

2026 RSA Annual Conference

From Systems to Stories: Rethinking Support for People with Developmental Disabilities Through Connection, Creativity and Collaboration

October 22 & 23, 2026 | 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

DAY 1 – October 22, 2026

9:00 AM – 9:30 AM

Welcome & Award of Excellence

Jason Young Director, Regional Support Associates (he/him/his)

9:30 AM – 10:30 AM

RSA's Trauma-Informed Community of Practice – "Stop Fixing, Start Understanding"

Aislynn Hatt-Lamarre (she/her) & Tonya Drost (she/her)

This presentation invites a shift from "fixing" behaviour to understanding it. Through a trauma-informed lens, we explore reframing labels, recognizing the impact of secondary traumatic stress, and fostering more compassionate, supportive relationships.

10:45 AM – 12:00 PM (break at noon for lunch)

First Steps – Transitional Housing for Independent Living

Mallory Hutcheson (she/her) & Jennifer Swindlehurst (she/her)

South-East Grey Support Services (SEGSS)

South-East Grey Support Services is located in Grey County and has been providing supports in the communities of Markdale, Flesherton, Dundalk, Durham and surrounding areas for 65 years. South-East Grey Support Services (SEGSS) provides support to approximately 100 individuals and includes 15 residing in our monitored model. We offered our first monitored model in 1992 working off the good neighbour model allowing a more inclusive community approach. In 2025 we replicated this model of support with the building of two tiny homes and what we call our next steps housing program. This model allows for those in need of housing but lacking the skills to manage an opportunity to learn to live independently.

1:00 PM – 2:00 PM

Overcoming

Guy Felicella

Drawing from decades of lived experience with addiction and homelessness in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, this presentation explores harm reduction, recovery, and the human realities behind substance use. Through personal storytelling, Guy's talk aims to educate, evoke compassion, challenge stigma, and encourage deeper human connection.

2:15 PM – 3:45 PM

Beyond the Crisis: A Family's Story of Resilience, Advocacy, and Person-Centered Support

Diana Alves

Diana will be sharing her family's journey through one of the most difficult crises her son has faced, and the lessons her family learned by navigating complex support systems while trying to protect his dignity, safety, and quality of life. Through personal storytelling, she will speak about the challenges, fears, and moments of uncertainty they experienced, but also the power of connection, creativity, persistence, and collaboration in helping him live his best life.

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DAY 2 — October 23, 2026 | 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Beyond Silos: Building Capacity, Recognizing our Strengths, and Working Together

Marg Van Herk-Paradis, Credence & Co.

Every role brings value. This interactive online keynote address will help participants recognize the value they bring to their own roles while appreciating the strengths of others across their organization. Through reflection, discussion, and practical activities, participants will explore how individual strengths contribute to team capacity, why different perspectives matter, and how building bridges across roles and across partner organizations can enhance service and strengthen the entire sector.

10:45 AM – 12:00 PM (break at noon for lunch)

The Power of Family - An Initiative Under Canada's National Housing Strategy Solution Lab

Martha Beach, Alexandra Shannan & Olivia Thomas

Join Martha Beach, Alexandra Shannan, and Olivia Thomas, DSO Housing Navigators for an informative session exploring The Power of Family initiative. This innovative project is working to create a "win-win" model that enables property owners to transfer assets or equity to a community land trust or other asset-receiving organization. The goal is to unlock new affordable housing opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities, while also supporting broader community needs. Learn how this collaborative approach can help increase the affordable housing supply and create long-term housing solutions.

1:00 PM – 2:15 PM

Simplifying Accessibility

Julie Sawchuk

Accessibility does not need to be complicated and overwhelming, nor is it an abstract concept or a box to check. Join Julie to discuss, learn, and gain real-life insights into what is needed to create accessible spaces that honour the needs of everyone in our communities. The world has so much to offer, and people have gifts to bring it. Let's design infrastructure and services to address the need for more space, improved safety and choice for independence. Together, we will address the issues that have serious implications for the lives of more than 28% of people in Ontario.

Insights from your time with Julie will allow you to move forward with pride, confidence and clarity to help people with disabilities have access and energy for life.

2:30 PM – 4:00 PM

Cultivating Personal Resilience

Claudia Ferryman

Cultivating Personal Resilience is a highly practical, interactive workshop designed to help participants sustain energy, optimism, and a sense of purpose in emotionally demanding work. Grounded in Claudia Ferryman's book Emotional Resilience, the session introduces her Four-Factor Framework for Building Emotional Resilience, which integrates Mental Fortitude, Emotional Agility, Body Dynamics, and Personal Mastery. Participants will explore evidence-informed tools including mindset reframing, managing negativity bias, emotional regulation, mindfulness, nervous system awareness, and values-based decision-making. Through guided reflection, practical exercises, and discussion, participants will learn to interrupt stress patterns, respond rather than react, and build sustainable self-care strategies they can apply immediately.

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Presenter Bio's



Aislynn Hatt-Lamarre is a Community Consultant with Regional Support Associates, where she provides assessment, consultation, and education services to adults with intellectual disabilities and the individuals who support them. Much of her work focuses on supporting people who are experiencing emotional and behavioural challenges, with an emphasis on collaborative, person-centered approaches that enhance quality of life and promote meaningful outcomes. She has a special interest in trauma-informed care and is passionate about helping support networks better understand the impact of trauma

on behaviour, relationships, and overall well-being. Through her direct experience working alongside individuals, families, and support teams, she has witnessed the significant value of utilizing a trauma-informed lens to foster connection, build trust, and create positive, lasting change in the lives of those supported.

Tonya Drost is a Registered Occupational Therapist with Regional Support Associates, where she provides assessment, treatment, and education for adults with intellectual disabilities and those that support them who are experiencing emotional, behavioural, and health complexities. Tonya has a particular interest in trauma-informed care and is passionate about supporting people, caregivers, and teams to better understand the impact of trauma on behaviour, regulation, and participation in daily life. She integrates evidence-based occupational therapy approaches with a compassionate, trauma-informed lens to promote safety, dignity, and meaningful engagement for the people she supports.



Mallory Hutcheson has worked in the Developmental Sector for 20 years, 11 of those as a Team Coordinator for South-East Grey Support Services. She is a member of the Grey Bruce TAY committee, the lead for agency compliance and the manager of our internal database. In Mallory's "free" time, she spends time with her husband and two children. She sits on the Board of Directors for a local youth mentorship program and is the President for Durham Minor Ball. Mallory graduated from University with Honours Arts and then focused on Social Work within post-grad studies.

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Jennifer Swindlehurst has had the privilege of being involved in many roles at SEGSS throughout her 35-year career. She started when she was in high school while volunteering with Youth Involvement Ontario and has continued to evolve with the agency over the years. She has had the opportunity to try out many different positions, from hands-on direct support to employment coach and now her current role as a Team Co-ordinator. Setting goals for the individuals on her teams for them to receive purposeful support as well as meaningful roles in the community

are always long-term goals.

Personally, with her husband, raising 3 children to be responsible young adults and enjoying their company has been so rewarding. Jennifer has been a long-time community volunteer and is always looking for opportunities to learn new things and share. Jennifer is currently the lead on the SEGSS Next Step Housing project.



Guy Felicella's story is one of survival, reckoning, and transformation. After years of homelessness, addiction, and gang involvement that brought him to the brink of death, he found a way to break free from the cycle that once defined his life. Through resilience, support, and a commitment to change, he rebuilt himself from the ground up, confronting the painful realities of his past. Today, he stands as an international public speaker, using his lived experience to shed light on the human side of addiction and systemic failure. With raw honesty and compassion, he shares the mistakes he made to ensure others do not have to repeat them. His

journey is a powerful reminder that even in the darkest circumstances, change is possible and hope can be reclaimed.

Diana Alves has been a dedicated stay-at-home mother for over 32 years, caring for her two non-verbal adult sons with autism. She is married and also supports a bonus adult son with disabilities, helping him live his best possible life. Diana is also the proud mother of a daughter and a devoted grandmother to her baby grandson.

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Marg Van Herk-Paradis is President and a Senior Consultant at Credence, specializing in supporting organizations with addressing conflict, transforming organizational cultures, and clarifying organizational missions and visions. Marg has worked across North America, facilitating, coaching, and mediating for groups and individuals. Marg works with businesses, universities, schoolboards, government funded agencies, social service organizations, not-for-profits, and faith-based organizations. Marg brings over 25 years of experience in not-for-profit organizations, including 17 years in leadership positions. Marg has a BA in Applied Social Science from Concordia University in Montreal and a Master of Theological Studies from Conrad Grebel University College, affiliated with the University of Waterloo. Marg is a Qualified Mediator with the ADR Institute of Canada and a member of the ADR Institute of Ontario. Marg is a certified Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) trainer and a regular instructor in Conrad Grebel's Certificate program.



Alexandra Shannan is the Housing Navigator for Developmental Services Ontario (DSO) Toronto, with 20 years of experience in front-line and leadership roles in the developmental services sector. She brings deep system knowledge, a strong professional network, and trusted relationships with the developmental services community, including people with lived experience. Since 2018, Alexandra has supported individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families, in accessing developmental services and housing systems. She has a strong understanding of the complex challenges within these systems and is passionate about demystifying system navigation. Alexandra advocates for inclusive, creative housing solutions that support independence, stability, and community belonging for people with IDD.



Martha Beach is the Developmental Services Ontario (DSO) Housing Navigator for the South-East Region. Since 2018 she has engaged with municipal Service Managers to ensure the housing needs of people with a developmental disability are acknowledged in housing and homelessness plans and recognized as a priority group. Martha has over 30 years of experience in the private and community housing sector, often dealing with vulnerable populations. Prior to her current role she was the Executive Director of an Indigenous not for profit housing provider where she turned a project in difficulty into a successful and thriving entity poised to take advantage of new funding available to Indigenous organizations.

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Olivia Thomas is a housing navigator for Developmental Services Ontario Eastern Region. Olivia has worked in this social services field for over 30 years, as a front-line worker, assessor, and case manager. Olivia strives to work with families to think outside of Ministry funded supports and to thread together available resources. She is passionate about housing and inclusion for people with a developmental disability and bringing people together through hosting family groups, lunch and learns and in-person events to speak about housing opportunities.



Julie Sawchuk International Speaker, Best Selling Author and recipient of the King's Coronation Medal, Julie is committed to helping everyone simplify accessibility. As an industry leader, she has helped stakeholders understand how accessible spaces and services maximize safety, maintain dignity and allow independence through practical solutions.

Bring your team together to deepen your awareness of the everyday challenges of living in a world not built with accessibility in mind. Together we explore how to design and build beyond standards so people can fully participate in all the opportunities being offered.

Using storytelling, expertise and humour, Julie reminds us that we all have a part to play in creating a world where people with disabilities don't have to expend extra energy to simply do life.



Claudia Ferryman (Senior OD Consultant/Master Facilitator) is an award-winning instructor at the University of Toronto (recipient of the Award of Excellence in Teaching), where she has taught for over 16 years, and is the Founder & President of a national learning and organizational development company – Rainmaker Strategies Group, located in Toronto. She has 20+ years of experience and expertise working directly with corporations, community, and non-profit organizations to solve challenging leadership and organizational issues and delivering thousands of hours of leadership and team development training in the social services sector. As a

consultant, she brings a wealth of knowledge in strategic planning, organizational development, talent management, leadership, and human capital development.

Claudia is a passionate advocate for social justice, community leadership, and talent & organizational development. More specifically, Claudia has been working with numerous Developmental Services (DS) agencies for over 20 years, providing training and consulting services, and she understands the unique vision, mission, culture, and challenges of these organizations. She has recently been a regular

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guest/keynote speaker at sector conferences such as the OASIS Annual Conference, OADD Annual Conferences, the Provincial Network Annual Forum, West Regional Support Services Table, and many other national and international conferences. Claudia has recently been elected to the Board of Directors for OADD. She will be facilitating a leadership lecture series for OADD and is the developer and facilitator of a DS sector-wide leadership program called Emerging Leaders.

Claudia has a degree in Organizational Psychology and over a dozen certifications, including The Leadership Challenge Train-the-Trainer & HRPAL Leadership Suite, Strategic Planning Drivers Model, Emotional Intelligence & Compassion Fatigue Train-the-Trainer, DISC Analyst Specialist, Adult Learning Principles, NLP Master Facilitator and Mental Health First Aid certified. Claudia is also the author of several books, including The Communication Chameleon, Emotional Resilience, Passage to Prosperity and StayVersations – Stay Interviews. She is a subject-matter expert featured in Elle, Readers Digest and Profit Magazine and a sought-after guest on a variety of leadership podcasts and radio shows. She loves producing music as a passionate hobby.

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