent generations. This presentation will aim to bridge research with real-world applications, highlighting lessons learned from implementing theory in community youth development programs across the state. Discover effective prevention and intervention strategies for fostering resilience and cultivating a restorative mindset and lens, especially with young people exhibiting risky behaviors. Designed for parents, coaches, educators, and community leaders, this presentation offers practical strategies and tools that can be immediately put into action to empower the next generations of young people as we help to prepare them to navigate post-secondary pathways and transition to adulthood.*

### **C. Creating Affirming Environments with Jennifer Edds & Amy Harsh**

*Parenting is a journey, often with unexpected twists and turns.*

*Over the past two years the Dane County Out of Home Care unit has partnered with Abra Vigne, Ph.D. of Inner Compass Counseling and Consulting LLC to create three Creating Affirming Home guides to support caregivers and youth in foster care.*

*Caring for children is one of the most meaningful things we can do. It's also one of the hardest. Parenting has many surprises. No two children are alike, and just as our children are on a journey of discovery, we, too, are learning about ourselves as parents.*

*In the first volume of Creating Affirming Homes, we explain how gender and sexuality help us to understand how and where we fit in the community. Figuring out our place in the community is a critical developmental milestone of childhood. First, we will cover some terminology for understanding gender that may be new to you. Then, we explore the ages and stages of gender identity development. After that, we will explore how we teach children about gender. Finally, we will provide several ways to create a healing and nourishing home that is supportive of a secure attachment between you and your foster child. This is particularly important for foster parents because, on top of navigating all the typical challenges of growing up, foster children are also working to integrate and heal the trauma of being removed from their family of origin.*

*Making sure your home is welcoming and affirming to all the different ways children understand themselves is the best strategy for creating the safety necessary to heal from the wounds of separation. This includes welcoming a child's racial identity, ethnicity, disability, religion, gender identity, and sexual orientation*



## **D. Family Ties: A Reflective Journey to Connection & Healing with Brontae, Felicia, & Meg (Parent Partners)**

*Come and learn about Parents Supporting Parents and participate in a powerful and reflective family mapping activity. During this activity we'll take a closer look at the connections in our lives, the strong ones that keep us grounded and the broken ones that still hold space in our hearts. Together, we'll explore how these connections shape us, how to strengthen the bonds that matter most, and how to begin healing the ones that have been strained. This is a safe, supportive space to share, grow, and gain clarity as we build stronger foundations for ourselves and our families.*

## **E. Understanding Human Trafficking in Our Community with Emily Yungen**

*This presentation will provide a critical look at how human trafficking impacts our local communities, with a special focus on vulnerable youth—including those in foster care—and the role parents and caregivers play in prevention. We'll discuss what trafficking looks like in our area, common places it happens, red flags to be aware of, and what makes certain populations more at risk. Attendees will also receive information on available resources, how to respond if they suspect trafficking, and how to build safety and resilience in the lives of youth.*

## **F. Addiction from the Eyes of Those With Experience with Holly Seals & Jean O'Brien**

*In this session, my mom and I will share our personal journey through addiction, loss, and healing. I'll speak openly about my experience as a former addict—what led me there, what recovery has looked like, and how I continue to grow. We'll also talk about the heartbreaking loss of my sister to addiction, and how that shaped both of us. Together, we offer a unique dual perspective: one from someone who lived through addiction and one from a parent who supported and suffered alongside her children.*

*This is a rare opportunity to get inside the mind of someone who has battled addiction firsthand. We'll talk about the reality that there is no one-size-fits-all path to recovery—what works for one person may not work for another. While we don't claim to have all the answers, we'll share honest insights and suggestions that might help others support a loved one who is struggling. We'll also briefly touch on harm reduction strategies and why they matter. The session will end with an open Q&A, creating a safe space for honest, judgment-free conversation.*

### **Learning Objectives:**

- a. **Gain insight into the lived experience of addiction and recovery** from both a personal and family perspective.
- b. **Recognize the emotional and behavioral signs of substance use** and how they can affect relationships.
- c. **Understand that recovery is not linear or universal**, and explore different approaches that may support healing.
- d. **Learn practical, compassionate strategies** for supporting someone in active addiction or recovery.
- e. **Explore the concept of harm reduction** and how it can be a life-saving part of the recovery journey.
- f. **Engage directly with a former addict** to ask questions and better understand the mindset, challenges, and turning points of addiction and recovery.
- g. **Encourage open, stigma-free conversations** about addiction, grief, and mental health.

## **G. Internet Safety with Detective Luke DuCharme**

*With the ease of access to digital devices and social media, it has brought new challenges to the forefront of parenting. During this presentation, we will discuss the prevalence of sextortion among our youth and how suspects are using social media to engage and defraud our youth. We will also discuss ways for parents and youths to face this disturbing trend head on and empower them to act.*

## **H. When to Worry: Red Flags in Behavior, Learning, and Development with Ligia Nobrega Barbossa**

*As foster parents, it's common to wonder if a child's challenges are signs of something more serious—or just part of their unique developmental journey. In this session, we will explore how to identify when to be concerned about a child's behavior, learning, or development, and when it might simply reflect individual pace and life experience. Through real-life examples and practical language, Ligia will help you recognize early red flags that may indicate a need for support, especially in children with trauma histories.*

*Ligia will also share insights from her children's book *Little Monsters in My Mind*, which introduces topics like anxiety, intrusive thoughts, and childhood OCD in an accessible, compassionate way. This brief segment will help foster parents understand how mental health challenges can appear in daily life—and how to talk about them with the children in their care.*

## **I. Safe Sleep with Kristi Ferrara & Abbi Brown**

*Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID), which includes Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), is the leading cause of injury death in infancy. Sleep is a big challenge for families with babies, but following safe sleep recommendations can prevent many SUID fatalities. During this presentation, attendees will learn how babies can sleep safely so parents can sleep soundly. Attendees will also learn about the Period of PURPLE Crying. The period of PURPLE Crying is an evidence-based shaken baby syndrome/abusive head trauma prevention program. This program aims to support parents and caregivers in their understanding of early increased infant crying and reduce the incidence of shaken baby syndrome and abusive head trauma.*

## **J. Trust and Boundaries: Building Strong Relationships with Birth Parents with Tiffany Meredith**

*Trust is a powerful tool in the foster care and adoption journey—especially when built between caregivers and birth parents. When foster and adoptive parents establish respectful, trusting relationships with a child's birth family, it can ease transitions, reduce trauma, and support better outcomes for everyone involved.*

*This workshop explores how to cultivate trust with birth parents while upholding clear and healthy boundaries. Participants will learn about the benefits of these relationships, what boundaries are essential to maintain safety and emotional well-being, and what intentional actions caregivers can take to build trust over time.*

*With a focus on practical tips and real-world examples, this session helps foster and adoptive parents navigate these complex dynamics with clarity, empathy, and confidence.*

## **K. CLTS Informational Discussion with Angela Bouton**

*The Children's Long-Term Support (CLTS) Program offers supports and services for children and young adults under age 22 who have significant developmental, physical, or emotional disabilities and substantial limitations in multiple daily activities because*



*of these disabilities. The CLTS Program helps children with disabilities live at home and better participate in their family and community life by providing supports and services to meet children's individual needs. This breakout session will provide a brief overview of the referral process, CLTS supports, and the Deciding Together process.*

## **Closing Keynote Address: The Importance of Parental Confidence with Patricia Carroll**

*Science tells us that, when parents stop believing in themselves as parents, they can become less effective at child rearing. Self-efficacy is not a fixed trait. It is possible to strengthen one's parenting efficacy. This talk provides tips to promote effective parenting practices that build parental confidence and stronger parent-child relationships.*

# 3rd Annual Rock County Foster Parent Conference November 15, 2025



## About our Presenters:



### **Emi Nietfeld, award winning author and speaker**

Emi Nietfeld wants her audiences to question the “cult of grit” and the notion of the American Dream. In *Acceptance*, Nietfeld chronicles her early struggle with her mother’s pathological hoarding, her own time spent in mental health facilities, and her experience with the foster care system. As a teenager, she believed attending an elite university was her ticket out of misery. So, even as she wrestled with housing insecurity, she wrote her college applications, packaging her life story into the one of a “perfect overcomer,” showing her strength and post-traumatic growth. Though she would go on to graduate from Harvard and become a software engineer at Google, Nietfeld discovered the cost of society’s fixation with resilience.

Nietfeld's path from her tumultuous childhood marked by abuse and neglect to a highly coveted job in Silicon Valley would make for a perfect "phoenix-rising-from-the-ashes" story. However, Nietfeld believes that chance and privilege factor into her success as much as her drive and ambition. Now, she urges her audiences to reassess their ideas about resilience, meritocracy, and the American Dream.

In her talks on the true meaning of resilience, Nietfeld speaks out against a society that ignores bias and inequities and places the responsibilities of social problems like racism, child abuse, and violence onto the backs of the victims. At the same time, she offers reassurance to audiences that they don't need to choose between making a living and living their dreams.

Among her other accolades, Emi Nietfeld won the Scholastic Gold Medal Portfolio in Writing and was a YoungArts Finalist as a teenager. Her essays have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Slate*, *The Information*, *The Rumpus*, *Vice*, *Longreads*, and other publications. She's been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and her work is noted in The Best American Essays of 2021. She currently resides in New York City.



### **Patricia Carroll, Associate Professor**

Patricia Carroll is an Associate Professor in the Division of Extension, Department of Family Development. Patricia's areas of programs center around the area of Human Development and Relationships with an emphasis in digital parenting outreach and engagement. She is a leader in the development, evaluation, and execution of educational programs that strengthen families and communities. Patricia comes from Menasha, Wisconsin, where she lives with her husband.



## **Matt Diehls**

Matt Diehls is an EMS Instructor 2 with over 3 decades of experience in Fire and Emergency medical service. He now specializes in American Heart Association Heartsaver CPR, Basic Life Support, and Advanced Cardiac Life Support instruction with MercyHealth System, bringing a comprehensive style of instruction to the classroom based on his experiences.

Matt graduated in 1992 from the Paramedic Program at St. Anthony Medical Center, Rockford, IL and carries an associate degree in Fire Science from Blackhawk Technical College. Most recently he was promoted to AHA Faculty Staff at the Mercy Prehospital & Emergency Service Center -Janesville.

Matt and his wife of 33 years, Cheri, have 3 birth children, Hayley (Austin, and twin Granddaughters, Addi & Taylynn), Brenna (Brandon and Grandson Myles) and Carsen. Together they fostered 4 kiddos in Rock County. The first 2 were reunited with family. In April, 2023 they adopted Abigail and Marie, still at home. Matt and Cheri's values parallel the County's commitment of Foster Parents providing a safe and nurturing family environment. They have been able to meet their children's individual needs by being meaningfully involved in all aspects of the child's life, such as school, supportive services, and social networks just to name a few.



## **Rock County Detective Luke DuCharme**

Detective Luke DuCharme has been with the Rock County Sheriff's Office since 2005. During his 20 years at the Sheriff's Office, he has held the positions of Correctional Officer, Deputy, and was promoted to Detective in 2019. Detective DuCharme is currently assigned to the Wisconsin Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force, which focuses on protecting our most vulnerable population from exploitation and brings those who do exploit children to justice. He has received numerous awards and commendations for his work. In addition, Detective DuCharme is the Commander of the Rock County Sheriff's Office Honor Guard and a Peer Support Coordinator for the Rock County Sheriff's Office Peer Support team.

Detective DuCharme is a certified law enforcement instructor through the State of Wisconsin, specifically focusing on Emergency Vehicle Operation, Vehicle Contacts and Scenarios. He is also a certified instructor through Crisis International, which teaches law enforcement throughout the State tactics to deal with those who have mental health issues and travels throughout Wisconsin teaching de-escalation tactics.



## **Annie Lisowski, Positive Youth Development Associate Institute Director**

Annie Lisowski is a Professor of Youth Development in the Department of Extension. Lisowski's work centers bringing youth and adults together in partnership to strengthen community assets and address community needs. She focuses her research on youth voice and resilience, restorative justice and the culture of mistake making, and equity in youth empowerment programs. Lisowski has an undergraduate degree in secondary education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a master's degree in youth development administration from Kansas State University.



## **Kristi Ferrara**

Kristi Ferrara is a graduate from Saint Anthony College of Nursing, Rockford, IL, with her Bachelor of Science in Nursing. As a nurse, she has experience in hospital nursing and, most recently, Public Health Nursing. Kristi has worked for Rock County Public Health for a little over five years. Her program areas within the Maternal, Child, and Family Health unit include Child Death Review, Fetal Infant Mortality Review, School Health Collaborative, Child Lead Poisoning, and Asthma Safe Homes. Her favorite part of her job is working with the Child Death Review team to prevent future child deaths in Rock County. The goal for our presentation today is to provide education on safe sleep, what it is, and why it is important. We will also be discussing the Period of Purple Crying and what to do if you are feeling overwhelmed when taking care of a young child.





## **Abbi Brown**

Abbigail (Abbi) Brown is a graduate from Alverno College, Milwaukee, WI, with her Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Minor in Psychology. As a nurse, she has experience in clinical nursing, specialty nursing, and most recently, Public Health. Abbi has worked for Rock County Public Health for the past five years. Her program areas within the Maternal, Child, and Family Health Unit include Asthma Safe Homes, Childhood Lead Poisoning, Child Death Review, and Fetal Infant Mortality Review teams, of which she is very passionate about.



## **Jennifer Edds, MSW & Amy Harsh, MSW**

Jennifer is the Dane County Supervisor for the Kinship Care team. She has worked in Dane County for over 25 years in various roles, including wraparound services, CPS IA and On-Going and Foster Care.

Amy is the Dane County Supervisor for the Foster Care team. Amy has worked in Dane County for almost 25 years in various roles, including Family Group Conferencing, CPS On-Going and Foster Care.



## **Holly Seals & Jean O'Brien**

My name is Holly, and I'm 37 years old. For 10 years, I struggled with heroin addiction—a battle that nearly took everything from me. But in 2019, I got sober, and on June 27, 2025, I'll celebrate six years of recovery. Last August, I returned to college as a 36-year-old-freshman and I am proud to say that I earned a 4.0 GPA as well as a place on The Dean's List. Today, I'm a proud mom to a beautiful 5-year-old daughter who is my motivation, along with my nephews.

My journey hasn't been easy. In 2016, I lost my sister Amy to addiction. She passed away during labor with my nephew Khalyn, who is now 8 years old. Amy's older son, Kalub, is 16. After her death, my mom, Jean, stepped in without hesitation. At 60 years old, she took on the responsibility of raising both of Amy's boys and has been their rock ever since.

My mom and I now speak publicly about our family's experience with addiction, loss, and recovery. We share our story to break the stigma, to honor Amy's memory, and to show others that healing is possible. Recovery gave me my life back—and together, my mom and I are using our voices to help others find hope.



## **Ligia Nobrega Barbosa**

Ligia Nobrega Barbosa is an experienced educator and special education professional with a diverse background that holds multiple degrees, including a Master's in Exceptional Education and a Bachelor's in Early Childhood and Elementary Education.

Originally from Brazil, over the past decade, she has worked in various roles supporting children with learning difficulties, both in schools and in private practice. After relocating to the United States, she continued her work in education.

Ligia is passionate about inclusion, early intervention, and strengthening collaboration between schools and families. In 2025, she published *Little Monsters in My Mind: An easy Way to Talk About Intrusive Thoughts and OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder)*, the first book in a series designed to help families and educators open up conversations about neurodivergent topics with children.

Ligia brings a multicultural perspective and practical insight to her work supporting every child's unique journey.



## **Emily Yungen**

Emily Yungen has dedicated her life to working with youth, from early childhood programs and daycares to educational and community-based settings. With a deep passion for public education, Emily focuses on reproductive health, STI prevention, healthy relationships, and human trafficking awareness. She also has experience with the foster care system, having provided respite care and support for individuals navigating complex transitions.

Emily has served on numerous committees at both the local and state level. She currently sits on the Executive Committee of the Rock County Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force and has collaborated extensively with the Department of Health Services (DHS) and the Rock County Health Department on various community-focused projects.

Currently pursuing a dual major in Public Health and Psychology, Emily combines her academic knowledge with real-world experience to empower and educate her community.



## **Tiffany Meredith**

Tiffany Meredith is a social worker with over 20 years of experience supporting children and families in Wisconsin. She holds a Master of Social Work from UW–Milwaukee and has served as a case manager, supervisor, team facilitator, and director within the child welfare system. Raised in a family that cared for relatives in need, Tiffany and her wife raised her teenage cousin through high school and into adulthood. Today, she focuses on preventing child abuse and neglect by equipping families, teams, and systems with what they need to thrive. She has a passion for community engagement, authentic partnership, and creative innovation.



## **Darcy Siefert, Rock County Permanency Specialist**

Darcy Siefert is the Permanency Specialist at Rock County Human Services. Darcy grew up in Montana and received a BA in Human Services from the University of Montana-Billings. She has lived in and worked for Rock County since 1993. Darcy has worked for several Rock County Agencies, including the Crisis Unit, Youth Services Center and the 911 Center. She has been a part of CPS since 2018 and started as an initial Assessment Case Manager. In 2023, Darcy accepted the position of Permanency Specialist and has worked on expanding the roll

to include greater family involvement while a child is in out of home care as well as working with children and families in efforts to prevent removal from home by involving natural supports at the point of initial assessment. Although Darcy does not often work directly with licensed foster providers, she understands the work of foster families can greatly impact the success of familial connections and is excited to hear from you, the expert, regarding your own experiences in helping kids in out of home care staying connected to biological relatives and other loved ones.



### **Angela Bouton/CLTS**

Angela Bouton has worked with Rock County Human Services for over 18 years. She initially worked as a CPS ongoing worker before transitioning into the Children's Long Term Support Program (CLTS). She has worked with Children's Long-Term Support for 15 years. She currently is the supervisor of the Intake and Eligibility unit in Rock County CLTS. Another role that she enjoys is connecting with community members and partners to share information about CLTS services in Rock County.



## **Brontae Hibbler**

Ms. Hibbler has been a Parent Partner since April 2024. She is a mother of 5. Ms. Hibbler has been impacted by the CPS system both in her family and extended family. She has seen the effects of CPS involvement and wants to help empower families to stay together. Her future plans are to get involved in advocacy for mental health and domestic violence. She is currently a student working on behavioral health and human services.



## **Megan Socker**

Meg Socker is a proud mother of three amazing children and the fiancée of a supportive partner who stands by her unconditionally. She serves as a Parent Partner with PSG, a role she has held since October 2024. Meg draws from her lived experience with recovery, mental health, and involvement with the Child Protective Services (CPS) system to walk alongside the parents she supports.

She is dedicated to her recovery journey and has been successfully sober for 11 months. Meg has completed the Strengthening Families and Systems Trauma-Informed Care Training, further equipping her to support families with empathy, understanding, and resilience.

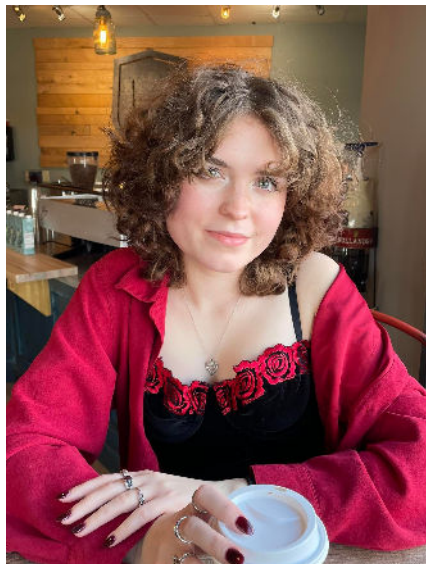
Meg's future goals include maintaining her sobriety, prioritizing and nurturing her mental health, and striving for continuous personal growth to become the best version of herself.





## **Felicia Schliesmann**

Felicia has been serving as a Parent Partner with PSG since September 2024. As a mother of five with lived experience in the Child Protective Services (CPS) system, she brings deep empathy, resilience, and insight to her role. Felicia is training for the second time to become a co-facilitator for the Strengthening Families and Systems Trauma-Informed Care Training this fall. She draws on her personal journey through the CPS system and mental health challenges to support, empower, and advocate for the families she serves. Her future goals include continuing her personal growth, maintaining her mental health, and furthering her education in the near future.



## **Ariel R.**

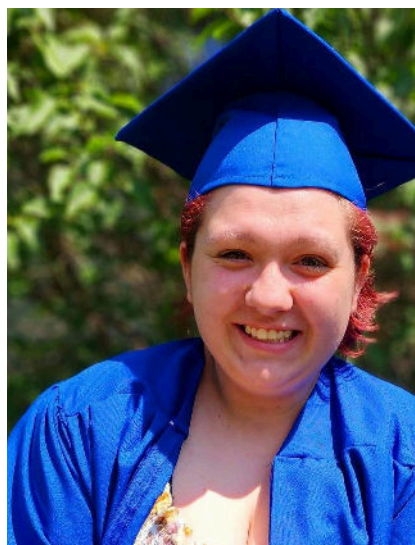
Ariel is a member of the local Youth Advisory Council. She is a former foster youth who has lived experience. Now 22, Ariel “aged out” in care when she turned 18. She currently resides in Whitewater, where she is a full-time student at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. She is anticipated to graduate in December with a bachelor’s degree in finance with an emphasis on

real estate. Ariel is a proud recipient of the Brighter Star Education Scholarship. Ariel lives independently in the community in her own apartment.



### **Mike W.**

Mike is a member of the local Youth Advisory Council. He is a former foster youth who has lived experience. Now 21, Mike “aged out” in care when he turned 18. He currently resides in Rock County, where he works at the Drafthouse. Mike lives independently in the community in his own apartment.



### **Gabi G.**

Gabi is a member of the local Youth Advisory Council. She is a former foster youth who has lived experience. Now 21, Gabi “aged out” in care when she turned 18. She currently resides in Rock County, where she works at Walgreens. Gabi has a goal of working in the medical field. Gabi lives independently in the community in her own apartment.