

Wednesday, October 8, 2025 Mount Vernon Canyon Club Golden, Colorado

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Becky Miller Updike, PhD



Welcome to Better Together 2025: The CAFCA Annual Conference!

We are honored to have such an incredible line-up of presenters and we know you will appreciate their insights. We extend sincere thanks to all of them for sharing of their time and expertise!

Today we honor our award nominees but we also honor EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU who have chosen to work to lift up and help children, youth, and families. You work is challenging and we know the landscape has many difficulties. Thank you for opting to make a difference every day, even when it doesn't feel like it. CAFCA will continue to work hard to support you all so that you can meet your missions and make real impacts in the lives of so many.

Thank you for your compassion and courage.

It is an honor to work with you all.

Enjoy learning together in this gorgeous place today!

With gratitude and respect,

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Becky Miller Updike, PhD

Executive Director, CAFCA (Colorado Association of Family & Children's Agencies)







CONFERENCE AGENDA







8:00 - 9:00	Breakfast &	Networking
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9:00 - 9:10 Introduction and Welcome - Becky Miller Updike, CAFCA Executive Director

9:15 - 10:15

Keynote Address: Dr. Angela Phariss – University of Oklahoma School of Social Work - The Science of Hope (Introduction by Mindy Kiser, President, Omni Family of Services)

10:30 - 11:45 Screening of *Rebecoming Me: Falling Through Foster Care* - 2025 Emmy-award winning short film (30 mins)

Facilitated discission with stars from film (in person) - "Maximizing Impact of Youth Voice & Lived Experience" facilitated by Lara Smedley, CEO, Better Together Productions; featuring Nyomi Davis, Mitchell DeVito, Jae Allyce, Brittney Barros, Latisha Mead

12:00 - 1:15 Lunch Session (including Awards Presentations & The Ambassador Project)

12:30-12:45- CAFCA Excellence Awards; Legislator of the Year Award (Rep. Lindsay Gilchrist)
12:45-1:15- The Ambassador Project Panel, featuring Shari Shink of Cobbled Streets, Renee Bernhard and Sarah Martin of Be the Source

- 1:30 3:00 Afternoon Sessions 'A' (90 mins. each)
 - 1. Cultivating Resilience for Success Presented by: Jan James, M. Div., LCSW, owner of LevelUP Leadership, LLC

 Today more than ever, leaders and practitioners need resilience to effectively serve children, youth and families in the current high-needs, low-resourced environment. This workshop helps you learn personal lifestyle approaches to help you build more BOUNCE for the journey to keep you energized and thriving!
 - 2. Youth Voice Matters: The Office of the Child's Representative's Lived Experts Action Program and Colorado's Foster Youth Bill of Rights! Presented by Cara Nord, J.D. (Office of the Child's Representative) & Nyomi Davis (Rebecoming Me and 2nd year student law student, CU School of Law)

The Office of the Child's Representative (OCR) created its Lived Experts Action Panel (LEAP) five years ago. During this session, Nyomi Davis (one of LEAP's inaugural members) and Cara Nord (OCR's Youth Empowerment Attorney) will explain why and how OCR created LEAP and some of the many amazing things LEAP has done in the last five years. The last point will segue into a discussion of Colorado's Foster Youth Bill of Rights – an amazing piece of legislation LEAP helped draft, LEAP testified on, and much more - that is providing enforceable rights to children and youth residing in foster care and/or participating in the Foster Youth in Transition Program.

3. Understanding Perspective to Build Community - Senior Judge Regina Walter and Dr. Regina Lewis, Building Bridges
This session is designed to move individuals from intention to action by helping them understand their perspectives and leverage their power to increase fairness and opportunity for all. Attendance at this session will be applied as credit towards fulfilling one of the cultural competency training requirements for the 40-hour Colorado Provider Training Academy.

- 3:15 4:15 Afternoon Sessions 'B' (60 mins. each)
 - 1. Family First and the Prevention Continuum: Myths, Opportunities, and Your Role Presented by Amy Sciangula, LCSW, Prevention and Core Services Administrator, Division of Child Welfare (DCW), Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS); Dr. Courtney Everson, PhD, Senior Project Director, Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab, University of Denver.

This session will discuss how Colorado is re-envisioning prevention for children, youth, and families – and the role of Family First in achieving the vision. The focus will be on debunking myths and identifying opportunities in the Family First strategy, such as the role of the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse and the unique reimbursement model of Colorado. The session will conclude with opportunities for agency providers to help advance Colorado's prevention continuum, including the value and "how to" of building an evidence-based service array.







3:15 - 4:15 2. Apathy to Action: Strategies for Reigniting Hope - Presented by Amy Savage of Omni Family of Services

Centered on utilizing the principles of the Science of Hope to equip caregivers with the tools and strategies needed to support youth in the child welfare system. We will demonstrate adapted evidence-based concepts to teach caregivers methods for fostering hope among youth who may be experiencing apathy and adversity.

Hope is a powerful predictor of well-bring. Hopeful thinking serves as a protective buffer against stress and adversity, making it an essential component in the well-being of youth in out-of-home care. We address working with youth who exhibit apathy. Caregivers will learn to reframe apathy and instill a sense of optimism in youth under their care.

We will empower caregivers with actionable strategies and deepen their understanding of how to engage and support youth experiencing apathy. Through this focus on hope, we aim to contribute meaningfully to the resilience and well-being of youth in the child welfare system.

3. Recruit & Retain Foster Families: FosterMore's Digital Recruitment Campaign Techniques - Presented by Kristin Pratt and Nicole Cadera of FosterMore

Learn how innovative digital advertising strategies can lower cost and recruit foster families faster and more effectively. This session explores the FosterMore Digital Recruitment Campaign's approach to leveraging precision targeting, compelling storytelling, and data-driven techniques to connect potential foster parents with local agencies. Attendees will discover practical tools to streamline recruitment, build community connections, and create impactful campaigns to meet the growing need for foster parents.

4:15 - 5:00

Bubbles on the Balcony! Networking with an incredible view

Networking with champagne, lemonade and other cool beverages

Thanks to our Sponsors!





KEYNOTE SPEAKER







Dr. Angela Pharris



The Science of Hope in Child Welfare & Human Service

Dr. Pharris is an Associate Professor in the Anne & Henry Zarrow School of Social Work at the University of Oklahoma, Director of the Child Welfare Impact Institute, and Senior Researcher at the Hope Research Center. Her research is focused on the application and implementation of hope-centered and trauma-informed practices that impact human service programs. Angela's current research is in child welfare and human service organizations and the application of the hope as a framework for practice. This research informed the development of the "Hope Centered and Trauma Informed" training program. Hope is a psychological strength, a buffer to stress, adversity, and burnout, and a hopeful mindset that improves organizational and individual outcomes.

Immediately following our keynote address...



SPECIAL SCREENING:

'REBECOMING ME'

Special Screening of the Emmy-Award Winning Documentary, "Rebecoming Me: Falling Through Foster Care," produced by Better Together Productions and Cobbled Streets. This special screening will feature a powerful live panel with the inspiring young individuals spotlighted in the film—Nyomi Davis, Mitchell DeVito, Jae Allyce, Brittney Barros, Latisha Mead—joining us in person at the CAFCA conFerence for an unforgettable conversation.

Our panelists will explore powerful ways to elevate lived experience into leadership, transforming personal stories into driving forces for real, lasting systemic change.

BREAKOUT WORKSHOP SESSIONS





90-Minute Sessions | 1:30 pm - 3:00 pm

Cultivating Resilience for Success - Presented by: Jan James, M. Div., LCSW, owner of LevelUP Leadership, LLC

Today more than ever, leaders and practitioners need resilience to effectively serve children, youth and families in the current high-needs, low-resourced environment. This workshop helps you learn personal lifestyle approaches to help you build more BOUNCE for the journey to keep you energized and thriving!

Youth Voice Matters: The Office of the Child's Representative's Lived Experts Action Program and Colorado's Foster Youth

Bill of Rights! - Presented by Cara Nord, J.D.., Office of the Child's Representative & Nyomi Davis, Rebecoming Me and 2nd year student law student, CU School of Law

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| 60-Minute Sessions | 3:15 pm - 4:15 pm

Family First and the Prevention Continuum: Myths, Opportunities, and Your Role - Presented by Amy Sciangula, LCSW,

Prevention and Core Services Administrator, Division of Child Welfare (DCW), Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS); **Dr. Courtney Everson, PhD,** Senior Project Director, Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab, University of Denver.

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EXCELLENCE AWARDS NOMINEES







Administrative Excellence

Jensyn Averly - People Operations Director / Griffith Centers

Nominated by Griffith Centers Leadership Team

"Jensyn is an ultimate team player. Jensyn has been at Griffith for 2 years, she fits perfectly and it feels like she's always been here. Jensyn is always supporting staff, the clients, and has a strong focus and desire to always be improving the culture. She strives for excellence and is a steadfast worker ensuring that the job gets done and done with excellence. With a focus on culture, client services and retention she continues to make waves of impact with her work."

Lauren Campbell - Chief Programs Officer for Clinical and Compliance | Griffith Centers

Nominated by Terah Sauer

"Lauren's hard work, unwavering dedication, and boundless compassion make them an exemplary candidate. Her advocacy and deep knowledge are evident in their daily work. Lauren has demonstrated remarkable adaptability, resilience, and commitment to staying updated is truly commendable. Proactively seeks out answers through their extensive network of resources and community relationships and embodies the qualities of a true leader."

Dr. Alexis Fratus - Clinical Therapist / Southern Peaks

Nominated by Angel Medina

"Dr. Fratus ensures that all documentation is completed within compliance standards. She helps to audit and ensure completion of administrative related clinical duties for the clinical team and seeks ways in which she can be helpful. She goes above and beyond to ensure she is openly and effectively communicating with external teams and ensuring not only quality of care but excellent customer service. She turns long stressful days into happy moments for our youth and staff."

Dave Koehler - Asst. Exec. Dir., / Third Way Center

Nominated by Amy Thomas

"Since Dave joined TWC ten years ago, he has made significant contributions to the agency in financial stability and prosperity as well as in leadership and culture. He leads with an open mind and is able to listen to challenges and thinks creatively to meet the needs of the agency, staff and youth. He wears many hats and has a full schedule although he will still take time to catch up and laugh with his co-workers and admin team which creates a safe and enjoyable work environment. Thanks Dave!"

Don Mainard - Clinical Therapist / Southern Peaks

Nominated by Angel Medina

"Don puts in long hours, communicates well with direct care staff, clinicians, case managers and is willing to step up to help in any way that he can. He has stepped in as a team player covering clinical on call, helping when other clinicians are out with seeing youth, responding to crisis with youth and ensuring that our youth are getting the best care he can offer. He is always willing to step up and help with any role that is needed. "

Brianna O'Dell - Administrative Assistant / Southern Peaks

Nominated by Angel Medina

"Brianna's dedication to staff and youth is unwavering. She tirelessly supports HR, staff retention, and admin duties with a direct care lens. Her heart shines through every effort to uplift SPRTC. After surviving a serious assault, she chose to return rather than retire—an inspiring testament to her resilience, compassion, and commitment to the mission."

Excellence in Education

Brooke Houtchens - Principal/Assistant Director of Education | Denver Children's Home - Bansbach Academy

Nominated by Jennifer Gutierrez

"Brooke is an amazing leader for the education team and the entire agency at Denver Children's Home. She always puts students first and supports our teachers in providing services that match the needs of individual students. Brooke is a leader with our daytime team and support the needs of all staff. Her dedication and knowledge of the needs of the agency and students is an asset to our program. Brooke has recently completed her Master's degree in Special Ed. as well as her director license."

Djuana Osby - Special Education Director and Principal | Tennyson Center

Nominated by Vanessa Ross

"Djuana has been a staple of the Tennyson Center community for the past 35 years! She has had many roles within the organization, and we cherish her enthusiasm and commitment to the care and wellbeing of both her staff and the children, adolescents and families we support. Djuana welcomes each day with a smile and positive attitude. She is creative, innovative and flexible! We appreciate all that Djuana does for our Tennyson community!"

Erin Swaim - Principal and Director of Education / Griffith Centers

Nominated by Griffith Centers Leadership Team and Lori McClurg

"Erin is not only a principal at her school, she is a mentor, coach & support for others. The students have always been her priority, ensuring that they continue to receive quality education while in a day treatment setting. Erin dedicates time, energy & enthusiasm to her staff & students. She is well versed in all areas of education & has made remarkable difference in the status of the program. Erin has faced challenges that others would tackle, she has remained consistent & resiliant and passionate."

Jeanette Williams - Teacher / Southern Peaks

Nominated by Angel Medina

"Jeanette provides exceptional, individualized math instruction in a multi-grade setting. She skillfully engages youth, optimizes small group learning, and delivers targeted lessons with meticulous planning. Her dedication and professionalism set a high standard for staff and make her an exemplary educator."

COMMUNITY
PARTNER
EXCELLENCE
AWARD

Dr. Kathleen Von Voorhis | Community Investment Alliance

Dr. Kathleen Von Voorhis has held a variety of leadership roles in emergency sheltering, service design, delivery coordination, and coalition building before founding Community Investment Alliance, which partners with local communities to develop housing solutions across the continuum, create culturally appropriate services programming, and increase food access through strategic, community-led initiatives. She has been a strong supporter of CAFCA and our member agencies, and is a dedicated partner for legislative and policy reform that will benefit the children and families of Colorado.



Excellence in Direct Residential Care

Garrin Desmond - Residential Youth Treatment Counselor / Denver Children's Home

Nominated by Rikki Salas

"Garrin has shown excellence, effectiveness and leadership at DCH on the residential floor in many ways. When times were difficult, Garrin was flexible with moving dorms and his schedule to assist other staff in other dorms. Since moving dorms, Garrin has quickly trained many staff to feel comfortable on the floor and their capabilities. Garrin has also established a good foundation and relationship with the clients in the building."

Reese Dominguez - Mental Health Worker (MHW) / Southern Peaks

Nominated by Angel Medina

"We proudly nominate Reese Dominguez for the CAFCA Excellence in Direct Residential Care Award. Reese exemplifies compassion, professionalism, and trauma-informed care. He created a youth-driven incentive system, leads transformative interventions, and was selected as a Safe Crisis Management instructor. His dedication, leadership, and commitment to growth elevate both youth outcomes and team culture."

Elizabeth Hesslink - Team Leader / Southern Peaks

Nominated by Angel Medina

"Elizabeth is a standout in our operations team. Her positivity, creativity, and tireless work ethic uplift everyone around her. She consistently seeks ways to improve services for youth and played a key role in bringing the Toys for Tots program to SPRTC—an inspiring example of community impact that directly benefits the kids we serve."

Alex Hurst - Program Supervisor / Southern Peaks

Nominated by Angel Medina

"We proudly nominate Alex Hurst for recognition at the 2025 CAFCA Conference. Alex is a visionary, empathic leader whose unwavering dedication to youth at Southern Peaks is both transformative and inspiring. Her exemplary professionalism, tenacious work ethic, and heart-centered approach embody CAFCA's mission. Alex's catalytic impact empowers healing and hope—she is deeply deserving of this honor."

Jared Mathis - Mental Health Worker / Southern Peaks

Nominated by Angel Medina

"Jared Mathis is nominated for Team Excellence for his unwavering reliability, flexibility, and professionalism. He frequently covers last-minute overnight shifts, supports critical staffing needs, and sets a positive example for staff and youth. His strong work ethic and dedication to team success make him an invaluable asset and a standout candidate for this award."

Elizabeth Meissner - Referral and Intake Coordinator | Shiloh House

Nominated by Daniel Venman

"Elizabeth is nothing short of a consummate professional that provides an essential level of empathy and capacity for families and youth in crisis. She consistently serves as the first individual that families and professionals interact with when they need advice and placement for youth in need. She is one of the most respectful, committed, compassionate, and driven professionals that I have ever had the honor of working with. Elizabeth truly exemplifies excellence in every aspect of her conduct."

Nikki Schweinhardt, LPC - Residential Director / Griffith Centers

Nominated by Griffith Centers Leadership Team

"Nikki has grown up at GC, starting in direct care, increasing her passion for the clients and now overseeing the program. She has incredible passion and dedication to the clients that we serv, striving to give them safety, hope and finding success back in the community. Nikki has worked tirelessly to improve programs to be trauma informed and client centered, increasing family engagement and community engagement."

Joel Spurlock - Program Supervisor / Southern Peaks

Nominated by Angel Medina

"We proudly nominate Joel Spurlock for recognition at this year's CAFCA Conference. His unwavering dedication to youth, staff, and the mission of Southern Peaks reflects the heart of trauma-informed care. Joel's quiet leadership, empathy, and consistent support make him a trusted role model and a stabilizing force. His impact reaches beyond daily duties—he helps shape brighter futures. Joel exemplifies CAFCA's values and is deeply deserving of this honor."

Team Excellence

Tennyson Center's Day Treatment Clinical Team - Hannah Lanman (Clinical Supervisor), Amber Dugan (Clinician), Ashley Hayes-Emory (Clinician), Makensie Owens (Clinician), Stephanie Zehntner (Clinician), Theresa Pergola (Clinician) Nominated by Vanessa Ross and Leah Spraque

"The Day Treatment Clinical team exemplify what it means to be a therapist and advocate for the most vulnerable children and adolescents. Their experience and commitment to Tennyson is evident, even on their worst days, as they each show up, prepared to hold space for their clients and families, as well as for staff. They make the job look easy, when in reality, they are all simply exceptional at what they do."

Excellence in Community-Based Services

Laura Arisohn - PASA Director / Griffith Centers

Nominated by Griffith Centers Leadership Team

"Laura is more dedicated to the mission, the program members and the program providers than anyone around. She treats the program & members as if they are family, going above and beyond to provide excellent services and meeting the needs of each individual. Laura and her team work together in a seamless way to support each other as well as the program. Her vision has continued to expand the services offered as well as service locations to meet the needs of the community. She also brings fun, laughter and the spirit of competition!"

Renee Bernhard - Co-Founder | Be The Source

Nominated by John Carl Guthrie

"Renee Bernhard consistently advocates for and helps provide services for children in care, kinship families, and foster families. The organization as a whole reflects her dedication and effort, providing comprehensive services and programming throughout the state. The staff and volunteers are unfailingly hardworking and compassionate. Their events feel like safe spaces, filled with people who truly understand. They are effective at rallying the foster/kinship community to help families in need."

Kaleo George - Family Support Practitioner / Raise the Future

Nominated by Haley Sinn

"Kaleo George exemplifies the very best in family support. She lives TBRI daily—authentic, caring, and nonjudgmental—meeting families with patience and hope. She was instrumental in launching our High Acuity Pilot Program, supporting children with big behaviors and families with deep trauma. Kaleo goes beyond teaching, ensuring families have tools, services, and fierce advocacy. She inspires trust, uplifts colleagues, and models true excellence in this work."

Laurel Henry - SafeCare Program Director | Family Tree

Nominated by April Lopez Juillard

"Laurel Henry has been an integral part of the Community-Based Service team within Family Tree's SafeCare program for 10 years. I have witnessed her exceptional leadership, unwavering dedication, and significant impact on our community and those experiencing tremendous hardships as they navigate parenting while working toward a safe and stable household. Laurel's leadership is defined by her ability to inspire action and build consensus."

Claire Johnston - Contract Home Study Supervisor / A New World Child Placement Agency

Nominated by Angela Chambers

"Claire oversees our home study process as a home study supervisor. She ensures all home studies are completed according to standards, works with home study writers to ensure thoroughness and accuracy, and communicates with all members of the organization to provide updates, status, and any concerns that may have arisen. Claire is professional, detail oriented, and thorough with her communication. She provides resources to better skills and hops in to help when assistance is needed."

Lisa Kreutzer-Lay - Intake and Training Coordinator | Cornerstone Programs Community Counseling Services Nominated by Lisa Webster

"Lisa shows excellence through genuine compassion, steady professionalism, and unwavering dedication. They go above and beyond to support others, offering care and understanding that make people feel valued and safe. Their leadership shines in everyday actions—listening, guiding, and inspiring trust. By modeling empathy and commitment, they create meaningful impact and set a heartfelt example for all around them."



LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

Rep. Lindsay Gilchrist

Rep. Lindsay Gilchrist (D-Denver) has been a member of the Colorado House of Representatives since January of 2025. But during that short period of time, she has become a respected champion for kids and families as part of her efforts to reform our broken child welfare system. She has proven herself to be a leader and a proponent of the kind of change that will benefit the lives of countless children and families throughout Colorado. We are honored to present her with the 2025 CAFCA Legislator of the Year Award. Thank you, Rep. Gilchrist, for all you do on behalf of Colorado's kids and families.







Jan James, M. Div., LCSW,
Owner of LevelUP Leadership, LLC



Dr. Regina Lewis,

Building Bridges; Professor, Pikes Peak

State College; Keynote Speaker; Strategic

Executive Coach; Facilitator



Cara Nord, J.D.,
Office of the Child's Representative



Amy Sciangula, LCSW,

Prevention and Core Services Administrator,

Division of Child Welfare (DCW), Colorado

Department of Human Services (CDHS)



Nyomi Davis, *Rebecoming Me and 2nd year law student, CU School of Law*



Dr. Courtney Everson, PhD, Senior Project Director, Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab, University of Denver.



Regina Walter, Senior Judge; Founder, Educating Children of Color



Nicole Cadena, FosterMore



Kristen Pratt, FosterMore



Amy Savage, Hope Ambassador, Omni Family Institute

Thank you to all of our workshop presenters for sharing their knowledge and expertise as part of Better Together 2025: The CAFCA Annual Conference.

CAFCA MEMBER AGENCIES







Alternative Homes for Youth - Greeley, CO

Cobbled Streets - Wheat Ridge, CO

Cornerstone Programs - Greenwood Village, CO

Denver Children's Home - Denver, CO

Firefly Autism - Lakewood, CO

Fostering Colorado (Partner Association) - Colorado Springs, CO

Gateway Residential Services - Delta, CO

Griffith Centers for Children - Colorado Springs, CO

Justice Works - Denver, CO

Laradon - Denver, CO

Mile High Behavioral Health Care - Denver, CO

Mount Saint Vincent Home - Denver, CO

PSI Cedar Springs - Colorado Springs, CO

Raise the Future - Denver, CO

Rite of Passage - Denver, CO

Savio - Denver, CO

Shiloh House - Littleton, CO

Southern Peaks Regional Treatment Center - Canon City, CO

Tennyson Center for Children - Denver, CO

Third Way Center - Denver, CO

Advantages of CAFCA Membership

For 44 years, CAFCA has been the alliance of agencies committed to providing quality care, leadership and accountability in services to children, youth and families in Colorado. Member agencies represent a broad continuum of trauma-informed services for child welfare, juvenile justice, homeless youth, education, behavioral and mental health, residential care, foster care, placement stability and related services for children, youth and families who have experienced trauma, instability, risk and adversity as well as individuals who are struggling with behavioral challenges such as autism spectrum disorder.

CAFCA membership is affordable and offers a wide variety of benefits. If you'd like to consider a CAFCA membership for your organization, please contact Becky Miller Updike at 720.560.3810 or by email at becky@voiceforcokids.org.

CAFCA works in Formal Partnership with Fostering Colorado, representing:

A New World Child Placement Agency, Adoption Options, Ariel Clinical Services, Bethany, Bridges Child Placement Agency, Commonworks–Synthesis, Commonworks-Whimspire, Dungarvin LLC, Griffith Centers, Hope's Promise, Kids Crossing, Lutheran Family Services, MapleStar, Mount Saint Vincent Foster Care Program, Nightlight Christian Adoptions, Parker Personal Care Homes, Quality Life Services, LLC, SAFY of CO, Sample Supports, Savio, Special Kids Special Families

For more information: www.fosteringcolorado.com

FOSTERING COLORADO CAFCA is a non-profit membership association founded in 1980. CAFCA is an active member of Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) and National Association of State Associations for Children (NOSAC).

CAFCA Member Agencies:

Alternative Homes for Youth | PSI Cedar Springs Hospital, Inc. | Denver Children's Home | Family Tree | Griffith Centers for Children Laradon | Mt. St. Vincent Home | Rite of Passage | Savio | Shiloh House | Tennyson Center for Children | Southern Peaks Regional Treatment Center | Third Way Center | Justice Works | Jefferson Hills | Cornerstone Programs | Cobbled Streets | Raise the Future | Brad's House

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Bethany | Bridges Child Placement Agency | Commonworks-Synthesis
Commonworks-Whimspire | Dungarvin LLC | Griffith Centers | Hope's Promise
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