

WELCOME TO

**LEADERSHIP
DAY**

2026



YOU BELONG HERE!



WELCOME

Welcome to Leadership Day 2026, proudly hosted by Directors as Leaders (DAL). We are thrilled to provide you with an entire day of learning, networking, and enjoyment.



To showcase the remarkable talent found right here in WNY, we intentionally chose several local experts as our speakers. We hope that your time together today ignites conversations and fosters collaborations that will extend well beyond this event. It is truly a pleasure to be part of such a dynamic, diverse community of leaders and learners. Thank you so much for joining us.

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**Interested in joining our
committee?**

**Email any committee
member to let us know and
we will be in touch soon!**

AGENDA

- 8:00 am** **Networking Breakfast & Vendors**
- 9:00 am** **Opening Keynote
with Zeneta Everhart**
- 10:00 am** **AM Breakout Sessions**
- 11:30 am** **Exhibitors and Giveaways**
- 12:00 pm** **Lunch & Advocacy Updates**
- 1:30 pm** **PM Breakout Sessions**
- 3:00 pm** **Closing Keynote
with Lynn Lubecki**



All events noted in **RED** are held in the Bellamore Room

Room assignments for breakout sessions are noted with workshop descriptions.

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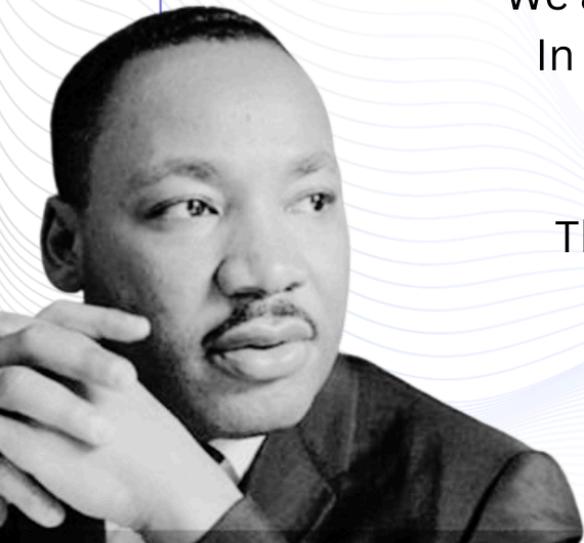
CONGRATULATIONS DIRECTORS AS LEADERS
for all of your hard work, dedication, & investment
into the longevity of the Child Care Profession.

“ We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today.
We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.
In this unfolding conundrum of life and history,
there ‘is’ such a thing as being too late.
This is no time for apathy or complacency. ”
This is a time for vigorous and positive action.

— *Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*



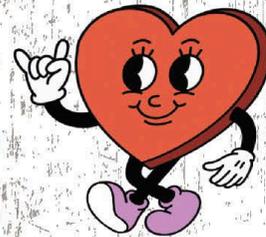
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Music Therapy, Lessons and Enrichment

Our team of Music Therapists serve Western New York, (as well as Pittsburgh, Rochester and Bradenton, FL!)

We provide:

- Music Therapy services
- Music Enrichment classes
- Music Rocks! early childhood music program

Programs take place at our two therapy spaces (Hamburg, Williamsville) as well as in the community

Contact us today to learn about how our programs can serve you

At Bloom we provide Special Education Services, Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy and Music therapy, with Wellness and Sensory Support Programs for our students.

With a strong focus for children with autism, sensory needs, or of unique abilities we strive to provide the best we can offer for your family as you transition into the school system.

Our integrated preschool classrooms are housed inside Care-A-Lot Childcare Centers, and Bloom Early Learning Center.



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QUALITYstarsNY is proud to support Directors As Leaders' Leadership Day

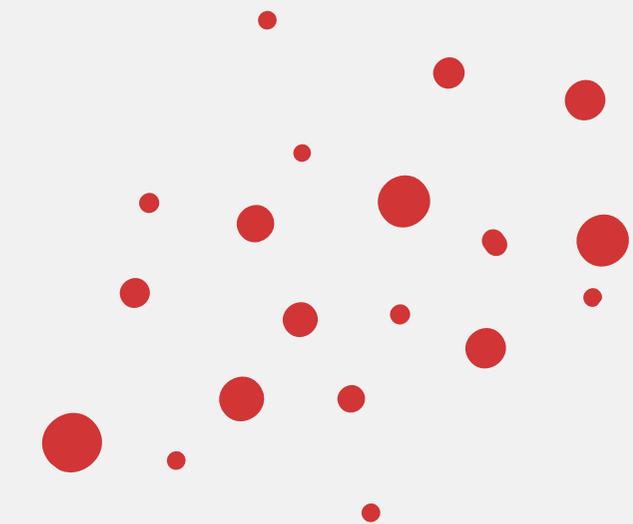
As **New York State's Quality Rating and Improvement System**, QUALITYstarsNY provides support and resources to improve and sustain high-quality early childhood practices across the state. QUALITYstarsNY is universally available to regulated child care programs who serve children from birth to age 5.

Benefits of joining **QUALITYstarsNY** include:

- One-on-one support from a Quality Improvement Specialist
- Professional development & scholarships for staff to grow as early childhood professionals
- Guidance, information, and resources to enhance your learning environment
- And much more!

Learn more at
qualitystarsny.org

Thank you



You support Western
New York's children,
families, and educators.
We support you.



Get support on your career journey through individualized academic and career advising and planning, scholarship and financial aid guidance, and our Early Childhood Employment Network.



Network with and learn from experienced leaders, share your needs and challenges and deepen your understanding of leadership in New York's early childhood field.

**New York Early Childhood
Professional Development Institute**

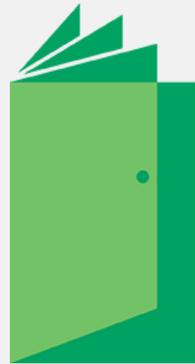


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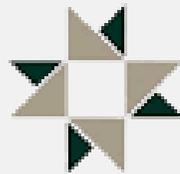
Thank you



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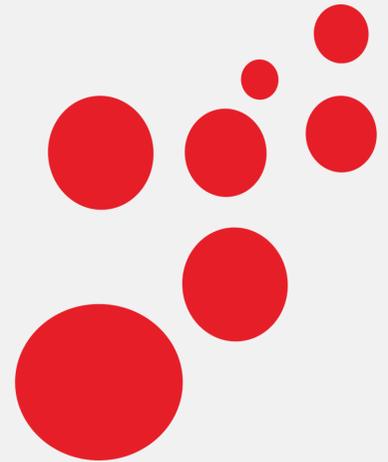
Thank you 

Ire-Designs

Terry's Photo Studio

Bullfrog Designs

Vanessa Rehac



Alison Tweedie

Alison is a passionate educator with over 15 years experience across private preschool, Head Start, and preschool Special Education. She is an active member of the WNY Behavior Collaboration and an even more active mother to three young boys.



Alison reliably brings music, art, creativity, and a sense of humor into every role she holds. Special interests include Mister Rogers, adirondack chairs, tacos, and being around both the books and women of her book club, "The Grapes of Gatsby."

Zeneta Everhart

**Buffalo Common Council
President Pro Tempore
Masten District Council Woman**

Zeneta B. Everhart is a Buffalo, New York native born and raised on the East Side of Buffalo. In 2023, Zeneta ran for political office, winning the Democratic Primary and the general election to become the next City of Buffalo Common Council Woman for the Masten District, a seat that has not been held by a woman in more than 60 years.



Villa Maria College, 2008
Canisius University, 2011

OPENING KEYNOTE

Zeneta Everhart

Zeneta is a Humanist who believes in the power of serving others through love and understanding.

Following the 5/14 massacre that seriously injured her son Zaire Goodman, Zeneta testified before Congress about the need for stricter gun laws, resulting in the passage of the Safer Communities Act.

From this tragedy, Zeneta & Zaire's Book Club was also born. Zeneta and Zaire have collected more than 17,000 books that teach children about racism, diversity, and acceptance in an effort to build a more inclusive society.



Storytelling is a Superpower: Using the Lessons of Mr. Rogers to Speak so Partners Listen

Presented by: Megan Battista

Victorian A

Stories move people. When navigating complex systems, competing priorities, & limited resources, the ability to communicate with clarity, empathy, & purpose can transform how people listen and respond. Inspired by the communication style & philosophy of Fred Rogers, this session explores how storytelling can strengthen partnerships, shift mindsets, and build momentum for change. Participants will learn practical storytelling strategies that help potential partners, funders, and policy makers notice what matters.



Storytelling is a Superpower: Using the Lessons of Mr. Rogers to Speak so Partners Listen

Megan Battista

As Learning and Advocacy Coordinator at Lutoff WNY, Megan focuses on expanding Lutoff's network of partners, advocating for policy change, and facilitating meaningful learning experiences that increase awareness and understanding related to Early Childhood Development in the WNY region.

Born and raised in Buffalo, Megan has spent her career working towards equity for vulnerable communities in WNY. She holds a Master of Social Work from the University at Buffalo.





Advocacy Opportunity

Get Onboard
and help
kids thrive

Advocate
for kids in a
way that fits
your life

Onboard is a volunteer network that supports the critical work of Lift Off WNY. The program brings together professionals from all industries to advocate for improved early childhood development, influence outcomes, and cultivate meaningful change.

You can leverage your own professional expertise and personal connections to remove barriers and support more young children, birth to five, who live in our local communities.

Pave the
way for the
next generation

Come Onboard! It benefits
everyone involved.

Onboard advocates use their powerful voices and expertise to encourage their networks to get involved. By taking action and inviting others to join, you'll be able to make a difference in the lives of nearly 100,000 babies, toddlers, and young kids in Western New York.

The best part? When you join Onboard, you can choose exactly how you'd like to volunteer your time and talents.

> LEARN MORE



Directors
As
Leaders

One Incident Away: The Insurance Gaps That Shut Down Childcare Centers (and How to Avoid Them)

Presented by:
Marcia C. Brogan & Jessyca Batcho

Victorian B

One unexpected incident can disrupt operations, threaten licensing, and create serious financial strain.

This educational session breaks down the most common insurance gaps in childcare, where claims really come from, and how to protect your center before problems arise.



One Incident Away: The Insurance Gaps That Shut Down Childcare Centers (and How to Avoid Them)

Marcia C. Brogan (Right)

Marcia C. Brogan, owner of Marcia C. Brogan Agency, has 45+ years of experience specializing in childcare insurance. As a mother and business owner, she understands industry challenges and parent concerns. Dedicated to protecting clients' assets, she guides them with education and empowerment to keep their businesses running smoothly.



Jessyca Batcho (Left)

Jessyca Batcho is a licensed insurance agent and partner at Marcia C. Brogan Agency. As a wife, mother, and fur mom, Jessyca is passionate about supporting the childcare community by making insurance simple and enjoyable. Specializing in coverage for childcare facilities, she customizes plans to meet each client's specific needs.

AM BREAKOUT

How to Have a Successful Licensing Visit

Presented by:
Andrea Weichmann-Duggan,
Holly Walker, & Patrick Gerrity

Venetian Room

Staff from the OCFS Division of Child Care Services will provide an overview of the licensing inspection experience.

The session will include best practices for empowering your program, working effectively with OCFS, and avoiding commonly cited regulations.



AM BREAKOUT

How to Have a Successful Licensing Visit

The NYS Office of Children and Family Services provides a range of resources to help parents with their child care needs, people who want to start or are currently running child care programs, and anyone with a concern about the health or safety of a child in a day care program.

Buffalo Regional Office Licensing Supervisor, Andrea Weichmann-Duggan, is joined by Licensors Holly Walker and Patrick Gerrity for today's session.



AM BREAKOUT

The Early Childhood Professional: Early Childhood Education as a Profession

Presented by: Carrie Becker

Bellamore Room

What is a profession? What does it mean to see yourself as a professional? What are your responsibilities as an early childhood professional?

In this session, participants will gain insight into the profession of early childhood education.



The Early Childhood Professional: Early Childhood Education as a Profession

Carrie Becker

Carrie has 20 years of experience in education with a focus on early childhood and special education.

She has a passion for creating environments that foster a love of learning while seeing all children as competent and capable of guiding their educational path.



Advocacy Updates

Directors As Leaders (DAL) is pleased to welcome **Vonetta Rhodes** (WNY Child Care Action Team) and **Kim Stewart** (Help Me Grow WNY) to share essential local advocacy updates.

As always, we are better together.



PM BREAKOUT

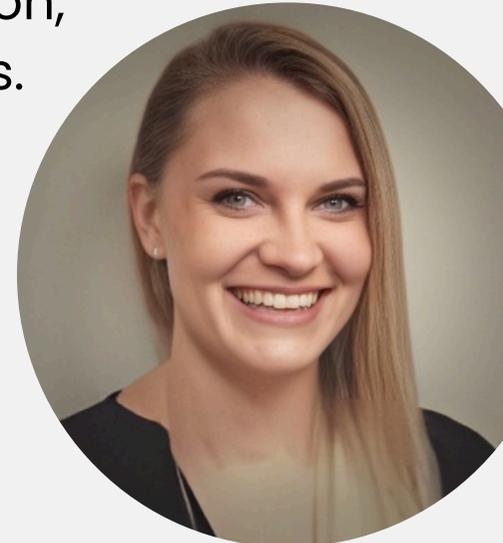
Psychological Safety: The Retention Strategy No One Talks About

**Presented by: Kristin Devereaux
and Shannon Solazzo**

Victorian A

High turnover isn't just a staffing issue, it's a culture issue. In this session, we'll explore how psychological safety directly impacts retention, team communication, and burnout in childcare environments.

You'll walk away with practical leadership strategies to create a workplace where staff feel heard, supported, and committed to staying.

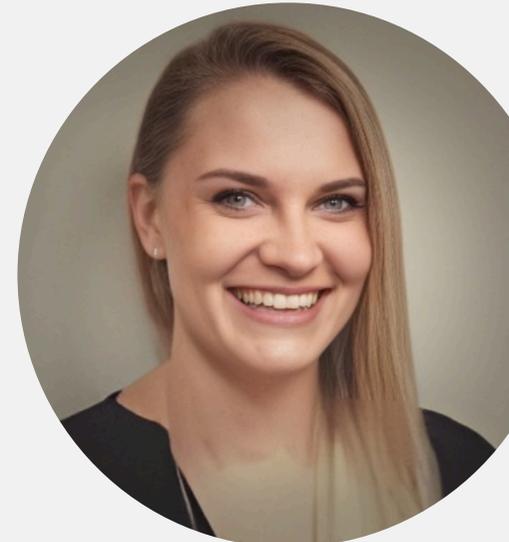


PM BREAKOUT

Psychological Safety: The Retention Strategy No One Talks About

Envision Benefits Group is a leading provider of business consulting, technology services, and outsourcing solutions.

Kristin Devereaux, SHRM-CP President, and **Shannon Solazzo**, Director of HR Consulting, are dedicated to driving innovation and empowering clients to achieve high-performance results.



PM BREAKOUT

How Leaders Use Data: From Reactive Problem Solving to Proactive Planning

Presented by:
Emily Oaks and Gerald Smith

Victorian B

We'll explore how leaders use data to enhance their quality of care and access additional resources.

Together we will use large, medium, and small-sized data to practice how these data can be used within their spaces.



PM BREAKOUT

How Leaders Use Data: From Reactive Problem Solving to Proactive Planning

Emily Oaks

Emily has 15 years of experience working in the nonprofit sector, providing direct service to clients as well as developing and implementing complex programs with community members and partners to achieve results.



Gerald Smith

Gerald has 20+ years of hands-on experience in early childhood. He's especially passionate about social and emotional wellness, developmental screening for all children, and the presence of males in the early childhood space.



PM BREAKOUT

Training That Sticks: How to Develop PD that Staff Actually Use

Presented by:
Michelle Wilson and Abby Webster

Venetian Room

Child care professionals deserve professional development that honors their experience and supports their growth. This session introduces directors to adult learning theory and learning styles through an early childhood lens, offering practical tips for designing trainings that are engaging, inclusive, and hands on. Together, we'll explore tools that help staff connect, reflect, and build confidence in their practice.



PM BREAKOUT

Training That Sticks: How to Develop PD that Staff Actually Use

Michelle Wilson

Michelle is an Education and Training Specialist at CCRN, with a T-TAP Professional Development Specialist credential, a B.A in Early Child Care Education, and a Masters in Adult Education and Distance Learning. She is an adjunct professor at Empire State University and has over 35 years of childcare experience.



Abigail Webster

Abby is an Education and Training Specialist at CCRN with a T-TAP Professional Development Specialist credential and a B.S. in ECE and Childhood Education. She has over 10 years of childcare experience as a preschool teacher, director, and school-age program director.



PM BREAKOUT

Creating Positive Workplace Communication: A Focus on Gossip

Presented by: Carrie Becker

Bellamore Room

Although gossip can seem ordinary in our early childhood programs, we should never underestimate its damaging effects on educator relationships.

This workshop will examine how to support communication and stop gossip.



PM BREAKOUT

Creating Positive Workplace Communication: A Focus on Gossip

Carrie Becker

Carrie has 20 years of experience in education with a focus on early childhood and special education.

She has a passion for creating environments that foster a love of learning while seeing all children as competent and capable of guiding their educational path.



CLOSING KEYNOTE

Dr. Lynn Lubecki

The Work We Chose: Leading with Purpose, Heart, and Hope

Lynn M. Lubecki, a leader in Early Childhood Education, champions equity and inclusion. As a mentor, teacher, and researcher, she supports students in accessing quality education and certification.

As NYS Pyramid Model Regional Coordinator, Dr. Lubecki helps Western New York professionals implement effective practices. A Pyramid Model Consortium Champion Award recipient, her work drives lasting systems change for disproportionately impacted children. A sought-after expert and speaker, Dr. Lubecki is also a devoted mother and grandmother, committed to ensuring all children feel loved, included, and understood.



**THANK
YOU**



**Being here today is evidence of
your commitment to children
and to our community.**

**We are so grateful
for all you do!**

**THANK
YOU**



**Winning raffle ticket numbers
will be displayed on the screen
in the Bellamore Room
at the end of the day.**