

NATIONAL JUDICIAL LEADERSHIP SUMMIT IV ON CHILD WELFARE

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Constituent Consultants

FosterClub



Zoe Jones-Walton, Texas

She/Her/Hers

Zoe entered the foster care system at 13 years old with one of her brothers, due to physical and sexual abuse. Being placed in foster care prevented Zoe from seeing her 6 other siblings. Going into her second placement, her and her brother were separated. After four years in care, she aged out at 18 and is working on rebuilding the relationships with her biological family. Zoe graduated Cedar Hill High School in the top 25% of her class. She has attended many conferences and seminars that advocate and empower foster youth. She was awarded the PAL Region 03's Shining Star in 2016. Zoe is a student at Sam Houston State University, majoring in Criminal Justice and pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree. Zoe is a member of the criminal justice academic fraternity, Lambda Alpha Epsilon, on her campus. She plans to become a criminal attorney to bring justice to those who are wronged. She plans to share her knowledge and continue to advocate for foster youth. Zoe believes that her circumstances in the past do not define her story; it was merely just a chapter in her book. Zoe likes to listen to music, read and be spontaneous.

Court Experience: I had an excellent court experience while in foster care. I felt like my opinion mattered and that my voice was being heard. My attorney always showed her interest in me by coming by to chat regularly and inviting me out to dinner. I was very aware of what was happening with my case. My caseworker would ask me if I wanted to attend my court hearings and kept me updated if I couldn't attend. My judge also took it upon herself to actually meet me and made sure I was okay whenever I would attend. I believe my attorney, judge and caseworker were trauma informed. They were always careful with the questions they would ask and made sure I was comfortable. I still maintain a close relationship with my attorney and caseworker.



Melissa Gutierrez, California

She/Her/Hers

Melissa has dedicated her life and career to empowering foster youth. Years of instability growing up in foster care and bouncing from home to home sparked her passion to reform the child welfare system. After 'aging out' of the system, Melissa started collaborating with advocacy groups to empower and lift up the voices of current and former foster youth. Melissa graduated from San Diego State University in 2014 on the Dean's List with a double major in Psychology and Sociology and a minor in social work.

Melissa's first speaking engagement was at the age of 18 as a Youth Ambassador for the Temecula Foster Youth Task Force. To date, she has conducted hundreds of trainings and

presentations to foster parents, social workers, legal counsel, school staff, volunteers and community partners. Her advocacy efforts have included collaboration with FosterClub, Casey Family Programs, the National Foster Youth Institute, Foster Youth in Action, Foster Care Alumni of America and numerous local agencies. Melissa is a member of the National Foster Care Youth & Alumni Policy Council. In 2017, she met with Commissioner Jerry Milner to lift up key priority issues voiced by foster youth. Melissa currently works as an Educational Liaison for foster youth in San Diego County. Melissa believes education is the great equalizer. In the future, she plans to pursue a Master's degree so that she can take her advocacy to the next level.

Generations United



Robyn Wind **Kinship Parent - Oklahoma**

Robyn Wind knows how important it is to keep children with family. She works in American Indian child welfare and has seen too many children separated from important family connections in her community. She herself resolved not to let that happen to her own grandson, Maddox, who was abused and neglected by a family placed with Robyn when he was three months old.

Working in child welfare, Robyn knew the importance of financial support in providing the best possible care for Maddox. She became Maddox's foster mother before pursuing guardianship. She also received Medicaid and child care assistance as a foster parent. Those services stopped when she received an unsupported guardianship. Robyn wishes that she had had more access to support groups in her area and that the judiciary and case workers could be more educated in American Indian child welfare and the effects of historical trauma. Maddox has returned to live with his birth parents, but Robyn continues to provide regular care and support to him.

Robyn has worked in child welfare for over a decade as a caseworker for Muscogee Creek Children and Family Services and for Cherokee National Indian Child Welfare. She participates in multiple tribal and state collaborations and is the chair of the Oklahoma Indian Child Welfare Association's Substitute Care Subcommittee.

National Alliance



Teresa Nord **Birth Parent – Minnesota**

Teresa Nord is a mother of two children and she has lineage with the Navajo and Hopi Tribes. She is also a Parent Mentor at the ICWA Law Center with the Indian Advocacy Team in Minnesota. She works with Indian families who currently have open child protection cases. As a Parent Mentor she helps Native families to navigate their case plans in such a way that they can be more successful in reunification with their children. Teresa is unique to the position because she has lived experience. She is a Native woman in recovery who at one time had an open child protection case. At that time, she struggled greatly with her addiction to heroin and mental health issues. She also had a drug charge that led to her stay at the woman's correctional facility. During the time she was involved with child protective services, Teresa's lineage to the Navajo and Hopi Nations was overlooked so her case did not go through the ICWA Child Welfare System. She was not given the services and extended timeline so she was forced to sign a Transfer of Legal Custody. She was deeply affected when

the custody of her daughter was awarded to the child's father who also had a substance abuse issue.

Following her release from the correctional facility, she has been able to successfully rebuild her life. Today, she has over four years of sobriety. She courageously took on the challenge of representing herself and petitioning the courts to regain custody of her daughter. She was successful in reversing that finding and she is the mother of two beautiful girls, ages 11 and one year of age.

Teresa is very determined and passionate about working with the many families who are experiencing the same struggles as she once did. In addition to working as a parent mentor she is also an emergent leader for the National Council of Juvenile and Family Judges. She continues to advocate for families as she works to bridge the gap of domestic and sexual violence and the child welfare system. Teresa is a liaison for the American Indian Prison Project Working Group. As one of her many passions, she strives to continue her work of healing with the native women who are incarcerated and have been released. She currently facilitates a post release talking circle for women who are in need of mentorship in their re-entry back in to society. Her future plans are to bring a Native specific parenting cohort in to Minnesota Correctional Facility-Shakopee as a way to bring healing and education to the mothers who strive to be mothers.

Teresa as been able to overcome many obstacles despite her addictions, child protection involvement and issues with poverty. She is active with the Native WellBriety recovery group, and Community Sweats and Cedar Healing which are both Native healing ceremonies. She is excited and willing to share her story as a way to help others understand the importance of family preservation and the extreme need for systematic change. She is also a member of the Birth Parent National Network (BPNN).



Shrounda Selivanoff
Birth Parent - Washington

Shrounda Selivanoff is a strong and passionate advocate for parents involved with the child welfare system. She, herself, was previously involved with the system due to a severe drug and alcohol addiction that lasted about 8 years. In 2007, when she gave birth to her third child, child protective services got involved and removed her daughter from her.

Shrounda was able to successfully turn her life around and she reunified with her daughter 10 years ago. She shared that changing her life took years of hard work that continued after she reunited with her daughter. But her daughter gave her a reason to follow that path. "I feel joy in my heart for her," she said. "I feel proud of the woman that I've become. I feel proud to be her mother." It's something she tells her daughter whenever she can.

Shrounda has extensive work experience with the King County Parents for Parents Program, Children's Home Society of Washington State, and also other programs such as the Perinatal Treatment Services and the University of Washington Fetal Alcohol and Drug Unit, Parent-Child Assistance Program.

Currently, Shrounda is contracted as a Social Services Worker with the Washington State Office of Public Defense's Parent Representation Program in King County. She is also a member of the Washington State Parent Ally Committee, a founding member of the Birth

Parent National Network, and a committee member of the Washington State Racial Disproportionality Advisory Committee.

Shrounda indicated that while involved with the child welfare system with her own family a number of years ago, she had a very limited understanding of the court system. She explained that she would have liked it to be more of a partnership with the attorney and the child welfare system working together with her to provide her with guidance to navigate the system and help her with the reunification process. Instead, she felt as though it was more focused on “what was wrong with her” and being told “here is what you are going to do.” She further stated that the court involvement was most impactful for her at the end of the case when she recalls that the judge highlighted all of the progress that she had made in order for her to reunify with her family.

She also added that through her experiences as a Parent Ally with the King County Parent for Parent Program, she was able to provide peer support, and hope to parents. She spoke very highly about a specialized class, Dependency 101, which offers parents information about how to navigate the dependency system, empowers them with tools to be successful in their case plan and also provides them with resources to help them understand and support the needs of their children.



Robyn Robbins
Resource Parent - California

Robyn Robbins and her family have fostered and supported more than 40 children and families involved with the child welfare system over the last 15 years in Sonoma County California. Currently she serves as a foster family trainer, parent mentor and is part of the National Birth and Foster Parent Partnership.

In the role of family support advocate, her most passionate work is being part of the Sonoma County Birth and Foster Parent Partnership, a team effort co-founded with her partner and parent mentor Jody Rodgers. Together they have launched a pilot project in which a birth parent mentor and a foster parent partner together and utilize their combined expertise and mentorship skills to wrap supports around birth families to help them reunite as quickly as possible. This unique and innovative model was highlighted at the recent Birth and Foster Parent Partnership Convening hosted by the National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds, Youth Law Center, Quality Parenting Initiative and Casey Family Programs.

Robyn Robbins and Jody Rodgers were also featured in a Casey Family Programs’ Issue Brief on Supportive Communities entitled *How Can Birth and Foster Parent Partnerships Help Families Reunify?* (November 2018) <https://www.casey.org/birth-foster-parent-partnership/>

Together they have helped to create a framework for relationship building and support for local families utilizing the values of teamwork, equity, community engagement and prevention strategies. Robyn has presented on numerous occasions to parents, families, child welfare and other community agencies about the importance of building strong partnerships between everyone involved in the lives of children.