



The World Needs Who You Are Meant to Be

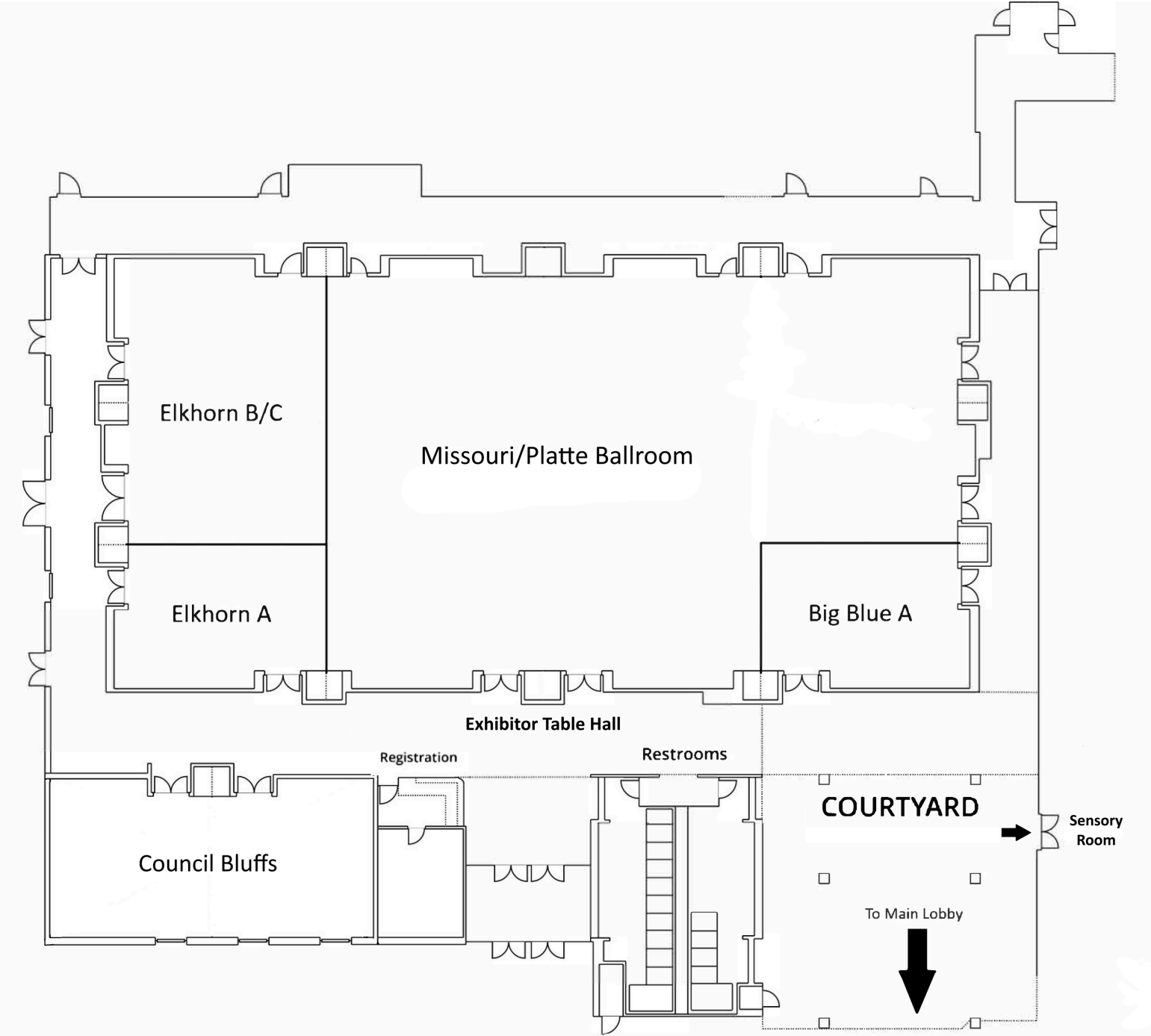
# Event Program

## 2025 SOAR Conference

October 3-5, 2025 | Omaha, NE



# Conference Map





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## About HSRN

The Heartland Self-Advocacy Resource Network (HSRN) began in 2014 as a collaboration between Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska to promote self-advocate voices in the region. Recently expanding to include Colorado, South Dakota, and Wyoming, HSRN encourages people with disabilities to be involved in advocacy, leadership, and education opportunities. The Seeking Opportunities for an Advocacy Revolution (SOAR) Conference is an opportunity for members from the regional states to come together to exchange ideas and learn from each other about advocacy, leadership, healthcare, and how we can better connect with each other and our communities. This conference is an opportunity to grow self-advocacy skills and create bonds with other advocates.



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## **SOAR Hosts**

### **Nebraska UCEDD at the Munroe-Meyer Institute**

The Nebraska University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) focuses on programs and resources to assist individuals with disabilities so they may participate fully in their communities. The UCEDD supports advocate development, disability leadership, family engagement, respite, and policy efforts. The Munroe-Meyer Institute's mission is to be world leaders in transforming the lives of all individuals with disabilities and complex health care needs, their families and the community through outreach, engagement, premier educational programs, innovative research and extraordinary patient care.

### **People First of Nebraska**

People First of Nebraska is the only statewide disability rights organization in the state run by and for people with all types of disabilities. A statewide board made up of elected officers and representatives from all our affiliated chapters raises funds, provides training and resources to local chapters, and advocates for community inclusion and self-determination for all people with disabilities. Local chapters meet to learn from each other and practice our advocacy skills. We volunteer to give back to our communities. We tell our elected officials what is important to us. We work with our families, our service providers, and other organizations to build the lives we want. People First holds an annual convention each fall, which has been combined with this year's SOAR Conference.





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# Accessibility

## **Sensory Room**

A sensory room is available for attendees who may need a break from the conference. This is a quiet space and attendees are asked to be quiet and respectful. This room is sponsored by People First of Nebraska.

## **Closed Captioning**

Closed captioning will be available during conference sessions through the use of PowerPoint/Google Slides captioning. These captions will appear on the screen during the presentation.

## **Sign Language Interpreters**

Sign language interpretation will be available during the keynote presentations and select breakout sessions.

## **Service Dog Area**

The hotel is pet friendly and there is space outside for service dogs to relieve themselves. During the day, it is suggested to go out the main entrance, as this will be the closest traditional exit from the conference area. Some people may find other doors closer to their rooms. The main check-in desk in the lobby has doggy bags available.



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## **Art and Advocacy**

Art can be a powerful tool to make your voice heard. This year, the SOAR Conference is hosting an interactive art event, with help from the Arts and Advocacy Program at the Munroe-Meyer Institute. Attendees are invited to create an art tile representing themselves, an advocacy issue, or whatever they wish at one of the stations placed around the conference. Tiles will be collected and placed together to show how advocates from around the region come together through art.



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## Exhibitor Tables

**Friday, October 3**

5:00 - 7:30 PM

**Saturday, October 4**

9:00 AM - 6:00 PM

Visit and learn more about the following organizations in the main conference hall.

- Arc of Iowa
- Arc of Nebraska
- Autism Action Partnership
- Autism Learning Collaborative
- Brain Injury Alliance
- Common Coalition
- Common Senses Festival
- Disability Rights Nebraska
- Down Syndrome Alliance
- Goodwill Specialty Services
- Hands of Heartland
- Iowa Council on Developmental Disabilities
- Kansas University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities
- League of Women Voters
- Madonna Ability Alliance
- Missouri University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities
- Mosaic



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- Nebraska Association of Service Providers
  - The Nebraska Table
  - Nebraska University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities
  - Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation
  - Neighborhood Pharmacy
  - Safety Systems Group
  - South Dakota University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities
  - UnitedHealthCare

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## Schedule at a Glance

### Friday, October 3rd

- 4:00 - 7:00 PM: Conference Check-in
- 5:00 - 6:00 PM: People First of Nebraska Board Meeting
- 5:00 - 8:00 PM: Conference Kickoff Event
  - Snacks available beginning at 5:00 PM.
  - Karaoke from 6:00 - 8:00 PM.

Complimentary Hotel Beverages Available from 5:30 - 7:00 PM.\*

### Saturday, October 4th

- 7:30 - 10:30 AM: Hotel Breakfast Available\*
- 9:30 - 10:00 AM: Opening Ceremony
- **10:00 - 11:00 AM: Keynote Speaker 1 - Kendra Gottsleben**
- **11:15 AM - 12:00 PM: Breakout Session 1**
- 12:15 - 1:15 PM: Lunch
- **1:30 - 2:15 PM: Breakout Session 2**
- **2:30 - 3:15 PM: Breakout Session 3**
- **3:30 - 4:15 PM: Breakout Session 4**
- 4:30 - 5:15 PM: Art and Advocacy
- 5:15 - 6:30 PM: Break
- 6:30 - 7:30 PM: Dinner
- 7:30 - 10:00 PM: Dance and Bingo

Complimentary Hotel Beverages Available from 5:30 - 7:00 PM.\*



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## Schedule at a Glance

### Sunday, October 5th

- 7:30 - 10:30 AM: Hotel Breakfast Available\*
- **9:30 - 10:30 AM: Keynote Speaker 2 - Chris Worth**
- 10:30 - 11:00 AM: Closing Comments and Wrap-up

*\*These activities are included for hotel guests.  
Additional vouchers are available for purchase.*



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## Breakout Session Overview

### Saturday, October 4th

#### Breakout Session 1

11:15 AM - 12:00 PM

- **Elkhorn A** - Being Twice Exceptional: How to develop and share your giftedness with your community
- **Elkhorn B/C** - Charting the Life Course: One Page Description Workshop
- **Big Blue A** - Self-Advocacy Focus Group Stories
- **Council Bluffs** - Self-Advocates as Sexual Health Educators: Benefits and Challenges

*(Full details on pages 18-19)*

#### Breakout Session 2

1:30 - 2:15 PM

- **Elkhorn A** - Learning More About Yourself as an Advocate and a Leader
- **Elkhorn B/C** - The Cliff is Real: Late Diagnosed Autistic Adults Speak Out
- **Big Blue A** - Learn about the WeSaid at the UCEDD
- **Council Bluffs** - "You Don't Have to Like Me": Lessons Learned in Effective Self-Advocacy

*(Full details on pages 20-21)*



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## Breakout Session Overview

### Saturday, October 4th

#### Breakout Session 3

2:30 - 3:15 PM

- **Elkhorn A** - Helping Others Achieve their Dreams was the Secret to Achieving my Own
- **Elkhorn B/C** - Advocating for Myself and Others: World Down Syndrome Day
- **Big Blue A** - Supported Decision Making
- **Council Bluffs** - Building Community Connections: Lessons Learned and Benefits Gained
- **Missouri/Platte Ballroom** - Skin: Your Best Defense

*(Full details on pages 22-24)*

#### Breakout Session 4

3:30 - 4:15 PM

- **Elkhorn A** - Advocating For Yourself in Healthcare Settings
- **Elkhorn B/C** - Three Exciting Ways to Get Involved in Your Community: Midwest Opportunities
- **Big Blue A** - How to Turn Negative Interactions to Positive Experiences
- **Council Bluffs** - Dinner Table Syndrome

*(Full details on pages 25-26)*



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## Keynote Speakers

Saturday - Kendra Gottsleben

**Saturday, October 4, 2025**

**10:00 - 11:00 AM**

**Missouri/Platte Ballroom**

*“Life’s Lemonade”*

(ASL Interpretation Provided)

Kendra is a Communication Specialist at the University of South Dakota Center for Disabilities, author, spokesperson on living a life with a rare disease/disability and founder and executive director of Rare by Design. She has defined her life by a positive outlook and success in overcoming obstacles.



Kendra refuses to be defined by Mucopolysaccharidosis (MPS) - the rare genetic condition she has had since birth. She enjoys a stylish outfit and shoes to match as she strives to make a difference. One of her favorite colors is yellow which embodies her life motto: When life hands you lemons, make the BEST lemonade possible!



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## Keynote Speakers

Sunday - Chris Worth

**Sunday, October 5, 2025**

**9:30 - 10:30 AM**

**Missouri/Platte Ballroom**

*“The Development of the Story of Self  
and the Beautiful Risks Involved”*

(ASL Interpretation Provided)

Christopher Robin Judson Worth is an educator, writer, community organizer, researcher, and visual artist. He also serves as both a PhD student and faculty member at the University of Missouri- St. Louis. Chris believes in the transformative power of developing the story of self. Through his work, he’s seen how intentionally shaping one’s personal narrative can lead to deep self-discovery and growth. In his talk, Chris explores how systems can quietly hinder this process—often without individuals realizing it—and offers practical ways to reclaim and strengthen your story over time. He emphasizes that embracing risk is essential to this journey; stepping into the unknown is often where the most profound insights and breakthroughs occur. Chris reminds us that our individual stories are powerful, and together, they form an even more powerful collective history.



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## Detailed Schedule

### Friday, October 3, 2025

4:00 - 7:00 PM: Conference Check-In

5:00 - 6:00 PM: People First of Nebraska Board Meeting

*Big Blue A*

As co-hosts of the conference, People First of Nebraska will be holding their Fall Board Meeting. This meeting is not required for attendees who are not board members, but any People First of Nebraska member is welcome.

5:00 - 8:00 PM: Conference Kickoff Event

*Courtyard/Big Blue A*

Join us for a fun and relaxed kickoff to the conference. Light snacks will be available in the courtyard starting at 5:00, and Karaoke will be held in room Big Blue A from 6:00 to 8:00 PM. This is a great opportunity to meet and get to know other conference attendees. Please note: dinner is not provided by the conference on Friday night.

*Complimentary beverages are offered by Embassy Suites to hotel guests from 5:30 to 7:00 PM. If you are not a hotel guest, you can purchase vouchers at the hotel front desk.*



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## Detailed Schedule

**Saturday, October 4, 2025**

*Hotel Breakfast is available to hotel guests from 7:30 to 10:30 AM. If you are not a hotel guest, you can purchase breakfast vouchers at the hotel front desk.*

9:30 - 10:00 AM: Opening Ceremony  
*Missouri/Platte Ballroom*

 10:00 - 11:00 AM: **Saturday Keynote - Kendra Gottsleben**  
**“Life’s Lemonade”**  
*Missouri/Platte Ballroom*

11:00 - 11:15 AM: Break

11:15 AM - 12:00 PM: Breakout Session 1 *(details on pages 18-19)*

12:00 - 1:30 PM: Lunch Break *(Lunch boxes will be provided.)*

1:30 - 2:15 PM: Breakout Session 2 *(details on pages 20-21)*

2:15 - 2:30 PM: Break

2:30 - 3:15 PM: Breakout Session 3 *(details on pages 22-24)*

3:15 - 3:30 PM: Break

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## Detailed Schedule

### Saturday, October 4, 2025 (continued)

3:30 - 4:15 PM: Breakout Session 4 (*details on pages 25-26*)

4:30 - 5:15 PM: Art and Advocacy

*Missouri/Platte Ballroom*

Return to the main ballroom to listen to a panel of advocates and artists discuss the impact art can have on advocacy. Hear more on how you can use art to express yourself. *This presentation is supported by the Arts and Advocacy program at the Munroe-Meyer Institute.*

5:15 - 6:30 PM: Break

6:30 - 7:30 PM: Dinner

*Missouri/Platte Ballroom*

7:30 - 10:00 PM: SOAR Conference Dance

*Missouri/Platte Ballroom*

Enjoy music by local band *On the Ledge* while you dance with old friends and new. *This event is supported by People First of Nebraska.*



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## Detailed Schedule

### Saturday, October 4, 2025 (continued)

7:30 - 10:00 PM: Bingo

*Elkhorn B/C*

Take a break from dance or have a quieter moment playing bingo and winning fun prizes. *This event is supported by People First of Nebraska.*

### Sunday, October 5, 2025

*Hotel Breakfast is available to hotel guests from 7:30 to 10:30 AM. If you are not a hotel guest, you can purchase breakfast vouchers at the hotel front desk.*



9:30 - 10:30 AM: **Sunday Keynote - Chris Worth**

**“The Development of the Story of Self and the Beautiful Risks Involved”**

*Missouri/Platte Ballroom*

10:30 - 11:00 AM: Closing Comments and Wrap-up

*Missouri/Platte Ballroom*

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## Breakout Session 1 Details

Saturday, October 4, 2025 | 11:15 AM - 12:00 PM

### Elkhorn A

*Being Twice Exceptional: How to develop and share your giftedness with your community*

Aimée Folker, Mary Angus

Einstein is often quoted as saying, “Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it is stupid”. This interactive workshop we will discuss the group’s gifts, how to develop them and how they can benefit our communities.

### Elkhorn B/C

*Charting the Life Course: One Page Description Workshop*

Kathy Rowhedder, Sarah Jennings, Joshua Whitfield, Joshua Swanson

This presentation will introduce attendees to the Charting the Life Course: One Page Description, discuss how it can support people to increase self-advocacy, and show how it can emphasize you, your life, and your choices and needs. Presenters will show an example of a completed template and work with attendees in a guided participation of completing a one-page of their own.



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## Breakout Session 1 Details

Saturday, October 4, 2025 | 11:15 AM - 12:00 PM

### Big Blue A

*Self-Advocate Focus Group Stories*

Ryan Henley, Austin Myers

At the 2024 Self-Advocate Coalition of Kansas (SACK) conference, the presenters led focus groups with conference attendees. This focus group discussed topics such as barriers to self-advocacy, employment, accessibility, healthcare, and independent living. Results showed that people with disabilities are more likely to self-advocate when issues related to personal/health needs, educational supports, and the unwanted actions of others arise. The presenters will share the results of the focus groups. Attendees will be given time to share their own stories and advice. (ASL Interpretation Provided)

### Council Bluffs

*Self-Advocates as Sexual Health Educators: Benefits and Challenges*

Emma Christian, Carly DeBruin, Leanne Gonzalez, Samantha Montemarano, Anne Woodruff Jameson

As a part of a grant project to deliver the Elevatus Sexual Education curriculum to people with I/DD and educators throughout the Omaha metro area, two self-advocates were hired and trained as educators to teach alongside the therapist educators. Presenters will share the benefits and challenges the team found while developing this project. Sharing these experiences could help other projects successfully incorporate the use of self-advocates to disseminate information.

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## **Breakout Session 2 Details**

**Saturday, October 4, 2025 | 1:30 - 2:15 PM**

### **Elkhorn A**

*Learning More About Yourself as an Advocate and a Leader*

Ida Woodden, Mary Angus

In this presentation you will learn what self-advocacy and leadership looks like for people with disabilities and how to develop a leadership timeline that helps you explore your self-advocacy focus. Overall, this presentation aims to see how advocacy and leadership grow to meet the needs of your world. (ASL Interpretation Provided)

### **Elkhorn B/C**

*The Cliff is Real: Late Diagnosed Autistic Adults Speak Out*

Janet Schwartz-Micheaux, Marcia Prideaux

A panel discussion led by members of Autism Action Partnership's self-advocate council and adult services programs explores the experiences, challenges and perspectives of individuals diagnosed with autism as an adult. Learn about panelists' experiences missing out on early interventions and transition planning, and how they navigate services as an adult. Hear what it was like to experience a shift in "identity" and learn self-acceptance, and work through trauma and find belonging after diagnosis.





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## **Breakout Session 2 Details**

**Saturday, October 4, 2025 | 1:30 - 2:15 PM**

### **Big Blue A**

*Learn about the WeSaid at the UCEDD*

Candace Cunningham, Skye Van Landuyt

Learn about the WeSaid at the UCEDD at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institute for Human Development. WeSaid is a Speaker Bureau, Training and Technical Assistance Center for people with lived experience in developmental disabilities. You will hear about “Candace’s Corner” a vodcast series, ‘Take Five with Skye’ vodcast shorts about the human journey, and the WeSaid Academy.

### **Council Bluffs**

*“You Don’t Have to Like Me”: Lessons Learned in Effective Self-Advocacy*

CJ Zimmer, Brad Meurrens

Emerging from CJ Zimmer’s experience advocating for herself as a woman with multiple disabilities and as a mom navigating the public school’s special education system are useful lessons for current advocates – the issues, problems, and pitfalls have not changed. This presentation will give attendees principles and strategies that CJ and Brad have developed to be more effective advocates with special educators, school administrators, and policymakers.



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## **Breakout Session 3 Details**

**Saturday, October 4, 2025 | 2:30 - 3:15 PM**

### **Elkhorn A**

*Helping Others Achieve their Dreams was the Secret to Achieving my Own*

Katie Selby

In this presentation, Katie will take you on a journey through her education and career – a journey that helped her achieve her dreams. Helping others achieve their independence and their dreams is an important part of life's journey.

### **Elkhorn B/C**

*Advocating for Myself and Others: World Down Syndrome Day*

Michelle Broady, Lori Broady

This session will show how to educate students and adults about disability. Michelle has Down Syndrome and has taken advantage of World Down Syndrome Day on March 21st each year to go into school, churches and other establishments to teach others. She provides each person who attends her presentation with a pair of “crazy socks” thanks to a grant from Thrivent Financial.

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## **Breakout Session 3 Details**

**Saturday, October 4, 2025 | 2:30 - 3:15 PM**

### **Big Blue A**

#### *Supported Decision Making*

Phillip McGruder, Shane Lewis, Colin Olenick, Brad Linnenkamp, Aaron Alspach

Supported Decision Making is a way for people to make their own choices with support from people they choose. All people use supported decision making to make decisions. The Self Advocate Coalition of Kansas and the Kansas University Center on Disabilities have been working to increase awareness and talk about the plans of proposing a bill in the future.

### **Council Bluffs**

#### *Building Community Connections: Lessons Learned and Benefits Gained*

Karen Kolb, Brad Meurrens

Even small community connections or conversations can have significant positive impacts for people with disabilities. This presentation will provide the audience with ideas and tools to connect with their community to help prevent or overcome social isolation, enhance or create successful self-advocacy strategies (especially asking for and accepting help), and identify and discuss the mental and physical benefits of self-advocacy and community connections. (ASL Interpretation Provided)

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## **Breakout Session 3 Details**

**Saturday, October 4, 2025 | 2:30 - 3:15 PM**

### **Missouri/Platte Ballroom**

*Skin: Your Best Defense*

The Panhandle Gering/Scottsbluff Chapter of People First

In this football themed presentation, attendees will participate in interactive activities exploring how our skin defends us. Have fun while learning what skin does for our bodies, handwashing, how to take care of a cut and defend your skin from the sun.



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## **Breakout Session 4 Details**

**Saturday, October 4, 2025 | 3:30 - 4:15 PM**

### **Elkhorn A**

*Advocating for Yourself in Healthcare Settings*

Nicole Noblet

Navigating the medical system can be exhausting and frustrating, especially for people with disabilities and those with medical complexities. Learn strategies that you can use to communicate effectively with providers, get your needs met, and talk about your concerns. Understand your rights as a patient, including the specific rights guaranteed by the ADA, and know what you can do if you are unsatisfied with your care.

### **Elkhorn B/C**

*Three Exciting Ways to Get Involved in Your Community: Midwest Opportunities*

Christi Crosby, Melanie Davis

This presentation will highlight three lesser-known opportunities in the Midwest for people with disabilities to create connections, as well as increase their advocacy skills. Opportunities include the Midwest Cerebral Palsy group, People First, and the Self-Advocate Leadership Training program.



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## **Breakout Session 4 Details**

**Saturday, October 4, 2025 | 3:30 - 4:15 PM**

### **Big Blue A**

*How to Turn Negative Interactions to Positive Experiences*

Jennifer James

This presentation will discuss stereotypes people with disabilities experience in the community because of a lack of information and understanding. The panel will offer possible solutions and approaches to make those “teaching moments” a positive experience for everyone involved. The audience will be asked to share their experiences and their advice on how to handle these difficult situations.

### **Council Bluffs**

*Dinner Table Syndrome*

Jeremy Daffern, Sakura Yodogawa-Campbell

Language deprivation is one of many causes of isolation, mental health struggles, addiction, behavioral and developmental issues that have lifelong effects on individuals and families. This presentation will give participants an insight into the struggles within the family and show how to be more inclusive and provide them with resources and support available. (ASL Interpretation Provided)





# 2025 SOAR Sponsors



**Center for Disabilities**



**Thank you to our SOAR  
Advocate Tier Sponsors**

**Iowa Council on  
Developmental Disabilities**

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**IOWA DD Council**

**Preparation, Participation, Power**



# **JFK Partners – University of Colorado – Colorado UCEDD**

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## **JFK Partners**

**UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO  
ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS**

# **Kansas University Center on Disabilities – Kansas UCEDD**

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**KU CENTER ON  
DISABILITIES**

# **University of Nebraska Medical Center – Munroe-Meyer Institute – Nebraska UCEDD**

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## **Nebraska Council on Developmental Disabilities**

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# People First of Nebraska



# The Arc of Iowa



# University of Missouri – Kansas City

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# University of Iowa Health Care – Iowa UCEDD

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**IOWA**  
**HEALTH CARE**

**University of South Dakota –  
Center for Disabilities –  
South Dakota UCEDD**

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UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTH DAKOTA**  
SANFORD SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

**Center for Disabilities**

**Wyoming Institute for Disabilities  
(WIND) – Wyoming UCEDD**

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**Empowered  
By WIND**

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## With Thanks

We would like to thank the following individuals for their assistance in planning the 2025 SOAR Conference.

### Programming Committee

Arlene Poncelet	Dawn Rudolph	Jessica Lamb
Brian Bernard	Duane Krolikowski	Patty Goss
Brooke Lovelace	Erin Phillips	Phillip McGruder
Christine Cook	Hugh Kelly	Renee Harp
Christi Crosby	Ida Woodden	Sakura Yodogawa
Candace Cunningham	Jeffrey Johnson	Sherry Stansberry

### Marketing Committee

Brooke Lovelace	Kendra Gottsleben	Jaclyn Anderson
Hilary Casey	Stephanie Lewis	Skye Van Landuyt
Jennifer Meints	Phillip McGruder	

### Accessibility Committee

Andrew Allen	Jennifer James	Mike Hoenig
David Colling	Kim Davis	Nicole Noblet
Derek Smith	Kristina Meinicke	Sakura Yodogawa
Devin Labbee-Darling	Kyla Mundweiler	Shelby Kappler
Edward Esbeck	Kourtney Krebs	

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## **With Thanks**

### **MMI Leadership Committee**

Alexandra Lane

Maribel Garcia

Nicole Hackendahl

Emily Costello

Mark Shriver

Rachael Serena

Kellie Ellerbusch

Melanie Davis

Kim Falk

Michael Skocz

### **Other thanks to:**

Embassy Suites – Old Market

Heartland Self-Advocacy Resource Network

The Munroe-Meyer Institute

People First of Nebraska

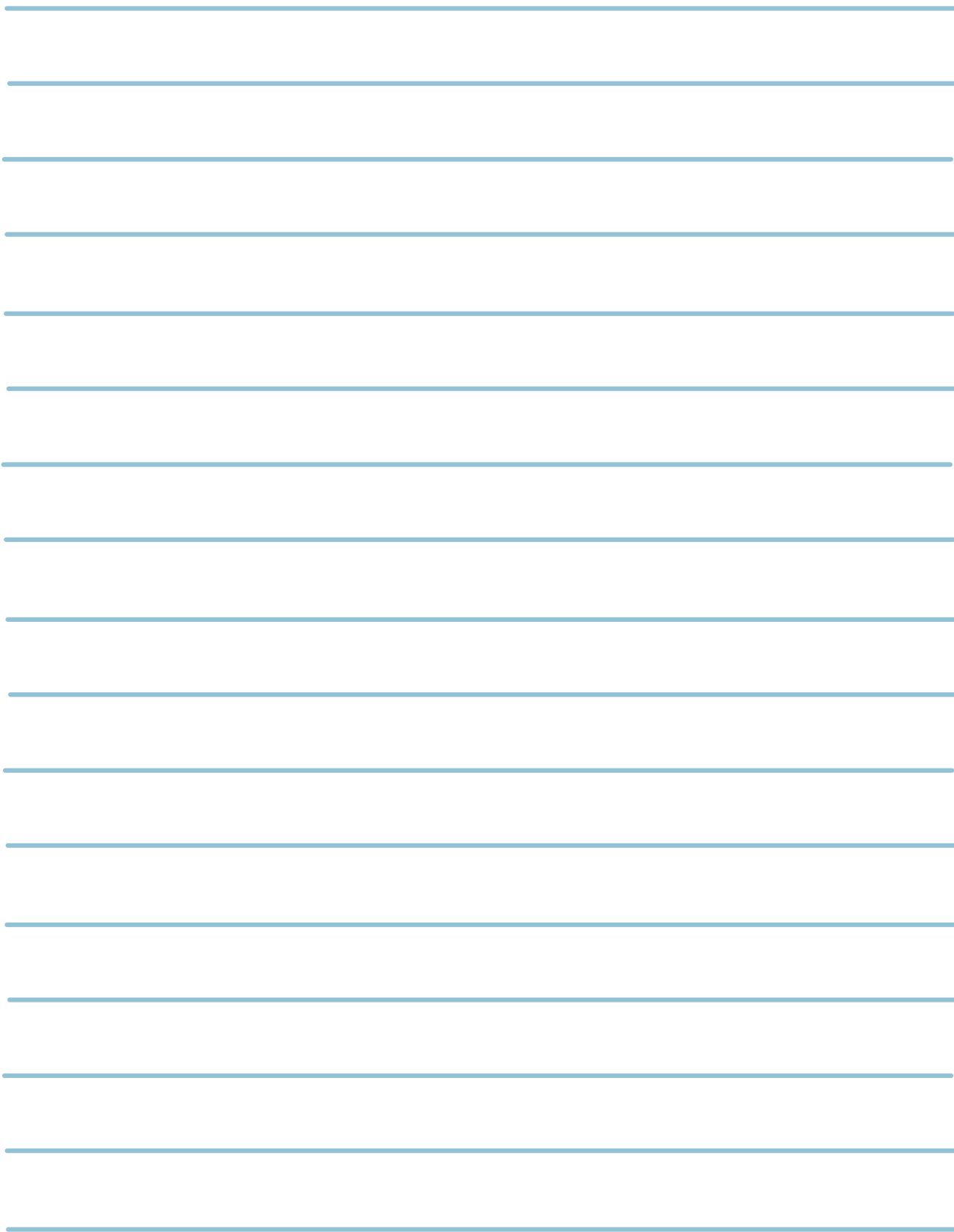
Regional University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities

University of Nebraska Medical Center



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The World Needs Who You Are Meant to Be



UNIVERSITY OF  
**Nebraska**  
Medical Center