2026 Youth Services Conference

Families First... Youth Forward



Wilderness Resort, Wisconsin Dells

April 29th – May 1st, 2026

Wilderness Resort
45 Hillman Rd
Wisconsin Dells, WI 53965

Registration
will open
Feb. 4, 2026

Questions?
Contact Kim Eithun
at keithun@wisc.edu

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

WCWPDS
Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System

Conference Information

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System invite you to attend the 2026 Youth Services Conference: Families First Youth Forward. This event will bring together youth services professionals from across Wisconsin who support young people and families at every stage, from prevention to youth justice. This conference focuses on centering family and youth voices in decision-making. Sessions highlight practical, trauma-informed approaches that strengthen family connections and support youth well-being, stability, and opportunity.

Dates

Wednesday, April 29th
9:00am - 4:00 pm

Thursday, April 30th
8:30am - 3:30 pm
Networking Reception 3:30pm - 5:00 pm

Friday, May 1st
8:30am - 4:00pm

Location

Wilderness Resort
45 Hillman Rd
Wisconsin Dells, WI

Registration Deadline: April 23rd

There is a fee of $100 for both virtual and in-person attendance.
Advance registration is required to participate either in-person or virtually. Please register at the following link:

https://uwmadison.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0xsMKxbC83vteIe

Registration is first-come, first-served. Please only register to attend in-person if you are able to attend the full conference. If registrations exceed available space, a wait list will be maintained. Cancellations must be received at least two weeks in advance of the conference. Otherwise, you will be responsible for paying the $100 conference fee.

Virtual Attendance

All conference presentations are being offered virtually via live Zoom meetings. Virtual attendees may participate via monitored chat as each presentation allows.

Conference Materials

Conference materials will be provided to attendees in electronic format only. These materials will be made available prior to the conference in the Whova app. Additional information and instructions will be sent to the email address provided as part of your registration.

Conference Information *(continued)*

Continuing Education Credits

Continuing Education Hours (CEH) for social workers will be offered to attendees for in-person and live virtual attendance. Credit hour tracking and reporting for this event is the responsibility of individual attendees. Conference organizers will maintain sign-in sheets through QR codes scanned in the rooms and virtual attendance logs for confirmation purposes.

Questions?



Please contact Kim Eithun at keithun@wisc.edu

Hotel Reservations

A hotel room block has been established with the Wilderness Resort at the state rate of $101.00/per night. In-person attendees are responsible for making their own lodging reservations. To do so, please call the Wilderness Reservation Center at 1-800-867-9453 and state you are with **Leader # B09501.**

Reservations must be made prior to March 28th to receive the discounted rate. If applicable, please provide tax-exempt information prior to checking in.

Agenda at a Glance

Wednesday, April 29th

8:00 AM - 9:00 AM	**Registration**
9:00 AM - 4:00 PM	*Seminar Sessions (optional)*
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM	**Lunch**

Thursday, April 30th

7:30 AM - 8:30 AM	**Breakfast**
8:30 AM - 8:45 AM	*Welcome*
8:30 AM - 9:45 AM	*Holding Relationships as Sacred in Child Welfare - Brandy Hudson*
9:45 AM - 10:00 AM	**Break**
10:00 AM - 11:15 AM	***Workshop A***
11:30 AM - 12:30 PM	*Youth Panel*
12:30 PM - 1:00 PM	**Lunch**
1:00 PM - 2:15 PM	***Workshop B***
2:15 PM - 2:30 PM	**Break**
2:30 PM - 3:30 PM	*Champions, Change Makers, Shifters & Servants - Ajamau Butler*
3:30 PM - 5:00 PM	**Networking Reception**

Friday, May 1st

7:30 AM - 8:30 AM	**Breakfast**
8:30 AM - 9:15 AM	*DCF Updates*
9:15 AM - 10:30 AM	*Taking Steps to Deal with Uncertainty and Build Resilience - Mitch Factor*
10:30 AM - 10:45 AM	**Break**
10:45 AM - 12:00 PM	***Workshop C***
12:00 AM - 1:00 PM	**Lunch**
1:00 PM - 2:30 PM	***Workshop D***
2:30 PM - 2:45 PM	**Break**
2:45 PM - 3:45 PM	*Don't Stop, Keep Moving - Melissa Moore*
3:45 PM - 4:00 PM	***Wrap-up***

Day 1 Agenda
Wednesday, April 29th

8:00 AM - 9:00 AM **Registration**

9:00 AM - 4:00 PM
with lunch from 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM ***Seminar Sessions***

Seminar Sessions – April 29th

Please choice one seminar workshop for the day.

9:00 AM - 4:00 PM
with lunch 12:00PM - 1:00 PM

S - 1

Family Teaming In Action

Marc Seidl, Eric Calvino, Andrea Szwec, Samantha Debias, Erika Traver, Tess Brodsky, DeAnna Cobun, Jessica Nehmer

This workshop will introduce participants to Family Teaming as defined in DCF child welfare standards, redefine engagement strategies, and explore how to implement at the local agency level. Lived experts and local county agency professionals will join the workshop to discuss their experiences, including barriers and solutions. Learners can expect to brainstorm solutions in real time and bring back ideas to their agency.

S - 2

The R5 Storytelling Model: Tell Stories that Teach, Influence and Inspire Action

Jeremy Triblett

The R5 Model: This model helps leaders, educators, facilitators, and influencers transform real-life experiences into meaningful messages that resonate. It's more than a speaking tool. It's a design process to ensure every story you share reflects who you are, what your audience needs, and why it matters. Individuals practice this process to gain the clarity and structure to: recognize your audience, reflect on personal experiences, repurpose those experiences, refine story delivery and release a memorable and actionable story. Join Jeremy Triblett to learn how to tell Stories that teach, influence, and inspire action.

Seminar Sessions – April 29th

(continued)

9:00 AM - 4:00 PM
with lunch 12:00PM - 1:00 PM

S - 3

Youth Services Conference Grantee Meeting (Invitation Only)

Brandy Hudson

This gathering brings together the Bureau of Youth Services (BYS) grantees from across the state that are responsible for serving vulnerable youth populations in the areas of housing, anti-human trafficking, independent living, youth justice, and more. It is an opportunity for attendees to network, share knowledge, resources, and best practices, and directly connect with the Department of Children and Families staff who support and oversee youth-serving programs. The BYS grantee meeting is open to BYS grantees, by invitation only. Bureau of Youth Services - Grant Programs, DCF-P-5725

S - 4

Ethics and Boundaries: Practicing Self-Care in an Era of Moral Distress

Sheng Lee Yang

In today's complex and demanding human services landscape, practitioners often find themselves navigating ethical dilemmas and encountering situations that can lead to moral distress. This seminar session is designed to equip professionals in the human services field with the knowledge, tools, and strategies to address these ethical challenges while prioritizing their own well-being.

The course will provide guidance on maintaining healthy boundaries in client interactions, organizational dynamics, and professional relationships. Participants will learn how to navigate ethical dilemmas with integrity and compassion, while safeguarding their own mental health. Course objectives will be established through a combination of interactive lectures, group discussions, and practical exercises.

Day 2 Agenda

Thursday, April 30th

7:30 AM - 8:30 AM	**Registration and Breakfast (provided)**
8:30 AM - 8:45 AM	***Welcome*** **Evelyn Coker- Wisconsin Department of Children and Families**
8:45 AM - 9:45 AM	***Families First, Youth Forward: Holding Relationships as Sacred in Child Welfare*** **Brandy Hudson** This plenary invites participants to rethink child welfare by centering trust, connection, and dignity, showing how honoring relationships with parents and youth is the foundation for lasting safety, healing, and well-being.
9:45 AM - 10:00 AM	**Break**
10:00 AM - 11:15 AM	***Workshop A***
11:30 AM - 12:30 PM	***Youth Panel*** **(Lina, Jayden, Markis, Johnny, Tia, Nina, Dream, Tina Czappa - facilitator)**
12:30 AM - 1:00 PM	**Lunch (provided)**
1:00 PM - 2:15 PM	***Workshop B***
2:15 PM - 2:30 PM	**Break**
2:30 PM - 3:30 PM	***Champions, Change Makers, Shifters & Servants*** **Ajamou Butler** During this conversation, we will lead with a passionate and unified call to action. Mixing information and inspiration, we will recharge the "tired" champion within us all as youth workers. Q/A will be held.
3:30 PM - 5:00 PM	**Networking Reception**

Workshop A – April 30th

10:00 AM - 11:15 AM

A - 1 Change Starts Locally

Sara Brown, Christina McCarty, Chet Hurt, and Jacquie Buchmann

Learn from HeadsUp Fox Cities and The Oak: WashCo Youth Center leaders as they share honest lessons from building and sustaining community-based youth programs, including what it takes to support staff, practical strategies, real-world insights, and shared problem-solving to help nonprofit leaders and community partners create resilient, sustainable programs that last.

A - 2 Relationships Are the Intervention: Centering Parents to Move Youth Forward

Brandy Hudson and Paula Buege

In child welfare, our most powerful intervention is often the relationship itself. This workshop explores how parental support directly influences youth outcomes and how professional roles, power dynamics, and system pressures can either strengthen or undermine relational safety. Participants will reflect on bias, examine everyday practice choices, and leave with concrete commitments to strengthen family partnership and preserve youth connections.

A - 3 The Journey: From Victimization to Victory

Nancy Yarbrough

The Journey takes participants through the realities of human trafficking from entrapment to empowerment. National trainer, speaker, and lived-experience advocate Nancy Yarbrough offers a dynamic, hopeful session designed to inspire professionals with tools, stories, and renewed passion to help survivors reclaim their voices and rewrite their stories.

A - 4 Busting Up Our Biases to Build Better Bridges

Ajamou Butler

In this session, we will spend time on self-reflection as well as reflecting from another person's shoes. This Interactive workshop helps us remove our own barriers of trauma and biased thinking /actions with the goal of becoming better community servants. Q/A will be held.

A - 5 In Equal Measure: Weaving Lived Experience Expertise Into Policy Work

Kelsey Hill, Greta Munns, Tia Milner, ShawnaRae Brunch

This workshop will introduce participants to key principles for engaging young adults with lived experience in policy work, resource development, and consulting opportunities in ways that are authentic, fruitful, collaborative, and allow for mutual learning. Lived experts will join DCF staff to discuss the experience of working together and to highlight some recent achievements and projects.

Workshop B – April 30th

1:00 PM - 2:15 PM

B - 1

Healing Centered Engagement

Patti and Jesse Heffernan

Explore how we can protect families by going beyond their pathology, beyond trauma-informed care to healing-centered engagement. Find out how to advocate for youth caught in the youth justice system, keep parents seeking recovery from losing their children, and eliminate the destructive impact punitive approaches have on families affected by substance use disorder.

B - 2

Old Drugs, New Threats

Melissa Moore

Today's youth substance use looks very different from what it did in the past, with new products and devices creating new risks that many adults don't recognize. This session breaks down current youth drug trends, what prevention efforts actually work (and which don't), and gives you clear, practical talking points and strategies to engage your community and strengthen prevention.

B - 3

Tailored Dispositional Orders: Promoting Positive Change Through Shared Responsibility

Bridget Mauerman

Youth and families have the best chance for success when conditions for return and supervision are clear, achievable, and tailored to their individual needs. The Tailored Dispositional Orders Project promotes the shared responsibility of creating orders that support positive behavior change in child welfare and youth justice cases. This workshop will highlight key lessons learned from jurisdictions across the state, explore common challenges that agencies and their partners face in crafting and implementing effective dispositional orders, and outline best practices that promote consistency, and clarity, and fairness. Presenters will discuss opportunities for you to engage in the project, and for those who have already completed the training, share strategies for expanding your work.

B - 4

What People Say vs. What You Meant: How to Understand People Well Enough to Lead

Rachel Lefebvre

Have you ever meant well and still watched a small moment turn into a big problem? This interactive session helps participants slow things down, read situations more clearly, and respond with curiosity rather than reaction, offering practical skills they can use immediately in their work and relationships.

B - 5

The Moments That Matter: How Outcomes Are Shaped

Julien Phifer

Youth-serving professionals know families and youth should be at the center of decisions, but everyday pressures often make that hard. This session shares practical, youth- and family-led approaches that shift power, reduce system-created trauma, and offer tools you can use right away, even in busy and complex work environments.

Day 3 Agenda

Friday, May 1 st

7:30 AM - 8:30 AM	**Breakfast (provided)**
8:30 AM - 9:15 AM	***DCF Updates*** **Shelby McCulley - Department of Children and Families**
9:15 AM - 10:30 AM	***Taking Steps to Deal With Uncertainty and Build Resilience*** ***Mitch Factor*** This session explores practical strategies to help youth services professionals manage stress, set healthy boundaries, and sustain themselves in challenging roles.
10:30 AM - 10:45 AM	**Break**
10:45 AM - 12:00 PM	***Workshop C***
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM	**Lunch (provided)**
1:00 PM - 2:30 PM	***Workshop D***
2:30 PM - 2:45 PM	**Break**
2:45 PM - 3:45 PM	***Don't Stop, Keep Moving*** ***Melissa Moore*** Learn how to prevent burnout by strengthening relationships, sharing the work, and using your influence to tackle tough, long-standing challenges together.
3:45 PM - 4:00 PM	**Wrap-Up**

Workshop C – May 1st

10:45 AM - 12:00 PM

C - 1

Family Involvement

Mitch Factor

Families play a powerful role in youth success, and this session focuses on practical ways for parents, caregivers, and male role models to partner with youth in supportive ways. Participants will learn how to build stronger relationships with families, increase engagement in meetings, and encourage healthy communication, routines, and family habits that support youth.

C - 2

Safe Enough to Fail

Jeremy Triblett

Creating physically and emotionally safe spaces for youth is crucial for their well-being and development. Through interactive exercises, attendees will gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by youth in unsafe environments and be equipped with the tools to create a safe and supportive spaces for young people in their communities.

C - 3

Coaching for Impact: Enhancing Risk Assessment Skills and Consistency in Youth Justice Practice

Jenna Dunlap and Ashley Lackas

This session introduces Wisconsin's YASI Coaching Model and shares real-world lessons from its use in 19 counties since 2024. Participants will learn how a local coaching approach helps youth justice professionals use the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) accurately and consistently, and how to put this model into practice in their own county.

C - 4

Got Drugs? Now What! Investing in "What Works"

Melissa Moore

Organizations are being asked to do more with less, making it harder to sustain people, programs, and momentum. This session shares practical lessons from over 24 years of experience and provides ready-to-use tools, examples, and resources to help coalitions engage members, strengthen prevention efforts, and move forward with confidence.

C - 5

Collaboration with Lived Expertise in Service Planning

DeShanda Williams-Clark, Markell Crawford, D'Angelo Markham, Narhia McAfee, Elizabeth O'Brien

This session focuses on partnership with young people as assets when planning and implementing programs and services. Actively and positively engaging young people - empowers them to share in decision-making, while maintaining agency compliance and liability standards. This approach supports the development of youth confidence, leadership skills, influence, and integration into their communities.

Workshop D – May 1st

1:00 PM - 2:30 PM

D - 1

Nothing For Us Without Us

Jeremy Triblett

The Latin phrase "Nihil de nobis, sine nobis" translates to "Nothing For Us, Without Us!" This means that policies, programs, or practices that impact young people should involve their active participation in the decision-making process. This learning experience provides youth work professionals with the necessary tools to engage with teenagers, form effective youth-adult partnerships, and enhance their leadership skills.

D - 2

Truancy - Small Changes, Big Impact

Alana Peck and Julie Incitti

In this workshop, we will facilitate small group discussions around effective and ineffective policies, practices, and strategies for responding to truancy referrals. Groups will identify assumptions, challenges, and successes related to truancy cases and will reflect together on small changes that can have a big impact on outcomes for youth, families, and our communities.

D - 3

Charting the Course Forward: Youth-Led Recommendations for Systems and Policy Change

Joli Guenther, TaMaya, Emi, Zatyra, Jade

Youth leaders from across Wisconsin will share recommendations developed to address the legal and policy barriers affecting young people experiencing homelessness. Youth Action Board members will highlight key challenges and priorities for change.

D - 4

Wisconsin's Independent Living Program: Moving the Needle to Support Young Adults During Times of Growth and Transition

Kelsey Hill and Greta Munns

In this interactive session, participants will learn about the history of the independent living program, requirements and best practices, recent changes and developments, and opportunities for the work moving forward, including how lived-experience experts' input at both the state and national levels shapes and influences the program. Participants will have the opportunity to share their experiences with IL work, help DCF staff prioritize how the program evolves, and strategize ways to keep lived experience and youth voice central to these efforts.

D - 5

The Secret to a Leader's Mental Wellness: Leading from Your Uniqueness

Molly Hildebrandt

This interactive workshop reframes mental wellness as more than self-care by focusing on self-awareness and how each person is wired to think, connect, and lead. Participants will learn a simple, practical framework to increase clarity, energy, and confidence while strengthening communication and reducing conflict in their work and relationships.