

**The College of Community and Public Affairs  
presents:**



**November 18, 2022 | 9:00 AM TO 1:00 PM EST  
Virtual Conference**



**BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY  
COMMUNITY SCHOOLS**



# Welcome to the Let Us Dream Conference

**THE LET US DREAM CONFERENCE** provides a platform for sharing, learning, and celebrating people and service groups dedicated to performing selfless acts for the benefit and betterment of society. The conference invites individuals with bigger hearts and deeper thoughts to discuss and reflect upon their experiences with community improvement successes and challenges. These annual community conferences are planned and organized by groups of volunteers and hosted by institutions in various regions of the world. In effect, Let Us Dream is a forum for introducing a variety of service possibilities and intervention models to promote and support engagement in volunteerism across generations. Since its inception in 2017, these annual conferences have provided increasing numbers of participants opportunities to engage in discourse grounded in community improvement research, experience, and best practices.

*The Let Us Dream Conference is presented to:*

- Empower people of diverse age groups and backgrounds working in a myriad of community improvement programs aiming at a better tomorrow;
- Consider the concepts and findings of researchers with the real-world experiences of practitioners, providing relevance to and synergizing combined knowledge; and,
- Promote community service and learning among students by introducing diverse community improvement interventions.

## VISION

- Empowered local communities for sustainable impact and improvement.

## MISSION

- The Let Us Dream Conference was established in 2017 for the purpose of providing a forum for sharing experiences with successes and challenges in community improvement organizations and efforts

## GOALS

*Broad conference goals are to:*

- Improve networking and collaboration among all interested in community improvement organizations and programs;
- Promote volunteerism and empower all involved in community improvement organizations and initiatives, including employees, volunteers, post-secondary students, researchers, and practitioners; and,
- Create a professional learning organization dedicated to improving local communities and characterized by a culture of shared researcher and practitioner knowledge, skills, theories, and best practices.

## TARGET AUDIENCE

Adult and young adult volunteers; Business owners involved in voluntary community development projects; Not-for-profit organizations, philanthropists, board members, social workers, educators, and educational administrators interested in community collaborative initiatives; Post-secondary student leaders, instructors, and professors; Retirees willing to share expertise and time for the betterment of community; All who dream of a better future and desire to make a positive community impact for generations to come.

*Thank you for joining us!*

# 2022

# Let Us Dream Conference

9:00 AM - 9:20 AM

## **Opening of the Conference and Overview**

Michael Kaufmann, Conference Co-Chair and Farm and Wildlife Director, Green Chimneys

## **Message from the President**

Harvey Stenger, President, Binghamton University

## **Welcome**

Dr. Laura Bronstein, Dean, College of Community and Public Affairs, Binghamton University

## **Director's Message**

Dr. Pauline Leonard, Co-Director, Let Us Dream Conferences, USA

## **Conference Logistics**

Ali Wittenberg, Conference Technical Support and Director of Professional Learning & Growth, Change Impact

9:20 AM - 10:20 AM

## **Opening Keynote Address, Research-Based**

Dr. Lotta Granholm, Professor, Department of Neurosurgery at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus

## **Break**

10:20 AM - 10:30 AM

## **Panel Discussions**

- Education Panel
  - Schools After COVID: A Time to Heal
- Health Panel
  - Changing the Face of Healthcare Delivery - the COVID Pandemic
- Social Panel
  - Breaking Down Barriers

## **Break**

10:30 AM - 11:30 AM

## **Closing Keynote, Practitioner-Based**

Kristin Licardi, Associate Executive Director, Behavioral Health Services, Green Chimneys

11:30 AM - 11:35PM

## **Celebrating Unsung Heroes in Our Community**

Tracy Lyman, Lecturer, Department of Teaching, Learning and Educational Leadership, Binghamton University

11:35 AM - 12:35PM

## **Closing Remarks**

Michael Kaufmann, Conference Co-Chair and Farm and Wildlife Director, Green Chimneys

12:35 PM - 12:55 PM

## **Conclusion and Dreams Band - Breathe (Cover)**

12:55 PM - 1:00 PM

1:00 PM

# Conference Presenters



**Michael Kaufmann** served in previous years as a Let Us Dream Conference panelist, moderator and is this year's conference co-chair. He is the Farm and Wildlife Director at Green Chimneys Children's Services, a residential treatment center/day school for children with psycho-social challenges in Brewster, NY. At Green Chimneys, he directs all aspects of the nature-based therapeutic/educational programs and supervises the Sam and Myra Ross Institute dedicated to education and research on the human connection to animals and the natural world.

**Harvey Stenger** was appointed President at Binghamton University in November 2011, and assumed his duties January 1, 2012. Prior to coming to Binghamton, he served as Interim Provost at the University at Buffalo, where he had been Dean of the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences since 2006. As an administrator, his emphasis has been on expanding graduate programs and enrollment, adding academic programs, increasing international research and academic partnerships, strategically hiring faculty and increasing enrollment. After his arrival at Binghamton, he launched the Road Map to Premier strategic planning process, involving more than 400 students, faculty, staff, alumni, community members and business leaders. In 2017, he led an update of the plan through the Road Map Renewal, which also involved hundreds of stakeholders, and he established the University's newest professional school, the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, which graduated its first class in 2021 and received accreditation. With a focus on academic excellence, operational excellence and University growth, the University is moving forward on its journey to becoming the premier public university.



**Dr. Laura Bronstein** is a founding member of the Binghamton University Department of Social Work and currently serves as Dean of the College of Community and Public Affairs and as Director of the Institute for Justice & Well-Being. Laura's research revolves around interdisciplinary and interprofessional collaboration as well as community schools. Prior to entering academia, Laura worked as a practicing social worker in family preservation, in a school for children with developmental disabilities, in hospice and in a psychiatric hospital. She created the widely-used and internationally recognized Index of Interdisciplinary Collaboration and published A Model for Interdisciplinary Collaboration, which has been cited as one of the top ten most influential social work articles of the last decade. She is currently leading Binghamton University Community Schools, creating the nation's first county-wide system of university-assisted community schools.



**Dr. Pauline Leonard** is a former elementary teacher and educational leadership professor. She retired from her work as professor and department chair in the Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Leadership at Louisiana Tech University in 2014. Pauline has served on the core leadership committee for the Let Us Dream conference since its inception in 2017.



**Ali Wittenberg**, Director of Professional Learning & Growth, has always had a passion for helping others and enhancing communities. After studying Education and serving as a teacher and enrichment specialist, her interest in non-profit initiatives led her to the American Camp Association, NY & NJ. As the Director of Member Services, she spent eight years developing a robust training and consulting program, and supporting individuals and organizations in camping. Utilizing her background as an educator, facilitator, and consultant, Ali provides support, resources, and systems to help organizations enhance the positive impact on the audiences they serve.



**Tracy Lyman**, MSEd is a NYS certified Elementary and Special Education teacher that has been working in the education field since 1999. Tracy currently works at Binghamton University in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Educational Leadership teaching undergraduate and graduate level courses focusing on special education and mental health. She supervises student teachers in early childhood, elementary and special education, and is the workshop coordinator for the department. She is also an Early Intervention specialist providing special instruction, family training and initial evaluations for children from birth through 3 years old.

# Opening Keynote Speaker

## Maintaining a Healthy Brain in the Face of Stress, Injury, and Adversity

The overall purpose of this plenary lecture is to discuss normal brain anatomy/behavior/physiology as an introduction, and then discuss what happens in the brain with stress, aging, and/or injury. Long-term changes associated with stress and injury will be discussed, for example the brain with PTSD or CTE caused by multiple trauma events. Finally, methods that each person can employ to reduce the risk for brain injury or degeneration will be discussed. This includes lifestyle changes, reducing stress, and exercising the brain to build resilience.

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**Dr. Lotta Granholm** is a Professor in the Department of Neurosurgery at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical campus. She is originally from Sweden and has lived in the USA since the 80s. She has a broad research background in neurodegenerative diseases, especially as it pertains to neurodegeneration and aging. She has been funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for more than 30 years and has more than 170 peer-reviewed articles. Dr. Granholm was the founding Director for the South Carolina Brain bank, housed at MUSC, and she is the lead investigator for an international collaborative for biobanking of brain tissues from individuals with Down syndrome which currently has 12 participating sites in the USA, India, and Europe. She is the founding Chair of a Professional Interest Area (PIA) on Down syndrome related Alzheimer's disease (DS-AD) in the international Alzheimer organization ISTAART. Dr. Granholm leads the CU/DU Concussion Research program which is focused on long-term biomarkers for sports-related concussions. Dr. Granholm recently moved from the University of Denver (DU), where she was the Inaugural Executive Director for the Knoebel Institute for Healthy Aging (KIHA), to the University of Colorado, Anschutz Medical Campus, to the Department of Neurosurgery. She is a Board member of the Colorado Chapter of Alzheimer Association.



# Panel Discussions

## EDUCATION PANEL

### Schools After COVID: A Time to Heal

Moderated by **Patricia Follette**, Ed.D., Retired Superintendent, Whitney Point Central School District

The pandemic has magnified the deep inequities within the educational system and left it in crisis. Its impact on learning has affected all students, but most severely, those already the furthest behind. Across the country, students have gone "missing" from schools, and many attending schools are disengaged with high levels of physical, social, and mental health needs. There is a shortage of administrators, teachers, staff, and bus drivers, with burnout rates at an all-time high. Schools are under attack for curriculum choices, and books are being banned from school libraries and classrooms. Communities and families are divided politically, stifling healthy discourse and thinking. And to add to the trauma is the constant reminder, threat, and fear of a school shooting. It's time for schools to begin the healing process!

Although the COVID-19 pandemic turned our educational world upside down in a short period and with devastating effects, there are still many reasons to remain optimistic. Our panel will provide current efforts to counter the pandemic's adverse effects and share ideas and actions to support our educators, students, families, and communities to become healthy, engaged, and thriving environments.

## HEALTH PANEL

### Changing the Face of Healthcare Delivery: The COVID Pandemic

Moderated by **Deborah Blakeney**, MS BSN RN CCM, Sr. Director Clinical Integration and Population Health, Our Lady of Lourdes Memorial Hospital, Inc.

The COVID pandemic has highlighted the fact that creating a healthy community goes beyond the health care services delivered in emergency rooms, hospitals and doctor's offices. The health of a community is also dependent on the environment in which people live- the social care services available. The pandemic pushed the local health care and social care systems to identify new ways to partner to deliver care for the community. Decision making processes that historically had to make their way through a multitude of committees- "thinking first" had to become "doing first" to keep pace with the constantly changing needs. Although this has been a very challenging three years, many of the changes made have led to new options for care and support for our local communities. Our panel will discuss the expansion of tele-health services, tele-health training for "non techies", addressing the behavioral health impact, and solutions for the provision of social care services in our urban and rural areas.

## SOCIAL PANEL

### Breaking Down Barriers

Moderated by **Carla Michalak**, Professor of Political Science, SUNY Broome Community College

COVID exposed the many barriers that Americans coped with and revealed the deep economic fissures between the haves and the have nots. For the wealthy and high income earners, the COVID experience was challenging. But the cushioning of resources and privilege mitigated their experience. For lower income and middle class workers, women, immigrants, seniors and communities of color, COVID was devastating economically and socially.

Inequities that have long existed became even more acute. For vulnerable groups, accessing community resources, timely unemployment benefits, health care, the internet or applying for COVID funding presented existential challenges. During this shared experience, divisions between those who have, and those who have not, widened. Extreme political views and partisanship aggravated how Americans perceived each other - stigmatizing the wealthy as being out of touch and often blaming those who are habitually underserved and marginalized. Distrust in government echoes from all sides. Yet sustainable communities have to work together for everyone in that community. We are all economically, socially and ethically interconnected and dependent on each other.

Join a panel of community leaders to explore action steps to breaking down real and perceived barriers that still keep us apart. Discover innovative solutions, consider new perspectives and let's move forward together.

# Education Panel

## SCHOOLS AFTER COVID: A TIME TO HEAL



**Patricia Follette, Ed.D., Moderator**, retired as the Superintendent of the Whitney Point Central School District in June 2021 after serving the district for thirteen years. During her 33-year career in education, Patricia was also a Reading Recovery Teacher Leader and the Supervisor of Curriculum, Instruction, and Educational Leadership at Broome-Tioga BOCES. She started her career as an elementary and literacy teacher in the Union-Endicott School District. An alum of Binghamton University, Patricia earned her M.S. and Ed.D. in Education. She is currently a consultant for Binghamton University's Community Schools Technical Assistant Center (TAC) and an adjunct lecturer in literacy. She continues to promote school and community collaborations to ensure that all students have the support they need to be successful.

**Kerri Bullock** has been with Broome-Tioga BOCES for the past sixteen years. She currently serves as the Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Support Services & Leadership, working in collaboration with BOCES staff and the staff of the school districts of Broome and Tioga counties. Kerri's experiences include professional learning, specifically in supporting curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices that have an impact on student learning. Prior to her role at BOCES, Kerri taught health and physical education. She continues to have a passion for supporting the whole child to ensure their success. She has worked collaboratively with component school districts and community partners, including Binghamton University and Broome County Office of Mental Health in recent years, to expand the services that BOCES provides to districts and students in the region.



**Matthew L. McConn** is an Associate Professor of English education and Chair of the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Educational Leadership at Binghamton University, SUNY. He has over a decade of English teaching experience in urban secondary schools in Houston, TX. His current research interests include defining and developing the teaching of literature in secondary classrooms.

**Doug Overton** is the co-founder of Edtomorrow and a leading expert in the work of Restorative Practices. He has facilitated over a thousand restorative circles and trained more than two hundred campuses nationwide. Doug is the creator of The First Five, a daily curated email for educators that is currently being used in over 10 countries and every state in the USA. This dynamic resource gives teachers tools for building connection, self-care, empathy for others, and the development of character. Doug has been a district leader, teacher, and consultant at all levels of education. As an educator, he received several prestigious awards including First Class Teacher, Campus Teacher of the Year, and District Teacher of the Year. As a district leader, Doug has built entire Restorative/SEL structures applied district-wide by training teachers, developing teams, and creating content.



**James Reece** is currently a Community Schools Coordinator for Ann G McGuinness Elementary School in Union-Endicott. James has been in this current role for a year. Prior to that James worked for three years in Whitney Point School district as a Family Advocate. My educational background is in Human Development. James is a restorative practices leader for the school district. His current position allows him to assist in coordinating community events. With these events, the school district can assist in meeting the needs of families, which in turn creates a stronger community. James passion in life is to help in any form I can. By supporting individuals, he is able to give back to a community in which he spent his entire life in.

**Jo-Ann Sexton** is the current Superintendent of the Whitney Point School District. She has worked in this district for many years, first as a counselor, then Assistant Principal, Director of Special Services, Assistant Superintendent before becoming the current Superintendent. Jo-Ann and the Whitney Point School District are committed to the importance of the community school framework and continually strive to build partnerships and organizational relationships that enhance support for students and families through their school. Jo-Ann is a doctoral student at Binghamton University and is doing research on family school relationships in rural areas during the phases of the pandemic. Additionally, she has a focused interest in the importance of birth to 5 learning experiences and programs, cultivating school environments that foster resilience and the essentialness of high caliber special education programs and services.



# Health Panel

## CHANGING THE FACE OF HEALTHCARE DELIVERY - THE COVID PANDEMIC



**Deborah Blakeney, Moderator**, is a graduate of Binghamton University with a BSN, and of Keuka College with a MSM. She has 40 years of experience in healthcare as an RN, a care manager and a member of the Lourdes Administrative team. She has worked in the acute care setting, Primary Care and supported services delivered through homecare and hospice. In her current role as Sr Dir of Clinical Integration and Population Health she is responsible for the coordination of services across the continuum, delivery of high quality patient care and development of population health capabilities throughout the healthcare system in collaboration with Lourdes internal team, community based organizations and Ascension national resources. She believes that to truly improve the health of a community social care needs to be integrated with the delivery of medical care.

**John Barry** is a University of Chicago graduate with an A.M. in Social Service Administration and is a licensed social worker. He has 30 years of experience in the fields of HIV, substance use treatment and mental health in both direct service and administrative roles. He has been an adjunct instructor at both SUNY Cortland and Binghamton University. He has been the Executive Director of the Southern Tier AIDS Program (STAP) since 2008, was a case manager there in the early 1990s and a volunteer in the 1980s. He is proud to lead this group of innovative, compassionate professionals that operate 3 Syringe Exchange programs in rural areas of New York State.



**Matthew "Matt" Griffin** is Director of Health & Nutrition at the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, where he has worked since 2002. Matt oversees activities that increase access to healthy food, facilitate nutrition education for people visiting emergency food programs and build partnerships with community organizations that promote healthy outcomes. During his time at the Food Bank, Matt has helped develop a nutrition policy that informs the Food Bank's food acquisition process. He also promoted the practice of client choice and the use of "nutritional nudges" throughout the Food Bank's network of food pantries. Matt was instrumental in the start-up of the Food Bank's client intake and registration program which yields insights into the people served by the emergency food network.

**Pamela Guth**, Director, Community Health Services, has led Rural Health Network SCNY Community Health Workers assigned to Broome, Tioga and Delaware Counties since mid-year 2013. Pamela's work experience covers 43 years in the public health, human service and education fields. Her expertise ranges from curriculum development, innovative project planning and implementation to program and resource management in the areas of: home visiting, integrated delivery systems in early childhood through aging services and rural health/social care networks.



**Laura Pascucci**, MHA is the Vice President, Provider Network at Lourdes, part of Ascension in Binghamton, NY. Laura leads the operations of a large multi-specialty medical group of 280 physicians and advanced practice practitioners. In addition to the medical group's primary service area of Broome and Tioga counties, Ascension Lourdes has a formally organized network of care extending west through Steuben County. Laura has extensive healthcare management experience over the past 26 years including corporate compliance, revenue cycle and operations.

**Karen Riewerts** is the Director of Community Development at Lourdes. Karen began as a home visitor with the Lourdes Parents and Children Together Program (PACT) in 2002. In 2004, she became a PACT Supervisor and in 2013 became the PACT Program Manager. In 2017, Karen became the Manager of Community Development and in 2021 became the Director of Community Development. Karen has a BA in Psychology and an MS in Educational Studies. Karen has more than 25 years' experience working with families and the community.



**Mathew Stein** is the Director of Revenue Cycle at Lourdes, part of Ascension in Binghamton, NY. Mathew has been an associate at Lourdes since 2009. Mathew has been instrumental in significant operations such as the implementation of telehealth carts being used at community based organizations, to operationalizing the new Lourdes Oakdale Commons location. Mathew is from Broome County where he still resides with his wife and 4 children today.

# Social Panel

## BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS



**Carla Michalak, Moderator**, is a Professor of Political Science at SUNY Broome CC, the Civic Engagement Coordinator and Coordinator for the Fast Forward Courses for the History, Philosophy and Social Sciences Department. She serves on the SUNY Broome's Civic Engagement Board and is Vice President for the Broome Tioga League of Women Voters' Board. She is a Broome County Poll Inspector and is passionate about voter and civic engagement and increasing awareness of current events and how those events affect citizens. In March of 2022, she was presented with the Woman of Distinction Award from the Status of Women's Council. From 2016 – 2021, she worked with the Broome Tioga County Suffrage Anniversary Committee chaired by Assemblymember Lupardo. She helped to plan events celebrating NY's anniversary and the nation's anniversary in granting women the right to vote. In 2014, she was awarded the SUNY Chancellor's Award in Professional Service. Aside from work, she enjoys spending time with her husband, and her three adult children. Her hobbies include cross stitching, reading and following current events. She loves all forms of outdoor activities including hiking, walking, gardening and rollerblading.

**Gay Canough** (PhD, particle physics, U of Notre Dame, 1988) has been working in the solar energy field since 1993, installing mostly photovoltaic systems. She founded Extraterrestrial Materials, Inc. (ETM Solar Works) in 1988, doing design work on small spacecraft such as the Lunar Prospector (which went to the Moon in 1998). Since 1993, ETM has installed over 3 megawatts of solar electric systems. ETM also installs air-source heat pumps, EV charging stations and battery backup systems. In 2000, she began instructing electricians and other interested people in how to install photovoltaic (PV) systems. Since then, she has run the PV Installer's course over 250 times. The course has been offered in NJ, PA and NY. In the fall of 2003, she received certification as a PV installer from the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners ([www.NABCEP.org](http://www.NABCEP.org)). Gay is a founding member of the New York Solar Energy Industries Association (NYSEIA).



**Jordan Ramsey** is currently pursuing a liberal arts degree at SUNY Broome where he serves on the Student Assembly as Vice President of Administrative Affairs. In recognition of his passion for civic engagement, Jordan was selected as SUNY Broome's cohort for the Civic Newman Fellowship for the 2022/2023 academic year. Off campus, Jordan is actively involved in food pantries in his hometown of Unadilla, New York and, more recently, at a local food rescue in Binghamton. After graduation from Broome, Jordan hopes to attend Binghamton University to pursue degrees in Psychology and Theater Arts.

**Dr. Ross-Scott** works with passion, grounded in her personal philosophy: College should be the most positively unforgettable experience of a student's life. Her current portfolio includes strategically leading and supporting the various departments in SUNY Broome Community College as the Vice President for Student Affairs and institution's inaugural Chief Diversity Officer. Prior to joining the SUNY Broome family, Dr. Ross-Scott was the Founding Chief Student Affairs for the country's first private liberal arts university, American University of Kuwait (AUK). Dr. Ross was responsible for the effectiveness of all Student Affairs Departments in addition to leading administrative units. Additionally, Dr. Ross-Scott earned her bachelor's degree from University of Maryland-European Division, master's degree from Boston University-European Division, and doctorate in Higher Education Administration from Florida State University.



**Mary Whittaker**, LCSWR, is a clinical social worker who has taught and been a program coordinator in the Psychology department at SUNY Broome Community College. Has nearly 40 years experience in clinical treatment and supervision, community programming, and education. She has developed and managed programs for Broome County Mental Health, Broome County Health Dept., United Health Services and Lourdes Hospitals. Her greatest passion is in facilitating best practices in adolescent mental health and substance use treatment. She has developed adolescent outpatient substance abuse treatment programs with a special focus on the juvenile justice population. She managed day to day operations at a one-stop clinic that offered counseling, health care (and reproductive health care) as well as child care to the infants/toddlers of teen parents. Services to adolescents/at-risk teens has been a main focus as it is the perfect developmental age for dramatic and lasting change.

# Closing Keynote Speaker

## Cultivating Resilience in Turbulent Times

In the wake of significant challenges we face in the world today, individuals and entire communities have been profoundly impacted. Whether it be the global pandemic, war and terrorism, community or targeted violence, or natural disasters, these series of events or set of circumstances are being experienced as traumatic, affecting our functioning and our physical and social emotional well being. While most people find healthy ways to cope and recover from traumatic experiences, this chronic exposure to trauma seems to be resulting in more adverse effects. The good news is that the ability to adapt well in the face of adversity – resilience – is not a trait you either have or don't; rather, resilience can be learned and developed. In this workshop, we will examine resilience: what it is, why we need it, and how to build it in order to weather, and grow from, all that life places in our path.

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**Kristin Licardi** is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and Hunter College School of Social Work graduate, with over 28 years experience in behavioral health services for children and families. Mrs. Licardi began her early career in direct care in several mental health settings before settling in at Green Chimneys Children's Services in Brewster, NY, where she has worked for the past 23 years. She held the Director of Social Services position for the last 17 years, where she directly impacted the programs and services provided to children and families, and trained clinicians, direct care staff, educators and parents, and has recently been promoted to Associate Executive Director of Behavioral Health Services. Mrs. Licardi has adapted and facilitated various training curriculum for the agency, including trauma, trauma-informed care, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), and suicide and non-suicidal self injury, and has presented at professional conferences, including the Association of Children's Residential and Community Services (ACRC) and Leir Foundation Trauma Conference.



# Unsung Hero Community Spotlight

GiGi's Playhouse Southern Tier is a Down Syndrome Achievement, and one of 56 in the nationwide network. We offer FREE educational, therapeutic and career development programming from birth through adult, so our families and participants never age out of our programs. GiGi's Playhouse is a 99% volunteer-run organization and 100% privately funded through grants, donations and fundraising events. Our mission is to change the way the world sees Down syndrome and send a global message of acceptance for ALL. Our local Playhouse opened its doors in May of 2019, and since opening has served hundreds of families, worked with hundreds of volunteers and provided close to 10,000 hours of programming. The Playhouse was founded by local parents and advocates who recognized the lack in of programming specific to individuals with Down syndrome, despite Down syndrome being the largest chromosomal disorder and the leading cause of cognitive and developmental delays.

GiGi's Playhouse has become the first line of connection for new families receiving the diagnosis of Down syndrome, providing congratulations and support for what can be a very difficult transition for families. Just since May of 2022, GiGi's Playhouse has been able to connect with 7 new families with New Family Bags, along with emails, phone calls and opportunities for the families to meet, connect and share stories. The goal of each participant and volunteer that walks through the Playhouse doors is to give their Best of All, whether that be holding a plank for 1 second longer during a GiGIFT session, attending for 5 more minutes during a 1-on-1 Math or Literacy tutoring session, or using their voice to express their greeting to friends during their Amina Grace Speech and Language session. Each person is encouraged to strive for their Best of All in all situations, doing a little more than they did the day before, therefore always growing and improving at their own rate and pace.

One of the most unique things about GiGi's Playhouse Southern Tier is our strong partnership with Binghamton University. From the very beginning, the students and faculty of the University have come alongside the Playhouse to be able to support and provide programming for our local families. From the literacy and math tutors, the weekly program leads and assistant through the SPED411 class, the SLPs from the developing Speech and Language Department, and continuing right on into developing partnerships with the incoming OT and PT programs. The university has provided more than half of the volunteers each semester and allowed the Playhouse to grow into much needed programming with literacy, math and speech, allowing participants to continue working on increasing communication and working towards increased independence.

2022 has seen another huge leap in participation at the Playhouse, and as a result GiGi's Playhouse will be relocating in Fall 2023, to accommodate their growing numbers of programs, participants and volunteers. We are excited for the future and all that is to come!



- Anna Bruce, Board Vice President, Program Coordinator  
Mom to Camden



# Gigi's Playhouse Community Spotlight: Unsung Heroes



**Anna Bruce** is the Board Vice President and Program Coordinator at GiGi's Playhouse Southern Tier, who also holds degrees in elementary and special education. Those titles do not begin to describe who she is though nor do they truly indicate how integral she has been in bringing GiGi's Playhouse to the Southern Tier. Anna is also Mom to Camden, who is her reason for getting involved in GiGi's Playhouse Southern Tier. When Camden was diagnosed with Down syndrome, Anna then made a commitment to provide him with all of the tools to help him succeed, just like his older siblings. Since then, Anna has been actively involved in establishing GiGi's Playhouse here in the Southern Tier, in order to help all the families like hers, provide the best opportunities and support for their children and family. She embodies the "Best of All" mentality in all she does, in her countless hours of planning, organizing, meeting and advocating for individuals with Down Syndrome along with changing the world to build acceptance for all. She truly is an unsung hero, wanting no attention for her efforts, always working to support others in every interaction, but we would be remiss to not acknowledge her dedication and impact on our community.

**Anne Laubisch** has known most of the families at GiGi's since the kids were babies. She was formerly a COTA, providing occupational therapy for many of our families during the years. She has become like family to most everyone, as she has become so invested in the growth and success of our kids and young adults, and was one of the first people to join the startup team to bring GiGi's into our area. Since opening, Anne's commitment and dedication to our families has only grown. On top of being a 3+ year board member, event committee member, program committee member and volunteer coordinator, she has stepped in to lead many programs, when we have been short volunteers, has offered rides to participants when transportation has been an issue and can often be found at the Playhouse whenever she is in town, just to be an extra set of hands. She has the most incredible capacity for love of anyone we have ever met, and we would be lost without her heart and dedication!



**Anna Pearlman**, Student Volunteer, began volunteering with GiGi's through our virtual tutoring program and immediately fell in love with our mission and vision. After volunteering as a literacy tutor, she became involved at our local Playhouse through the Sped411 class, where she jumped right into leading and assisting with programs at the Playhouse. Anna not only helped at the Playhouse, but she truly embraced our mission to help change the way the world sees Down syndrome, by reaching out to other students at Binghamton University to help spread awareness of our Playhouse and mission. She was constantly bringing new friends into the Playhouse to volunteer, promoting the Playhouse at tabling events and even volunteered at our "I Have a Voice" gala.

**Jeannie Post** was first involved with GiGi's Playhouse in 2018, before we even opened our doors. She was the Events Director at Traditions at the Glen and helped us plan our very first event, which was a Halloween Dance-a-Thon. Shortly after that event, Jeannie was so inspired by our mission and by our participants that she came on as a board member and volunteered to take over our event committee, coordinating, planning and executing our 3 events each year. She works tirelessly to help make each event a success so that our Playhouse can continue to provide free programs, and she does all of this with a smile and so much joy, on top of being a busy mom and a local business owner. Our Playhouse could not continue to thrive and grow without her!



# Unsung Heroes

Unsung Heroes are those selfless, caring and sacrificing individuals who strive to serve their respective communities without the need or expectation for glory or recognition. It is their invaluable and inspirational stories that the Let Us Dream community celebrates.

The primary purpose of the Unsung Heroes is to help shed light on just some of the many acts of immeasurable service in which people in our community engage. These acts may not be necessarily large-scale endeavors; however, step-by-step, they help make our community a better and brighter place. Undoubtedly, at times the world may seem to be a dark and difficult place, especially during these perilous pandemic times. It is our hope that these stories of love, sacrifice, and compassion will help to inspire.



**Ralph Fuller** has been an Unsung Hero for our communities for the last 46 years. Serving selflessly as firefighter, paramedic, and a Town Representative in Broome County. Not only has he served his community selflessly he has taken his time to aid in the training of new fire and EMS members sharing his knowledge, wisdom, and empathy along the way. He has provided donations of much needed equipment and supplies to multiple EMS and Fire agencies in the community. Ralph is the oldest paramedic in New York State and is always ready to serve his community making him an Unsung Hero.

**Margaret Goodfellow** is co-President of the Broome Tioga County League of Women Voters and has dedicated her time and talents to the well-being and promotion of the LWW at the local, state and national level. She is an enthusiastic advocate for voter registration, conducting voter registration drives at SUNY Broome Community College, Broome County Public Library, and other local venues. Margaret is a constant and reliable presence at the monthly Naturalization Ceremonies, ensuring that every newly naturalized citizen has the opportunity to register to vote. She personally delivers the voter registration forms to the Board of Elections to ensure that they are received and processed! Margaret also collaborates with community organizations such as WSKG and the Broome County Status of Women Council.



**Christopher Murdock** is the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Union-Endicott Central School District. For eighteen years, Chris has been in education and spent the last fifteen years as a Social Studies teacher at Jennie F. Snapp Middle School prior to moving into his new role. Chris sits on several boards and committees, including the Board Advisory Team for Equity and Student Achievement, the Broome County Chamber of Commerce DEI Committee, and the Regional DEI Committee through Binghamton University. In working with the Board of Education and other stakeholders to ensure access for all community members, Chris has overseen a number of initiatives. The efforts to support our school community have been most recently brought to fruition in the opening of the Family Support Center and Food Center, housed in UE's district office. Chris also secured grant funding and piloted the Brother to Brother and Union-Endicott Efficacy Club initiative which has impacted over 500 students of color in the district.

**Rebecca Porter** is selfless and never tiring in her work to help those in the community. From art to homeless outreach to her work on the ACEs program, her entire life is centered around caring for others. She is active in the community and at her church to always reach out and take care of anyone who crosses her path. She looks for the best in people and by being so kind and supportive she often times brings it out.



**Rebecca Rathmell** has been active within the local homeless services sector since 2007, but currently works as the Coordinated Entry System Manager for the state of Rhode Island. Rebecca is also the owner of ProcessSPEAKS, an advocacy and consulting firm committed to assisting service providers, local governments, faith-based organizations, and regional representatives in identifying and addressing issues of homelessness and housing instability. She recently served as the Housing Specialist for Broome County's Relocation Assistance Program, an anti-displacement initiative offering housing search assistance and financial support to households at-risk of or experiencing homelessness, and has previously held roles such as Street Outreach Coordinator & Housing Advocate at the YWCA in Binghamton, Continuum of Care Coordinator for the Southern Tier Homeless Coalition, and co-chair for the Broome County Safe Housing Task Force. Guided by a commitment to individual worth and the belief that the solution to homelessness is a home, Rebecca is a persistent and passionate advocate for increased access to housing for extremely low-income and vulnerable populations.

# Unsung Heroes

**Bouakham Rosetti** is the Senior Project Manager with Care Compass Network (CCN) and the Program Director for the CCN Regional Trauma-Informed Care Network (RTIC). Bouakham has accumulated over 15 years of meaningful experiences in behavioral health and primary care integration, practice transformations, and project management. She is passionate about building and improving community health, resilience, wellness, and transforming workforce environments to advance and promote health equity, education, quality of life and health for all individuals. In her role, she has effectively worked to bring clinicians, educators, healthcare, and community professionals together to collaborate, implement, and expand behavioral health/primary care services, trauma-informed care practices, team-based care, evidence-based trainings, and community health programs.



**Susan Spink** throughout the pandemic and to this day Sue strives to assure access to vaccination and testing for our community. She developed Lourdes COVID vaccination and screening programs to assure they are staffed at times convenient to serve the needs of our community, and never hesitates to jump in to provide the service if there is a gap in coverage. She will go out to homes in the community to COVID test or vaccinate if that is what is needed to meet the needs of an individual. Sue is one of those people that works tirelessly behind the scenes with a true commitment to improving the health of our community. She is an advocate for the delivery of exceptional patient care in our physician practices through engagement with frontline associates and providers. She frequently participates in Lourdes community events to offer education to the community, fundraise for multiple causes and provide services at our medical missions where healthcare and social care services are made available to those most in need. She is a very special nurse, an overall awesome individual. Sue truly lives our mission every day both while she is at work and outside of work- serving all those who are most vulnerable with every chance she gets.

**Kelly Tobin** is the current Executive Director for the YWCA of Cortland. Under her leadership, key accomplishments of the YWCA include expanding opportunities for teenage girls to receive mentoring, implementing social justice programming for school-age children as well as the YWCA USA Stand Against Racism initiative in Cortland, making the organization's health and wellness options more affordable, developing programming to support young professional women, and partnering with Christopher Community to provide affordable, permanent housing for survivors of domestic violence and their families. Some of Kelly's most notable traits are her selflessness and commitment to leading by example. As just one illustration of this, several key frontline YWCA staff had to be laid off during the initial months of the pandemic. Until the organization's first Payroll Protection Program loan was secured, Kelly went without pay as a sign of her solidarity with these staff even though she was working 60+ hours each week. In addition to her work at the YWCA, Kelly is a leader in the Cortland community. She has been a leader in the local Relay for Life cancer fundraiser, an active volunteer for her church, a member of both the Cortland Downtown Partnership and Zonta Club of Cortland, past President and current member of the Cortland Rotary Club, and Chair of The Cortland Area Chamber of Commerce Diversity and Inclusion Action Team.



**Debra Welsh-Clarke, LMSW** is a Community Schools Coordinator at the Johnson City Central School District. Debra's journey at Johnson City started as a member of the School Board then as a building social worker. During her time, she has worked diligently as a team player in addition to being a strong advocate for students and their families. She works to provide support and guidance as families navigate various systems at school and in the community to meet their needs. Debra's vast experience in fields of mental health; youth and family services span over 25 years. Prior to working at Johnson City, she has worked at the Madison Square Boys & Girls Club, Binghamton University Counseling Center, Family and Children's Society and Broome County Gang Prevention. Debra strongly believes that in order to help students, we need to work with the family as a whole.



# A Special Thank You

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