

Cruising Thru a Sea of Support

Speaker Biographies

Alicia Grubel is the Director of Quality Assurance at Thrive Upstate. She began her career as a DSP om New York. In 2005, she joined the Thrive Upstate team as a QIDP. In her role as Director of Quality Assurance, she provides support to service recipients, staff and families.

Dr. Alonzo Kelly is a dynamic Executive Coach, Professor, 3x Best Selling Author, and Radio Host. Dr. Kelly has gained international and global attention as a premier consultant and strategist. Dr. Kelly is recognized as one the nation's leading experts on leadership development, strategic thinking, planning, and acting. He has appeared on *America's Premier Experts* which airs on major networks across the country including ABC, NBC, CBS, and FOX. Dr. Kelly has served over 1,000 individuals through personal and professional development, delivered training to a plethora of Fortune 500 Companies, College and Universities, Foreign Countries (Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Guam), nonprofit organizations, and is consistently retained to be the keynote speaker at large and small events across the country. Dr. Kelly holds a bachelor's in accounting, three master's degrees (Public Administration, Human Resource & Labor Relations, Business Administration), an Honorary Doctorate Degree in Business & Entrepreneurship. He currently serves as the National Board Representative for the Wisconsin State Board of Directors for the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union), the Fire and Police Commission for the City of Howard, and Board of Directors for Family Services of Brown County. Find more at www.alonzokelly.com

Amber Lydford is a Nationally Certified Community Work Incentive Coordinator (CWIC), otherwise known as a Benefits Specialist II for South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation. She was born and raised in the upstate area of NY however, relocated to South Carolina (Manning) in April 2014 after being offered her current position with the state. Amber has 2 Master's Degrees, one in Psychology and one in Mental Health. She is currently married with 3 children, all with disabilities and have worked in the field for over 18 years. With her current experience, she has assisted numerous individuals and families with understanding the benefits of working while receiving Social Security Benefits along with the Medicaid process including but not limited to applying for certain Medicaid categories. Further, she has a strong passion and belief that a piece of paper or medical diagnosis does not define an individual's characteristics or abilities rather, they are in control of defining themselves.

Ann Dalton has been working with the DDSN Network for over 30 years. She has worked in various roles for 3 different DSN Boards and has served in her current position at DDSN for the past 15 years.

Audrey M. Coogler is the Senior Director of Administration at the Babcock Center and has been there since April 2017. With a rich academic background, Audrey holds a Master of Business Administration and a Master of Human Resources, both earned from the University of South Carolina. In her current role Audrey supports the Human Resources, IT, and Marketing Teams. She has a rich background in Human Resources as well as Operational Leadership. Audrey has an extremely supportive husband, Kevin, two beautiful daughters, Haley and Katie, a dog, Maple, 10 chickens, 4 guineas, and a partridge in a pear tree (not really, but sometimes feels like it!).

Ben Whitaker is a Long-Term Care Ombudsman at the SC Appalachian Council of Governments in Greenville, SC. He has been a part of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program for the past two years, specializing in DDSN and DMH facilities. He has over 20 years of experience working with disabilities and special needs. In his role as a Long Term Care Ombudsman he promotes and protects quality of life for older adults and individuals with disabilities.

Brad Turner as commissioner and executive director, oversees nearly 2000 employees responsible for administration and oversight of services and supports for approximately 25,000 children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities through the home and community-based waiver programs, Tennessee Early Intervention System (TEIS), Katie Beckett Program, MAPs Program and Family Support Program. Under Turner's leadership, DIDD launched the Tennessee Believes program to expand inclusive higher education opportunities across the state and the TN START Assessment and Stabilization Teams to increase support to persons with disabilities who have a co-occurring mental health diagnosis. In addition, the department has been recognized nationally for its innovation in Employment First and Enabling Technology to promote full access, inclusion, and independence for people with disabilities. The department has also been recognized as the first state service delivery system to receive Person-Centered Excellence Accreditation from the Council on Quality and Leadership. As the father of a daughter with intellectual and developmental disabilities and parents who are aging, Commissioner Turner is passionate about advocating alongside people with disabilities, older Tennesseans, and their families for a brighter future in the Volunteer state.

Bonnie Shaw is the Regional Director of Case Management for the Midlands at Bright Start. Bonnie is an experienced educator with over 25 years of experience. She came to Bright Start in 2018. Prior to that she served as a school principal and a leader in the early childhood field. Bonnie has a passion for helping others grow and be their best selves. It continually fuels her passion to see other people achieve their goals and dreams. Bonnie has spoken throughout the country on what it takes to have successful relationships with the people that she serves. She is always excited to see people reach for the stars and keep going!

Brooke Schmidt is the Director of Family Programs with the Center for Developmental Services in Greenville, SC. She has more than 15 years of experience in the case management field. Brooke started her career at Thrive Upstate as a case manager in 2007, then helped transition the case management program over to the Center for Developmental Services in 2017 to comply with Conflict Free Case Management. Brooke graduated from the SC HSPA's Executive Leadership Academy in 2019 where she learned tools to effectively lead a team and advanced her career. Outside of work, Brooke continues her advocacy within the community as a board member for the Barbara Stone Foundation. By spreading awareness, Brooke hopes to bridge gaps and barriers for the disability community. Brooke and her husband, Stephen, have two young girls. Together, the family enjoys traveling and cheering on the Clemson Tigers!

Colin Stevens is a former Division 1 basketball player and senior year team captain at Coastal Carolina University. After spending years working in the banking industry, he left the 9-5 to embark on the entrepreneurial journey and start his own business. He has since created two brands in the basketball development industry that have thrived for over a decade. Over the past five years, Colin has worked as a life strategist and performance coach. He's been hired by professional athletes, business executives and entrepreneurs to help them maximize their potential. He uses a deeply engaging and unique approach to enhance decision making, personal growth, and emotional intelligence - leveraging his sports background and personal development expertise to guide individuals towards success. Colin is the published author of two books, *COACHABLE*, and his most recent book with raving reviews, *Make Your Mark*. He is a sought-after speaker and trainer for various companies, motivating and empowering others to reach their full potential.

Davan Brewton is one of the Director's for Supportive Living at The Charles Lea Center in Spartanburg, SC. She is a graduate of Limestone College with a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration. Davan started at the Charles Lea Center 17 years ago in residential where she has worked in roles as a DSP, Program Manager, Assistant Director and currently as Director where she learned to support people with disabilities and special needs. Davan enjoys being a part of the supports that helps the people we serve accomplish their dreams of living alone, working jobs, and traveling places independently; that they thought wasn't possible.

Dave Kammerer is the Director of Staff Development for the Babcock Center Inc. He has been an employee of the Babcock Center for 39 years. He is the HIPAA Privacy Officer and Motor Voter Coordinator for Babcock Center. He is a certified instructor for Therap, National Safety Council, Therapeutic Options and Associate Instructor for Dementia. Dave is the legal guardian and advocate for his younger sister who has a lifelong disability. She is currently supported at Babcock Center.

Dustin Beatty has worked at the Babcock Center for 27 years in many different roles, from a direct support professional to a Registered Behavior Technician. He is a trainer through MUSC and DDSN in Positive Behavior Supports by AAIDD. He completed his bachelors in Applied Behavior Analysis with Ball State University. He is first and foremost an advocate for people with disabilities.

Harold Sloves is an Innovation Consultant for Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities Systems & Networks entailing consultation and speaking engagements in multiple states. Prior to this, he led Tennessee's efforts to become a leading Technology First State. His current focus is supporting the shift toward enabling technology as a primary option for people with intellectual disabilities. Harold is also a principal collaborator in the launch of the Technology First Alliance (TFA), a nonprofit innovation catalyst, think tank, and consulting group.

Isaac Bishop is the Assistant Director of Information Technology with The Charles Lea Center and has an Associate in Computer Technology with Networking. For the past ten years, Isaac has utilized his computer and networking skills to find efficient and reliable technological solutions to support employees and people supported by The Charles Lea Center. He is always striving to find new ways to help simplify processes and empower employees to give them a greater ability to succeed in their tasks.

Dr. Ishya “Shae” Dotson is a resident of GA with over twenty years of experience in the human services field. She joined Therap in 2014 and has a wealth of knowledge and experience on best practices in person-centered practices, agency documentation, and quality assurance. Prior to working for Therap, Shae was employed as an agency administrator.

Jason Ray is the CEO at SimplyHome and a Certified Aging in Place Specialist. Since beginning with SimplyHome in 2008, Jason has been a national speaker on enabling technology and technology first transformation to associations, state and national agencies, and provider organizations. Jason was named in 2012 as a recipient of the Stephen E Sallee Excellence in Technology Award and accepted the 2012 Edison Award for Best New Product for SimplyHome. Jason’s work with SimplyHome has been featured on multiple episodes of ABC’s Extreme Makeover Home Edition along with many other national publications. From 2017-2019 Jason served as the Subject Matter Expert on Enabling Technology and Remote Support for Tennessee Department on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (TN DIDD) Technology First Initiative. Since July 2021 Jason has served in the same capacity for New Mexico’s Developmental Disability Supports Division’s Technology First Initiative. In 2022, Jason helped to launch the Technology First Alliance, a non-profit organization focused on advancing technology first principles in long-term care.

Jason Tavenner graduated from Presbyterian College in 1999 with a major in business administration and an emphasis in accounting. While at PC, Jason participated in an internship with the Lawrence County DSN Board. The internship generated an employment opportunity in the finance department. Since that time, Jason has been employed by the Laurens County Disability and Special Needs Board in various administrative roles including Finance Director, Human Resources Director and currently Executive Director since July 2007. Jason has served the South Carolina Human Services Providers Association as treasurer for several years, vice chair for two years (2018 and 2019) and chair (2020 and 2021). In 2022 he was honored to receive the Debbie Burton “Making a Difference” award.

Jessica Winters is the Regional Long Term Care Ombudsman at the SC Appalachian Council of Governments in Greenville, SC. Jessica has been a part of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program for 18 years, serving in several roles and becoming the supervisor of the program in 2013. She is a strong resident advocate and is committed to ensuring residents of long-term care facilities are aware of their rights and are treated with dignity and respect. She is trained as a Certified Dementia Practitioner and has a passion for educating caregivers and the community about how to better serve and care for persons living with dementia.

Josh Bolt is the Director of Technical Support and Training for Nucleus. Originally from a small town in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, now living in Charlotte North Carolina, Josh helps provide solutions to customers every day. Josh has always had a desire to help and has spent time not only in the States, but abroad providing medical assistance, education and basic needs to those around him. Josh is a charismatic person who hopes to continue helping others and provide the best solutions possible for those in need.

Justin Amoyal is an engineer by trade and an entrepreneur at heart. He is the Founder and currently serves as CEO of Impruvon Health, a medication workflow automation platform designed to streamline tasks and minimize error in enterprise care settings such as Group Homes and Assisted Living Facilities. Justin studied systems engineering and operations research at George Mason University. This is where he discovered his love for innovation and process optimization. During his junior year internship at Lockheed Martin, he invented a system to detect errors in the F35 Fighter Jet production process and streamline the inspection process. Following his time at Lockheed Martin Justin led process optimization and error reduction programs for a multitude of organizations including the US Navy, Department of Homeland Security, and US Marine Corps. In 2019, Justin's life took a tragic turn when he lost his brother to an overdose. In the wake of this tragedy, Justin started Impruvon Health, driven by a deep desire to help others avoid similar experiences. He continues to lead the Impruvon team with passion and professionalism, continuing to develop and deploy cutting edge technology for those who need it most.

Keela C. Ardis is the Director of Human Resources at Babcock Center. Keela is a Ph.D. Candidate and a native of South Carolina with sixteen years of experience in both Human Resources and the corresponding field of Industrial and Organizational Psychology. She joined Babcock Center in late 2023 and specializes in organizational leadership development, process improvement optimization, and employee health and wellness. Prior to joining Babcock Center, Keela worked as an HR Professional for several corporate conglomerates and institutions such as PepsiCo, Amazon, and Wells Fargo.

Kimberly Tissot proudly serves as the President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Able SC, where she guides the staff in applying the philosophy of independent living to real situations. Kimberly believes in the value of individualized and community-based empowerment, as she wants people to recognize their full potential and has over 20 years of experience advocating for disability inclusion on a local, state, federal, and international level. Under Kimberly's leadership, Able SC has experienced years of growth success and has become a nationally recognized Center for Independent Living. Kimberly led the efforts in passing progressive legislation in South Carolina, such as the "Persons with Disabilities Right to Parent Act" in 2018 and ending subminimum wage in South Carolina in 2022. Kimberly's road to disability rights began at an early age, after having her leg amputated from a rare childhood cancer, Alveolar rhabdomyosarcoma.

Lakeila Young is one of the Director's for Supportive Living and Liaison to the Innovative Services department at the Charles Lea Center in Spartanburg, SC. She is a graduate of USC Upstate with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and a Master of Arts in Human Services, MFT from Liberty University. Lakeila is a certified Enabling Technology Integration Specialist with SHIFT. Lakeila enjoys working in Human Services and supporting people with disabilities and special needs; with 18 years in residential services and Awareness, Prevention and Reporting. She has embraced technology as a tool in ensuring people are supported in the way that they desire to and according to their goals; where they work, live and play.

Linda “Joyce” Walker is a resident of The Charles Lea Center in Spartanburg, S.C. She prefers to be called by Joyce and is originally from Shelby, NC. Joyce is currently employed by Charles Lea Industries. Joyce is very family oriented and loves to stay on the go, whether shopping, traveling, or being out anywhere in the community. Joyce has goals that she's working toward to live her life as independent as possible.

Linda Kunz is an experienced Case Manager, Case Manager Supervisor and Regional Director. Prior to the world of Case Management, Linda was an Early Interventionist. Through her time as an EI, she learned to develop her connection and collaboration skills that was more in tune to what people needed. Driven by her passion for connection, Linda developed skills in leadership. A part of her growth is from her personal experiences with having a sibling with Down Syndrome and a child with the same diagnosis. Her journey has taken her through what it means to have a connection with people. She brings this same dedication and determination to her work to empower people so they can achieve greater success.

Marly Saade is the director of Employment Programs for Able SC. Marly leads agency initiatives such as the Hire Me SC Campaign and the South Carolina Disability Employment Coalition, advocating for increased employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Marly also manages the AgAgrability Project with Clemson University, which provides support and resources to farmers with disabilities to maintain their farming businesses, as well as the Promoting Avenues for Community Employment (PACE) grant as South Carolina works to 14 c phase out and support transitioning individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities from sheltered workshops into competitive integrated employment. Marly is a Lebanese woman with a spinal cord injury and has been a manual wheelchair user since 2007

Melody Dodgen is an Eligibility Division Program Manager for the South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs. She is tasked with oversight for both Initial and Annual Level of Care approvals for ICF/IID determinations. She has over 20 years’ experience in this state level position.

Melissa Ritter is the Director of the Head and Spinal Cord Injury Division for the South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs. She has worked providing oversight of the Head and Spinal Cord Injury Waiver at the state level for 10 years, and previously served as a case manager and case management supervisor at the provider level.

Michael Thames is a graduate of The University of South Carolina with a Master of Art and is a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst. His passion for education and behavior analysis has led him to work in the career field of behavior analysis with children, adolescents, and adults with a variety of disabilities. Michael has performed multiple roles in the field of behavior analysis working in the home setting, clinical setting, and also residential habilitation. He has been training the Positive Behavior Supports by AAIDD curriculum for over five years helping residential staff carry out person centered planning and honoring human rights. Michael has been afforded multiple opportunities to manage people including managing fellow mechanics while serving in the United States Air Force, managing a team of Registered Behavior Technicians in the home setting, and managing a team of Registered Behavior Technicians in a clinic setting.

Rich Frettoloso is a resident of SC with over thirty years of experience in the human services field. He joined Therap in 2018 and has a wealth of knowledge and experience on best practices in person-centered supports, agency documentation, case management, and quality assurance. Prior to working for Therap, Rich was employed as a program manager and Therap administrator.

Shannon Childress has worked in the human services and disabilities field for 27 years. As the Sr. Vice President of North Carolina and Ancillary Services at the Charles Lea Center her role is to support the medical and clinical services offered to individuals with disabilities. She has served on various healthcare boards in North Carolina and has participated in various committees across the nation to improve healthcare outcomes for persons with disabilities. Shannon has a Bachelors in Science from Western Carolina University majoring in Child Development and Family Relations and a Master's in Business Administration from Gardner Webb University with an emphasis in Health Care Management. She has also holds a certification as a trainer of Person-Centered Planning in North Carolina.

Shekeeta Davis is a native of SC with over thirteen years of experience in the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities field. She joined Therap in 2020 and has a wealth of knowledge and experience on best practices in managing agency funding and billing. Prior to working for Therap, Sheketta was employed as an agency director and billing coordinator.

Sophia Richardson began her career as a direct support professional working with people with disabilities in July 1989. Sophia presently works for Babcock Center as a Senior Director of Compliance and Quality Management; before, she had jobs as a QMRP, Residential Coordinator, Behavioral Supervisor and Residential Administrator for numerous providers, including Charles Lea Center and SC Mentor. She is a graduate of Newberry College. Sophia is a certified Therap instructor. She enjoys shopping and spending time a the shooting range.

Stephen Sutter is the Founder and President of CreateAbility Concepts, Inc. Sutter directs all research and development at CreateAbility, and has been the principal investigator for 37 Federal grant projects from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and a special section of the USDA that is focused on improving life for people with disabilities in rural America. Sutter's research aims to improve the independence and capability of people with cognitive deficits. He serves as chair of the Cognitive and Sensory Special Interest Group for the Rehabilitation Engineering Society of North America (RESNA). He has received several recognitions for his work in helping people with cognitive impairments, including the Mayors Award from Fort Collins, Colorado: the DASH award from the University of Buffalo, and the Technology Developers Award for Excellence from Easter Seals. Stephen is married to his best friend, Katy, and they enjoy spoiling their 9 grandkids rotten.

Thomas Mayne, CWIC is a Nationally Certified Community Work Incentive Coordinator for the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department. He has been working with beneficiaries for the last 33 years helping them manage their SSA and Medicaid benefits, educating them on the different work incentives these programs have for them and providing long term case management/advocacy support when they to work. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from SUNY Empire State in Human Service Management.

Vanessa Pressley is the Sr. Director Community Supports-Day and Employment Services with the Charles Lea Center in Spartanburg. During her tenure Vanessa has worked in various capacities within the organization, including Area Manager, Inside Sales Coordinator and Plant Manager. In each role, Vanessa has capitalized on opportunities to build relationships with Persons Supported to assist with identifying goals and gain the skills to realize successful outcomes. Vanessa holds a Bachelors in Business Administration and a Master's in Human Service Counseling by way of Liberty University. Vanessa's passion is helping people find ways to achieve their dreams despite perceived obstacles.

Wynn Godbold is an author, coach, and certified John Maxwell Leadership trainer. Her specialty is helping clients transform their impossible dreams into their I'm Possible lives. Wynn works extensively with disability and special needs boards in South Carolina and is on a mission to expand her uplifting message of possibility to organizations across America.