

2025 RSA Annual Conference

Strengthening Safety Within Our Communities: A Bio-Psycho-Social Approach to Wellbeing

October 23, 2025 | 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

9:00 AM - 9:30 AM

Welcome & Award of Excellence

Jason Young

Director, Regional Support Associates

(he/him/his)

9:30 AM - 12:00 PM

(break at 10:30 AM)

Embracing Neuroaffirming Practices: Reflection, Respect, and Responsibility in Supporting Neurodiversity

Alisha Stubbs (she/her)

This engaging and interactive presentation will explore how Neuroaffirming principles can enhance safety and dignity in support settings. Divided into two sessions, the first will focus on deepening participants' understanding of neurodiversity, challenging biases, and reflecting on how traditional approaches can be framed in inclusive ways and positively impact the experience of neurodiverse individuals. The second session will provide practical strategies for creating respectful, affirming environments that align with principles of dignity, choice, and inclusion. Attendees will be engaged to share their own insights and expertise and will leave with actionable insights to support their work in fostering spaces where neurodivergent individuals feel seen, heard, and valued.

1:00 PM - 4:00 PM

(break at 2:30 PM)

Sexual Behaviour Across the Lifespan: Understanding and Supporting

Landa Fox (she/her)

This session will outline sexual behaviours and knowledge that all people experience across the lifespan. We will examine historical and current perspectives on disability and sexuality and how these impact care and service provision. We will also explore several key skill areas that are essential to safe and healthy sexual health and sexual expression. It will also include a brief review of the assessment of sexual behaviours to determine if they are inappropriate and, if this determination is made, how to move toward providing appropriate support to clients. Common barriers to sexual health support for adult clients, along with potential solutions will also be reviewed.

People Living their best lives in the communities they call home

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9:00 AM - 10:30 AM

Healing and Thriving: Psychological Support for Individuals with IDD

Karyn Harvey

This webinar will explore effective strategies for supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in their journey of healing from past trauma, thriving in the present, and preparing for a successful future. Key topics will include building resilience, fostering positive identity development, and promoting overall well-being. The session will emphasize the importance of targeted support in enhancing resiliency and facilitating post-traumatic recovery. A positive identity framework will be introduced as a key component of resilience-building. Participants will gain practical tools and resources, along with the opportunity to review case studies that highlight successful approaches.

10:45 AM - 12:00 PM

Perspective on Health Care from the Voices of Lived Experience

Nicole Flynn, Theresa Somerton and Yvonne Spicer

Through a panel discussion of five questions the panelist will tell the story of their healthcare experiences. The questions will reflect on the way challenges, frustrations, assumptions and barriers affect the health care of people. Suggestions and strategies will be presented for achieving health care goals and eliminating barriers.

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1:00 PM – 2:30 PM

Beyond the Binary, Beyond the Barriers: An Introduction to Gender Identity and Expression

Eliot Newton (they/them)

How many genders are there? How new is trans identity? What do these buzzwords around gender really mean? For many people, talking about gender is confusing, counter-intuitive, and socially charged. "What is Gender Made Of?" is a friendly introduction to the concept of gender identity and the context in which we can use this knowledge to support the needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Bringing together the threads of theory, research, and lived experience, this introductory session will give you the base terminology and confidence to engage with big ideas around gender, as well as make connections to practical applications of this knowledge. Using interactive slides, reflection questions, and humour, together we will go beyond binary ideas and begin to answer the complex question of how to make a safer world for queer and trans people.

Following this sessions, participants will be able to:

- Recognize and articulate the nuances between gender identity and gender expression
- Evaluate barriers to access for trans people with and without I/DD as identified in recent research and lived experience
- Identify practical first steps to increase support and access for trans people

Participants will also be encouraged to reflect on their own identity as it relates to gender, and develop greater empathy for gender diverse people of all ages.

2:45 PM - 4:00 PM

To be announced

Presenters Bio's

Alisha Stubbs (she/her)

Alisha is a social worker and researcher with nearly 20 years of experience in various sectors across southwestern Ontario and British Columbia. Currently living on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Sinixt, Sylix, and Ktunaxa People, Alisha's work spans schools, family engagement in research with McMaster's Team of Pediatrics, post-secondary teaching, and non-profit leadership. She is the Executive Director of an early years non-profit in BC and oversees a private practice offering neuroaffirming counseling across Canada (www.bewellcounselling.org).

Her work, grounded in the social model of disability, focuses on how systemic ableism creates barriers for individuals and communities. Alisha supports organizations, therapists, and youth workers in creating structures that promote well-being in high-stress environments. Her research specifically explores the role of school social workers in supporting autistic students, drawing on her expertise in social work, education, and neurodiversity advocacy.

Alisha's approach is shaped by critical reflection, curiosity, and a belief that mistakes are opportunities for growth. She brings a personal connection to her work, being a parent to an autistic child and navigating her own neurodiversity, which enriches her perspective on the systems affecting people's lives.

Landa Fox (she/her)

Landa Fox is a BCBA, Registered Behaviour Analyst (RBA, Ont.) and Certified Sexual Health Educator living and working in Lekwungen Territory (now called Victoria, British Columbia, Canada). She is also completing a Masters in Counselling Psychology. She has formed a practice by merging her interests of teaching fundamental skills to people of various ages and abilities with teaching sexual health, safety, and relationship education. She believes that access to inclusive, accessible, and accurate sexual health education is a fundamental human right that should be afforded to all. Areas of passion include individualized teaching of sexual health and safety education, teaching content and body autonomy, and access to pleasure for all.

Karen Harvey

Karyn Harvey has worked as a clinician in the field of intellectual disabilities for over 35 years. She has her Ph.D. in Applied Developmental Psychology from the University of Maryland. She has written three books: Positive Identity Development, Trauma-Informed Behavioral Interventions, and Trauma and Healing, as well as several chapters in various publications and a variety of articles. She currently has a private practice and does therapy with people with intellectual disabilities. In addition, she regularly conducts training on trauma-informed support for people with IDD, trauma-informed leadership, and trauma-informed behavioral interventions for both state and individual organizations throughout the US and Canada. She has trained numerous trainers throughout the United States and Canada in conducting trauma-informed support training. In the last several years she has received awards for her clinical service from NADD, START, and AAIDD.

Presenters Bio's

Nicole Flynn

Nicole Flynn is a graduate of the Loyalist College general arts and science program. Nicole has taken advantage of many opportunities in life, and these have led to experiences that have shaped who she is. Nicole is the author of A Life Worth Living and Nicole Flynn Enterprises CEO. Nicole presents interactive workshops and seminars on topics such as Diversity, Equity, Access-ability, IN-clusion, and Allyship.

Theresa Somerton

Theresa Somerton is a woman of many talents, from baking cheese croissants to cutting hair. Theresa is an active advocate for the rights of persons with disability. She is involved in various committees and is a power to behold. Theresa offers insight to the world from a person who has several challenges and lives an active and meaningful life.

Yvonne Spicer

Yvonne Spicer is a tireless advocate for disability rights. Yvonne actively participates on various committees at the local, provincial and federal level. Yvonne is the author of My Life, My Choice, My Future. Currently, Yvonne is developing her own business centered around educating the public about disability and assisting people to live their best possible life by making their own decisions.

Eliot Newton (they/them)

Eliot Newton is a genderqueer activist and educator who has been working in the 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion field for more than ten years. Currently, they freelance as a consultant on queer and trans inclusion through their website, Genderbandit.com. Eliot worked for six years at the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity (CCGSD) in a variety of roles, culminating in the design and implementation of a 1.1-million dollar sexuality education project entitled 'Not Just the Tip'. They also worked for several years as a clinical educator with Rainbow Health Ontario, teaching health care staff about trans-specific care needs and cultural humility when working with queer and trans patients. Eliot has worked with a variety of workplace and community demographics, ranging from kindergarteners up to CEOs, and their greatest professional passion is finding new ways to make gender and sexuality feel accessible in ways that speak to each person's individual context. When not doing work as a "professional trans person," Eliot can usually be found at home with their partner, their cats, and their latest true crime binge.

To be announced