

# 2021 CAFFA Parenting through Adoption Conference Session Descriptions

**\*\* Please note that all sessions take place during Central Time \*\***

**Saturday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

**Keynote Address 9– 10 am**

We will kick off our conference with our keynote speakers, Cheryl and Jason Bentsen.

Jason & Cheryl Bentsen are adoptive parents, foster parents and the founders of Love Moves Us, a Chicago based organization serving and supporting families who foster or adopt. Jason holds a Bachelor's Degree from Judson University in Youth Ministry and Adolescent Studies and has since spent time working in mental health, youth ministry and church planting. Cheryl also studied at Judson & holds a degree in Elementary Education. She has taught at the elementary level & served in children's ministry for over a decade.

After connecting with other families who adopt and foster, they recognized the need to support families going through similar experiences. Jason and Cheryl currently live in Joliet, IL with their 3 children, two adopted and one who is currently in foster care. Jason is a T.B.R.I.® practitioner and teaches parents this evidence-based model of caring for children to build trust and connection. Jason and Cheryl are both Empowered to Connect Parent Trainers and share a passion for helping families navigate the unique challenges that come with parenting through adoption and foster care.

**Saturday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

**Session 1: 10:15 - 11:15 am**

**Session 1A: Becoming a Parent Through Domestic Adoption: Agency, Private & Foster Care**

*Shelley Ballard Attorney—Shelley B. Ballard P.C.*

This workshop will present an overview of the domestic adoption process, including agency, private and foster care. It will address first steps, locating a child, costs, adoption tax credits, adoption subsidies, avoiding scams, openness, the interstate process, the Indian Child Welfare Act, birth father rights, the Putative Father Registry and insurance coverage.

*Shelley Ballard has devoted her law practice to adoption after adopting her oldest child over 30 years ago, handing thousands of adoptions of every type (domestic, international, foster care, related, adult, surrogacy/gamete donation and contested cases). She is active in legislative efforts to improve adoption in Illinois and was recognized by the Illinois House of Representatives in a formal House resolution for her efforts in passing the "Baby Richard Law", which created the Putative Father Registry and added several safeguards to reduce contested adoptions. Ms. Ballard contributed the chapter on adoption for the Illinois State Bar Association Family Law Handbook and is the author of the chapters on Interstate and Adult Adoption for the Illinois Adoption Law Practice Handbook, published by the Illinois Institute for Continuing Legal Education. She is a member and Secretary/Treasurer of the Board of Directors of Midwest Adoption Center, a nonprofit organization that provides services to persons touched by foster care and adoption, including search and confidential intermediary services. Ms. Ballard is an Honorary Board Member and past President of the Board of Directors of the On Your Feet Foundation, a nonprofit organization that provides assistance to birthparents who have placed children for adoption. She has twice chaired the Chicago Bar Association Adoption Law Committee, has been a Fellow of the Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys since 1990 and has been recognized as a top lawyer in adoption by the Leading Lawyers Network and SuperLawyers. Ms. Ballard is also an Adjunct Professor at the Loyola University School of Law, where she teaches a seminar on Adoption Law.*

*Ms. Ballard graduated magna cum laude from Vanderbilt University School of Engineering and cum laude from Northwestern University School of Law.*

### **Session 1B: Plastic Parenting: Tap Into Your Flexibility!**

*Pam Shepard, Supervisor of Clinical Services, Holt International, Illinois and Wisconsin Branch*

You may or may not have heard the term neuroplasticity. In a nutshell, our brains can change and adapt because they have plasticity. Kids' brains are still physically growing so they adapt at a much quicker pace than adults. But as adults and more specifically as parents, we CAN still change. It's not too late! It might take us longer to change our deeply rooted responses, but it is possible. Come be part of this interactive workshop where you will learn specific responses, phrases and tools you can use for your children (of all ages) as well as strategies for a stronger connection!

*Pam Shepard (MSW, LCSW) is a licensed clinical social worker and therapist. She has worked as the Supervisor of Clinical Services for Holt International, Illinois and Wisconsin Branch for the past 10 years. She has worked in the field of child welfare and adoption for 25 years in various roles. Pam is trained in Theraplay, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy and EMDR. She is also a TBRI Practitioner. Pam is passionate about working with families and individuals connected to adoption.*

### **Session 1C: Raising Kaylee Together**

*Denise Beyerle, Adoptive Mom and Patty Jonland, Birth Grandmother*

Learn how Denise and her husband, Shawn, navigated through the adoption process, met their daughter's birth mother and built a healthy relationship with their daughter, Kaylee's, birth family over the past eight years. Hear about the amazing advice they received from their Adoption Social Worker that truly set up the adoptive and birth family for a successful relationship with one another. Also, you will hear about the adoption process from the Birth Grandma's perspective, as well as, her perspective on having a relationship with her granddaughter and Kaylee's adoptive parents. Come hear about a unique and wonderful relationship of one adoptive and birth family and be encouraged.

*Denise Beyerle is an adoptive mom to a beautiful eight year old girl, Kaylee. Denise and her husband, Shawn have been married for 13 years. They were married five years when Kaylee arrived and became part of their Forever Family. Denise and Shawn chose Domestic Adoption and were blessed to take Kaylee home when she was only two days old. Denise was a medical social worker for 20 years prior to staying home full time when Kaylee was two years old. Denise has returned to work and is a Transferceutical Representative for 4Life. Denise also spends her time volunteering at Kaylee's school raising money for the Theater Department.*

*Patty Jonland, Kaylee's Birth Grandma, is former real estate broker and is now enjoying her semi-retirement as owner of an estate sale company which she runs with her husband, Ron. Patty and Ron are proud grandparents of Kaylee, who is the joy of their lives. With the gentle guidance of the adoption social worker, God's grace, and a mutual respect between the birth and adoptive family, they were able to forge a lasting and close relationship – becoming a true family in every sense of the word. Hear Patty's emotional story of how she came to trust in the open adoption process and realize her dream of being a loving grandmother to Kaylee.*

### **Session 1D: An Integrated Approach in Treating ADHD, Autism, FASD, Learning Disorders and Sensory Processing Disorders**

*Ajeet Charate, Psychotherapist & Neurofeedback Specialist, Neurofeedback & Integrated Therapy Institute*

*Smita Charate, Physical Therapist, Neurofeedback & Integrated Therapy Institute*

The presentation will include an overview of the brain based assessments and various interventions that are unique to this practice. Presenters will include some case examples to demonstrate the effectiveness of the interventions.

*Ajeet Charate graduated from the Illinois School of Professional Psychology (Argosy University) in 2001 with a Master's in Clinical Psychology. He is a licensed Clinical & Professional counselor and Board Certified in Neurofeedback therapy*

*(BCN). He is also trained as a physician in India and can integrate his medical knowledge with clients presenting problems and have a better understanding of their psychological, behavioral and physical concerns. Mr. Charate has been trained in the new wave contextual therapy techniques such as Motivational Interviewing (MI) techniques, Dialectical Behavioral therapy (DBT) and Acceptance & Commitment therapy (ACT). Additionally, he is a certified Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselor. Mr. Charate has been using biofeedback training which includes mindfulness and relaxation strategies as well as neurofeedback training to treat a variety of conditions that include chronic pain, headaches, migraine, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, anxiety, PTSD, addictions, ADHD and stress and sleep conditions. Mr. Charate integrates his previous knowledge of medicine and orthopedics to develop a thorough understanding of his client's complaints and develops an individualized comprehensive treatment plan.*

*Smita Charate has over 30 years of combined clinical experience in outpatient orthopedics and pediatric rehabilitation treating a wide variety of neuro musculoskeletal and orthopedic conditions. She has pursued extensive continuing education in a variety of manual therapy skills and techniques such as myofascial release techniques, Graston technique and Muscle energy techniques. She takes great pride in providing her patients with the highest quality of care utilizing manual therapy techniques for the treatment of spinal and extremity dysfunctions. Her eclectic approach to treatment includes joint mobilization, soft tissue mobilization, functional training exercises, taping and patient education. Her pediatric outpatient experience includes treatment of many conditions such as autism spectrum disorders, cerebral palsy, idiopathic toe walking, orthopedic conditions, torticollis, motor delay, hypotonia and various genetic disorders. Through her clinical experience Smita has developed a high interest in neurological-based and orthopedic conditions. As the owner of NITI Smita is committed to providing her patients with the care they need for effective recovery and provides truly customized therapy based on each patient's unique health and medical profiles as well as their individual goals, expectations, and lifestyles. In addition, Smita offers personalized guidance and professional advice to help patients perform home exercises and strategies at home and to incorporate them into their everyday activities so healing occurs more rapidly and more completely. Smita has authored a children's story book, "Benji Bounces Back" and donated the proceeds from the sale of this book to Trinity Services, Inc., since it is the Illinois affiliate of the National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. This book has been featured in Parent magazine as well as the Pediatric LER. In her free time Smita likes to read, cook and enjoy nature*

**Saturday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

**Session 2: 11:30 am - 12:30 pm**

**Session 2A: Gift of Adoption - Adoption Assistance Grants**

*Brian Murphy, CFO of Gift of Adoption*

Are you pursuing an adoption and facing a financial hurdle that could delay or derail your journey? Gift of Adoption may be able to help. Gift of Adoption is the oldest and largest provider of adoption assistance grants on a non-discriminatory basis. Grants are awarded without regard to an applicant's religion, marital status, race, sexual orientation, age, or number of children. Join this presentation to learn about the application process and Gift of Adoption's funding priorities.

*Brian joined the GOA staff as the Director of Programs and Marketing in 2007. Prior to joining the GOA staff, Brian served in a variety of positions at the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Illinois, most recently as the Director of Program Services for five years. Brian also served as Treasurer on the Gift of Adoption of Illinois Board of Directors for two years prior to joining the staff team.*

**Session 2B: Even When We Think We're Not Anxious, We Are: Managing Pandemic Stress in Ourselves and our Children**

*William (Billy) Kaplan, President & Clinical Director, House Calls Counseling*

The presentation helps participants understand the underlying causes of anxiety many of us have in response to the Pandemic and current events, provides participants with methods for managing it within themselves, and guidance for helping our children through their own struggles.

*Billy Kaplan is the President and Clinical Director at House Calls Counseling in the Chicago-land area. He specializes in working with adolescents and families, especially those that formed through adoption. He has advanced training in Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy and Brainspotting. With over thirty years of experience, Billy is a seasoned trainer who has presented extensively locally, nationally, and internationally on attachment disorders, therapeutic parenting, adolescent development, child welfare and a host of other topics.*

## **Session 2C: Fundamentals of Therapeutic Parenting**

*Elba Karim, Founder and Executive and Clinical Director, Roots and Wings Counseling Consultants, LLC*

Many foster and adoptive parents find themselves parenting children with much greater need than anticipated. The level of burnout and ongoing frustration and fatigue, coupled with a general lack of resources often leads to the parents being overwhelmed and feeling unheard. Traditional parenting often does not address the trauma these children live with, and at times can heighten negative behaviors and result in less connected familial relationships. Therapeutic parenting can help parents escape from their feelings of helplessness and hopelessness in parenting children with trauma. Pulling from a number of established parenting protocols, over 30 years of working with foster and adopted children, and being an adoptive parent, has led to a functional understanding of the obstacles to parenting many face when dealing with these challenges. Parenting interventions as well as resources will be offered and discussed. Come share the unsharable thoughts and feelings many foster and adoptive parents face when dealing with these parenting challenges. Leave with concrete interventions to apply immediately towards more successful parenting and a greater sense of understanding and competency, which results in a more harmonious family system.

*Elba J. Karim is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and a Certified Clinical Trauma Professional with nearly 30 years of clinical experience serving children, individuals, families, and organizations. Elba is a member of the Illinois Children's Justice Task Force and numerous professional organizations. She is a published author and on the 2019 First Place Award Writing Team for the National Foundation to End Child Abuse and Neglect in the area of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention. She is trained in the principles of Theraplay and Trust Based Relationship Intervention, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy, Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, BrainSpotting, Attachment Focused Family Therapy, and Attachment Focused Parenting. She is certified as an Extended Forensic Interviewer by the National Children's Advocacy Center, a Certified Clinical Trauma Professional through the International Association of Trauma Professionals, a TF-CBT Certified Therapist, and a Trauma Informed Specialist by the National Center for Treating Trauma. She believes in providing services that are evidence-based and trauma-informed. She uses a collaborative approach that attends to the family and systems of which her clients are a part. She provides consultation and training to educational systems, the judicial system, faith-based organizations, CASA, adoption networks, Children's Advocacy Centers, and other community partners. She is a member of the Illinois Children's Justice Task Force and is currently the Chair of the Needs Assessment Committee. She has a special interest in supporting children with Reactive Attachment Disorder, attachment insecurity, complex developmental trauma, posttraumatic stress disorder, child abuse (including childhood sexual abuse and neglect), therapeutic parenting, foster and adoptive parents, LGBTQ individuals and families and other marginalized populations, as well as children and youth who are exploring sexual orientation and/or identity. Elba also provides trauma response services to the community and child welfare, including school shootings, witnesses to and intended victims of murder, and other high profile highly complex trauma cases. She is a previous presenter to the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, Champions of Children's Conference, Changing Children's World Best Start for Family Symposium, CASA, Chicago Area Families for Adoption, the Kane County Child Advocacy Center, numerous school districts, faith based organizations, and others. She was also one of the therapists who provided crisis intervention at Northern Illinois University following the mass shooting there in 2008. She teaches sexuality and relationship curricula to middle and high school youth. She is the mother of four children (including one who joined the family through adoption) in a multiracial family. She is the founder of Roots and Wings Counseling Consultants, LLC in St. Charles, Illinois.*

## **Session 2D: Remember Who I Was**

*Dr. Todd Ochs, MD, Adoption Pediatrics*

Our adopted and foster children have lives before we met them: prenatal and post-natal; parental physical and psychological histories; and possible abuse, neglect, and malnutrition. We need to be aware of what problems we can manage, as parents, what resources we have or can identify and utilize, and how we try to predict the future.

*Dr. Ochs has been an adoption/foster care pediatrician for almost 25 years, has seen thousands of adoptees and foster children, and continues to review adoption referrals and follow many of these children as their pediatrician. He is the adoptive father of four special needs Chinese daughters.*

**Saturday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

**Session 3: 1:00 pm - 2:00 pm**

## **Session 3A: Adoption Options: Agency Adoption Vs. Private Adoption (And What Is An Identified Adoption?)**

*Denise J. Patton, Adoption Attorney, Law Office of Denise J. Patton*

There are many different types of adoptions but Illinois residents consider domestic adoptions they fall into one of three different categories: 1. Agency Adoption; 2. Private Adoption (a.k.a. Independent Adoption); 3. Agency Assisted (a.k.a. Identified Adoption). To understand how these three options differ from each other it is usually easier to examine the differences between the first two options with a side by side comparison and then explain the third option afterwards. Note: another type of domestic adoption is adopting through foster care but, due to limited space, that option will not be addressed in this session.

*Denise J. Patton is an adoptive parent and adoption attorney who, for over 21 years, has devoted her law practice to adoption and infertility law issues. Denise is a member and past Chair of the Chicago Bar Association's Adoption Law Committee and she is also a fellow of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys and American Academy of Assisted Reproductive Technology Attorneys.*

*As an adoption attorney, Denise has successfully completed approximately two thousand adoptions. She has presented at numerous adoption conferences over the years and conducted seminars educating prospective adoptive parents on the different types of adoptions, the adoption process, how to get started and the financial benefits available to adoptive parents to help make adoption more affordable.*

*Prior to receiving her law degree from DePaul University, Denise was employed as an Adoption Specialist for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. In this capacity she monitored, assisted, trained and educated private agencies on the adoption process.*

## **Session 3B: Developing a Positive Self Concept: How to Guide your Child**

*Kel Gott*

Self concept is the gift all parents give their kids. How to give it? Kel Gott, a multiple year CAFFA presenter, will explain how to guide kids to solve their own problems and how you, as parent, can use chores and problem solving to bolster your child's Self Concept. With tips on how to raise the chances you will raise responsible child.

*For 35 years, Kel taught high school English and coached football, baseball and basketball. He is the father of four daughters and six grandchildren. For the last 20 years of his teaching career, Kel was also a presenter and Consultant to schools and parents groups across the midwest in the application of Love & Logic parenting and teaching. Retired, for eight years, Kel and his wife Lisa lived in Las Vegas and traveled a great deal. Recently with grand children in*

*Edwardsville, IL and Manhattan KS, they have returned to Illinois and now reside in Bethalto, IL where they spend time practicing Love & Logic as grandparents.*

### **Session 3C: Will You Help Me Regulate?**

*Pam Shepard, Supervisor of Clinical Services, Holt International, Illinois and Wisconsin Branch*

Regulation has become a hot topic lately! But if you don't have a clear understanding of what it means how can you help someone do it? More specifically how can you help your child regulate if you don't know what it means, what it looks like or how to do it yourself? In this workshop we'll define it, practice it and then discuss some concrete tools and strategies you can use with your kids, your significant other, your co-workers, friends and neighbors! Learning about regulation is an everyday coping skill that everyone can benefit from!

*Pam Shepard (MSW, LCSW) is a licensed clinical social worker and therapist. She has worked as the Supervisor of Clinical Services for Holt International, Illinois and Wisconsin Branch for the past 10 years. She has worked in the field of child welfare and adoption for 25 years in various roles. Pam is trained in Theraplay, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy and EMDR. She is also a TBRI Practitioner. Pam is passionate about working with families and individuals connected to adoption.*

### **Session 3D: Transracial Adoption in the Renewed a Age of Racism**

*Michelle Hughes, Co-Founder, Bridge Communications, Inc.*

*Camilla Hudson, Bridge Communications, Inc.*

A few short years ago transracial adoption was perceived easier than it is now and in fact over 40% of adoptions are transracial. In the last several years, the renewed awakening of racism and white supremacist groups has shocked and scared some Americans. Whether the killing of George Floyd and BLM marches to advocate against centuries of police brutality of Black people or the racial slurs and punches thrown at Asians over Covid -19, it has become clear BIPOC children will need to navigate racism. Now some families who were excited to become a multiracial family are now anxious for their children and their family. How do I discuss race, racism, and racialization with my child? What is anti-racism, microaggressions, white fragility, the race card, victim mentality, white privilege, white saviorism, emotional labor, code-switching, and other terms? How do I discuss police brutality with my child? Do I ever let my kid out of the house? How do I keep my child safe? What are the schools teaching my child? How do I build their healthy racial and self identity? How do I learn to talk across racial lines without being condescending? This seminar will address those issues and give resources on how to assist.

*Ms. Hughes established her own law firm, the Law Office of Michelle M. Hughes in 1993 and her legal practice focuses primarily on family building both in adoption, (working with private agency, DCFS, independent adoption, co-parent adoption and related adoption) and assisted reproductive technology. She also does real estate and corporate contractual work. She has conducted seminars on general adoption education, as well as transracial, domestic and international adoptions. Ms. Hughes has testified in Springfield regarding several bills for the State of Illinois. She has discussed multiracial issues, including transracial adoption, in many forums, including appearing on several TV broadcasts and on radio. In 1994, she co-founded Bridge Communications, Inc. specializing in diversity training, with an emphasis on transracial, international and general adoption education.*

*Ms. Camilla Hudson is a multiracial, domestic adoptee who was adopted at birth via private, semi-open adoption. She has one adult son and her lived experiences of the intersectionalities between race, adoption and parenting guide her work as a facilitator for Bridge Communications, Inc. In addition, Camilla helps administer "Transracial Adoption Perspectives" Facebook Group, as well as its predecessor group. Camilla's background includes over 15 years' experience in working closely with children and mentoring young adoptees. She is pursuing a degree in psychology with a focus on behavioral health and wellness. Ms. Hudson had first hand experience with racism that made national news after an unpleasant experience at a national drugstore.*

**Saturday, April 10th, 2021**

**Session 4: 2:15 pm - 3:15 pm**

**Session 4A: Adopting Through Foster Care**

*Genie Miller Gillespie, Attorney, Gillespie Law Group, LLC*

*Christina Schneider, Special Assistant General Counsel, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services*

This will be an in-depth discussion of how to adopt through foster care from beginning to end, including the adoption assistance (subsidy) review process, the court process, and how to ensure the child receives the services they need.

*Genie Miller Gillespie, partner at Gillespie Law Group, LLC, has had her own practice in Chicago since 2001, concentrating exclusively in adoption, guardianship, assisted reproductive technology and other issues relating to children and families. She is the current President of the Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys; an Illinois Leading Lawyer and Super Lawyer in the area of adoption and assisted reproductive technology; and a member of the Chicago Bar Association and American Bar Association. In 2016, she was recognized as an Angel in Adoption by the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute in Washington, DC. She was one of a limited number of attorneys appointed as guardian ad litem in adoption cases in Cook County for fourteen years. She was one of the co-founders and prior Legal Services Director for the Center for Law and Social Work, where she also worked part-time until 2011. From 2006 through 2008, she was the Director of the ABA Child Custody and Adoption Pro Bono Project. She is the General Editor and chapter author for the IICLE Adoption Law Manual and has written numerous training materials regarding adoption law. She has spoken at numerous seminars and meetings related to adoption for attorneys, agencies, foster parents and prospective adoptive parents and has been the chair of the Chicago Bar Association Adoption Law Committee twice. She has appeared in two episodes of Illinois Law, the Illinois State Bar Association cable television show, regarding domestic and international adoptions. Prior to starting her own practice, she served as the Pro Bono Director at the Chicago Bar Foundation; was in private practice with a small firm handling domestic relations and mental health matters; and spent her first year after law school clerking for the Honorable Wendell P. Gardner, Jr., at the Superior Court for the District of Columbia. She received her B.A. from Washington University in St. Louis, and her law degree from the Columbus School of Law at the Catholic University of America.*

*Christina M. Schneider is the Special Assistant General Counsel for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services' Office of Legal Services.*

**Session 4B: Cracking the Code on Misbehavior: Tools, Techniques and Activities to Curb Negative Behaviors**

*Zara Gillogly, Clinical Therapist, The Theraplay Institute*

*Kirsten Rieck, Clinical Therapist, The Theraplay Institute*

Prior to adoption, children's histories and experiences have already impacted their behaviors. When misbehaviors occur, those providing childcare can struggle as they search for ways to help the child. Join this discussion of tools, techniques, and the use of parental skills training to provide treatment towards behavioral challenges. The presentation will also incorporate information regarding the role of misbehavior, use of attunement, differences between shame and guilt, and use of discipline versus punishment. The use of Theraplay as a play therapy model is highly emphasized within this presentation.

*Zaya Gillogly (she/her/hers) is a Licensed Social Worker, Intermediate Theraplay Practitioner, Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) Practitioner, and a Certified Clinical Trauma Professional. She works with youth of all ages, and their families, who have experienced abuse, trauma, neglect, domestic violence, separation and/or loss. Zaya has experience working with youth who are adopted and their families on grief, loss, identity, and other adoption-related topics. She aims to build a working alliance with families to identify the specific needs of their child. Zaya aims to create space for parent and child to experience connection, attunement, and mutual enjoyment as a tool to build their relationship.*

*Kirsten Rieck earned her Master of Social Work with a mental health concentration from the University of Illinois at Chicago. There, she also earned a certificate in Integrated Behavioral Health with children and adolescents. Kirsten has received additional training in Attachment, Regulation, and Competency (ARC), Trust Based Relational Interventions (TBRI), the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI), and adoption related mental health.*

*Kirsten uses a strengths based approach to promote secure attachments, foster healthy relationships between family members, and promote mutual enjoyment of each other. She has worked with youth in care, the refugee community, and youth and families who have adopted or have guardianship through DCFs. She has experience working with these communities on issues of trauma, grief, loss, displacement, identity, and other related issues.*

#### **Session 4C: Meet the Birthparents: A Panel**

*On Your Feet Foundation - Alexis Eycler , Moderator*

This panel will consist of multiple birthparents sharing their experiences and answering questions. The goal of this panel is to share the whole story of what being a birthparent means—the good and the bad, the happy and the sad. Adoption is not a point in time – it continues into the future and changes as we all grow together. We look forward to your questions and hope to learn as a team!

*Founded in 2001 by adoption professionals, adoptive parents and a birthparent, On Your Feet Foundation was the first organization dedicated to providing post-placement services to birthparents who have placed their child for adoption. Recognizing the lack of available support, On Your Feet's founders focused on helping clients build a better life by giving them the tools they need through case management and coaching, monetary grants and through the creation of a community of birthparents. Nearly 20 years later, On Your Feet Foundation continues to be one of the only organizations dedicated to providing comprehensive case management services, grants for adoption-competent counseling, tuition, emergency rent assistance, as well as running birthmom-facilitated retreats for birthmoms residing in the US and beyond. On Your Feet Foundation's board of directors, staff, advisory and auxiliary boards include birthparents, adoptive parents (both domestic and international), adoptees and adoption professionals. Our clients have placed in open adoptions, closed adoptions, transracial adoptions, and with same-sex couples. They are parenting other children, are survivors of domestic violence, have had their parental rights terminated, have placed with family members, and are adoptees themselves.*

#### **Session 4D: Understanding Adult Guardianship**

*Valerie Darby, Program Director, Greenlight Family Services*

*Maria Nanos, Executive Director, Greenlight Family Services.*

Awareness and discussion of what is adult guardianship for the special needs adoptive child. What occurs when your special needs child turns 18 and is legally an adult. This presentation will focus on several aspects of guardianship such as; when is adult guardianship appropriate, responsibilities of guardianship, types of guardianship, who can be an adult guardian, and the process for obtaining adult guardianship. Participants will learn of the reasons and how to obtain guardianship of their special needs child who is legally an adult.

*Valerie Dary has worked as a Master Level Social Work for over 35 years in the area of Child Welfare, Special Education , Domestic and International Adoption. She began her career as a foster care case manager and has been able to have continuous career growth, from direct contact with clients to where she presently sits as the Program Director at Greenlight Family Services.*

*Maria Nanos has been a social worker in the child welfare system in Chicago for her career for almost 30 years. Most of her work has been with child sexual abuse. She has worked in many venues in Chicago such as courts, schools, private agencies and DCFs. She has been working with sexual assaults on college campuses for the past 13 years. She is currently an executive director of a non-profit in Chicago, teaches at Loyola University and has a private practice. She received her MSW at UIC and a PhD in clinical social work.*



**Sunday, April 11th**

**Session 5: 11:00 am - 12 noon**

**Session 5A: Domestic Adoption, A Master Class...Covering The Basics And Beyond!**

*Rebecca Gruenspan, Founder & CEO, RG Adoption Consulting*

Rebecca Gruenspan, founder of RG Adoption Consulting, will help you understand what it takes to realize your dream of "having a baby" through domestic agency adoption. She will walk you through the process and answer your most pressing questions such as:

- Will I get chosen if: I'm single, gay, already have children, over 40?
- How long does the adoption process take?
- How do I find the right agency?
- Is it possible to adopt a healthy baby?
- Open adoption – what does it mean and what if the birth mother changes her mind? ...and more! Are you ready to get you started on the right path to fulfilling your dreams! This is not your typical Adoption 101.

*Founder of RG Adoption Consulting, Rebecca Gruenspan is a single adoptive mama who, like millions of women, had a dream of becoming a mother. After a short marriage and struggling with infertility, Becca embraced the idea of domestic adoption. She made herself a promise that if there was a way to make the process easier after everything she had already been through, that she would do it, but had no idea where to start. Not knowing anything about adoption consultants, Becca was given the name of one, and nine months after placing that first call, her son was in her arms. In her previous careers, Becca was a family therapist and non-profit fundraiser. However, after adopting her son in 2011, she found so much joy in helping others down their path that she decided to make a career of it. Becca and her team at RG Adoption Consulting are dedicated to helping individuals and couples from across the U.S. navigate the domestic adoption process as smoothly as possible with the hopes of bringing their babies home in less than a year.*

**Session 5B: The Key to Building Strong Families: High AQ (Adoption Attunement Intelligence)**

*Joann DiStefano, Adoption & Life Performance Coach, GIFT Family Services*

*Gayle Swift, Adoption & Life Performance Coach, GIFT Family Services*

From daycare to high school, families and service providers should think about how they can advocate for adoption sensitivity in the school setting. This presentation will address topics including positive adoption language, adoption-sensitive curriculum, and multicultural awareness in schools. Additionally, we will recommend adoption-related books and resources. Audience participation will be encouraged.

*Joann DiStefano is a Co-founder of GIFT Family Services, Certified life coach since 2005, Family Law attorney, Masters in NLP., received certification in Internal Family Systems, received certification in the Developmental Model of Couple's Therapy, adoptive parent since 1986.*

*Gayle Swift is a Co-founder GIFT Family Services, Coach since 2004, Adoptive parent, award-winning author, Adoptee rights advocate, NLP.*

## **Session 5C: Adolescent Social Re-Engagement When Life Becomes “Normal” \*\* UPDATED \*\***

*Imy Wax, Psychotherapist, Educational Consultant, Author, The Aspire Group*

Just like us, our children have lived rather “sheltered” lives the past year. Unlike us, however, they don’t have years of experience interacting with their peers. Learn how to help your middle-school and high school age children re-enter their social circles and what they may be anxious or uncomfortable about when reaching out.

*Imy F. Wax, M.S. LCPC, CEP is a psychotherapist, Educational Consultant, author, and President of The Aspire Group. She has worked with the adolescent population and their families for over 38 years. She is a member of a number of professional and parent organizations. She has presented at both professional and parent conferences on a variety of topics and has published articles in several professional and parent journals. Wax has appeared as a guest on the "NBC Today Show," has been quoted recently in The Atlantic and has appeared on other TV and radio programs. She is the co-author of the highly acclaimed book The K & W Guide To Colleges For Students with Learning Differences. Imy Wax travels over 80,000 miles around the U.S. visiting traditional and non-traditional schools, programs (including wilderness and therapeutic), colleges and post secondary environments for young children, adolescents, young adults and adults. She believes that there should never be a "closed door" for a beloved family member.*

## **Session 5D: African-American Hair & Skin Care**

*Tamekia Swint, Executive Director, Styles 4 Kidz*

Learn the basics of textured hair management including what products to use, the types and textures of hair and basic management techniques. A discussion about the types of protective hairstyles that are culturally acceptable for girls and boys and a basic skin care discussion followed by a Q & A.

*Tamekia Swint is a wife, mom, hairstylist, and instructor who is passionate about hair! In 2010 Tamekia founded Styles 4 Kidz, a non-profit organization that provides textured hair care resources, services, and education for kids in the transracial adoptive, foster, and biracial community. Tamekia is committed to helping kids feel good about how they look and feel through beautiful hairstyles. She is a Chicago native and has made appearances on Good Morning America, Windy City Live, and the Kelly Clarkson show to discuss the growing need for proper hair care for kids.*

**Sunday, April 11th**

**Session 6: 12:15 pm - 1:15 pm**

**Session 6A: Keys to a Quicker Domestic Adoption**

*Nicole Witt, Executive Director, The Adoption Consultancy*

Traditional parenting techniques will most likely not work with your adopted child so we need to be flexible. If you are considering inviting a child with a tough past into your home, or if you are already in the middle of it, this workshop will provide education on the effects of in utero and early childhood trauma, as well as practical trauma informed parenting strategies you can use in your home & community.

*Nicole Witt is Executive Director of The Adoption Consultancy ([www.TheAdoptionConsultancy.com](http://www.TheAdoptionConsultancy.com)) as well as a frequent speaker on adoption and infertility. The Adoption Consultancy is an unbiased resource serving pre-adoptive families by providing them with the education, information and guidance they need to safely adopt a newborn, usually within 3 to 12 months. Nicole has helped hundreds of people to realize their dream of becoming parents.*

*Nicole earned her BA from Lehigh University and her MBA from Cornell University. She spent over 10 years in Management Consulting and Strategic Marketing before founding The Adoption Consultancy.*

*Nicole is recognized as an information source. She serves as an Expert Witness in adoption-related cases. She has been interviewed by Today, World News Tonight, Daytime, Redbook, More magazine, E! Online, and many radio programs. She has also been interviewed for articles appearing on [www.WebMD.com](http://www.WebMD.com) and [www.CBSNews.com](http://www.CBSNews.com). Her articles have been featured in local and national publications such as "Family Building" magazine.*

*Nicole is a member of the Florida Adoption Council. Nicole is also an active professional member of RESOLVE, the National Infertility Association, served on the Resolve Editorial Board and co-founded the Tampa chapter of the organization in 2007. Nicole can be reached at 8613-681-6232 or via email at [nicole@TheAdoptionConsultancy.com](mailto:nicole@TheAdoptionConsultancy.com).*

**Session 6B: For Dads Only: An Adoptive Dad Panel**

*Jason Bentsen, Executive Director, LoveMovesUs*

This session will be a panel discussion of dads from all types of adoption & foster care - international, domestic & foster care. Hear from other men the challenges and joys of being a dad to vulnerable children.

*Jason is an adoptive parent to two beautiful children and grew up in the Chicago area. He received his degree in youth ministry and adolescent studies from Judson University in Elgin, IL. After spending time in various youth ministries and church plants, Jason saw an enormous need for support in the foster & adoptive community. LoveMovesUs began to come alongside foster & adoptive families in their parenting journey. He is a Trust-Based Relational Intervention Practitioner and an Empowered to Connect parent trainer. Jason is passionate to engage people in serving the foster & adoptive community & to bring men's voices to the forefront of caring for vulnerable children. Jason & his wife, Cheryl, reside in Joliet, IL.*

**Session 6C: Making a Match: Choosing the Right College or Post Secondary Option \*\* UPDATED \*\***

*Imy Wax, Psychotherapist, Educational Consultant, Author, The Aspire Group*

For a student who learns differently than the traditional student, college can seem like a dream. There are many college and post-secondary options available if the parents understand their child's diagnosis and what to expect after high school.

*Imy F. Wax, M.S. LCPC, CEP is a psychotherapist, Educational Consultant, author, and President of The Aspire Group. She has worked with the adolescent population and their families for over 38 years. She is a member of a number of professional and parent organizations. She has presented at both professional and parent conferences on a variety of*

*topics and has published articles in several professional and parent journals. Wax has appeared as a guest on the "NBC Today Show," has been quoted recently in The Atlantic and has appeared on other TV and radio programs. She is the co-author of the highly acclaimed book The K & W Guide To Colleges For Students with Learning Differences. Imy Wax travels over 80,000 miles around the U.S. visiting traditional and non-traditional schools, programs (including wilderness and therapeutic), colleges and post secondary environments for young children, adolescents, young adults and adults. She believes that there should never be a "closed door" for a beloved family member.*

**Session 6D: EMDR: A Promising Treatment Approach for Trauma Related to Foster Care and Adoption**

*Colleen Norwell, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Looking Glass Therapeutics, LLC*

This session will provide foster parents, adoptive parents and professionals information about Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), a form of therapy that has been successful in use with treatment of trauma, as well as a variety of mental health conditions by relieving affective distress, reformulating negative beliefs and reducing physiological arousal associated with traumatic events or symptoms related to a diagnosis. Information provided will include a brief history of the evolution of EMDR and how it can be used to treat the myriad of issues that present around adoption, trauma and attachment. Participants will also have the option to participate in some demonstrations of resourcing/coping skills that would likely be taught within EMDR treatment.

*Colleen Norwell is an adoptee and Licensed Clinical Social Worker. She currently works as a therapist at Looking Glass Therapeutics in Naperville, IL specializing in trauma, and works closely with child, adolescent and adult adoptees, as well as adoptive parents. Colleen has previously had the honor of working specifically in the field of adoption as well as residential care for DCFS youth.*