

Bridging Gaps: Collaboration Across Sectors for Neuro-Inclusive Futures

autism
cayman 



Saturday, 18 April
9:00 AM – 4:00 PM
John Gray High School
Performance Hall

SYMPOSIUM 2026

8:15 AM - 8:55 AM

Registration

8:55 AM - 9:00 AM

Welcome

Ben Meade, Master of Ceremonies

9:00 AM - 9:05 AM

Student Welcome

Ashley Miguel Diaz, Head Girl and J-Mar Clark,
Head Boy: John Gray High School

9:05 AM - 9:10 AM

Opening Remarks

Hon. Rolston Anglin: Minister for Education & Training and
Minister for Finance & Economic Development

9:10 AM - 9:15 AM

Introduction of Keynote Speaker

Denis Olarou: Director, Autism Cayman

9:15 AM - 10:00 AM

Keynote Address

Dr. Temple Grandin: Professor of Animal Science, Colorado
State University | [The World Needs All Kinds of Minds](#)

10:00 AM - 10:30 AM

Q&A with Dr. Temple Grandin

Moderated by Ben Meade

10:30 AM - 10:45 AM

Coffee Break

Sponsored by



10:50 AM - 11:15 AM

Presentation | *From Vision to Impact*

Desirée Powery-Tatum: President, Autism Cayman
[A Year of Progress for Autism in the Cayman Islands](#)

11:20 AM - 11:45 AM

Presentation | *Planning for Transitions*

Daniel Altneu: Partner, Bedell Cristin
[Protecting your Child for Life and Beyond](#)

11:50 AM - 12:15 PM

Presentation | *Gender Disparity in Autism*

Deshane Gutierrez Lopez: Clinical Psychologist, Aspire
Therapeutic Services | [Understanding Anxiety and Depression in
Autistic Girls and Women](#)

12:15 PM - 1:00 PM

Lunch

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AGENDA

1:05 PM - 1:30 PM

Presentation | *Seeing Strengths First*

Arianna McCoy: Occupational Therapist, KidsAbility | *Practical Strength-Based Approaches for Children and Adults with Autism*

1:35 PM - 2:15 PM

Panel Discussion | *Nothing About Us Without Us*

Moderated by Sloane Pharr-Stang: Developmental Support Services Manager, The Wellness Centre

2:15 PM - 2:30 PM

Coffee Break

Sponsored by



2:30 PM - 2:55 PM

Autism Cayman Awards | *Inclusion in Action*

Ally Olarou: Director, Autism Cayman | Awards Presented by Hon. Isaac Rankine: Minister for Social Innovation & Development & Minister for Youth, Sports, Culture & Heritage

- *Video*: Every Stroke Counts: Autism-Friendly Swim Programmes in Cayman
- *Video*: Safe Spaces in the Wild: Autism Inclusion at the Cayman Parrot Sanctuary
- *Video*: Equine Connections: Equine-Assisted Autism-Friendly Therapy at the Cayman Equestrian Centre

2:55 PM - 3:50 PM

Panel Discussion | *Different Minds, Different Strengths*

Rethinking Autism in the Cayman Islands with Dr. Temple Grandin, moderated by Dr. Shannon Seymour, Owner/Clinical Psychologist, The Wellness Centre | *Panellists*:

- Dr. Temple Grandin: Professor of Animal Science, Colorado State University
- Janelle Tibbetts: Owner/Director, Spark! School of Performing Arts
- Lana Hargrave: Owner, Tukka East & West and Cayman Parrot Sanctuary
- Laura Kelly: Paediatric Speech and Language Therapist, Cayman Islands Health Services Authority
- Phillippa Miller: SENCO/ School Inclusion Specialist, Department of Education Services
- Louise Pennington: Registered Speech Therapist, Lead - Allied Health, Student Support Services, Department of Education Services

3:50 PM - 4:00 PM

Closing Remarks

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Premier and Minister for Financial Services & Commerce

4:00 PM

Wrap Up & Thank You

Ben Meade, Master of Ceremonies

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BUTTERFIELD



Ministry of Education & Training
Cayman Islands Government





Honourable André M. Ebanks

Premier and Minister for Financial Services & Commerce

Honourable André Ebanks was sworn-in as Premier of the Cayman Islands in May 2025 following his election as a second term Member of Parliament for West Bay South in the April 2025 general election. Passionate about strengthening the Caymanian community, Premier Ebanks, who is the leader of The Caymanian Community Party (TCCP), entered politics to create meaningful change and advance the needs of Caymanians.

Prior to becoming a Member of Parliament, Premier Ebanks had a distinguished career both in government and the private sector. He is an attorney-at-law who has practised for more than a decade at two of the largest law firms in the Cayman Islands. He was called to the Bar of England and Wales in 2005 and to the Cayman Islands Bar in 2006.

The Premier holds a Bachelor of Laws from the University of Liverpool, a degree in sociology from Morgan State University and a master's degree in legal practice from Manchester Metropolitan University. Among his professional and civic activities is his membership to the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple, England.



Honourable Rolston Anglin

Minister for Finance & Economic Development and Minister for Education & Training

Honourable Rolston Anglin attended Sir John A. Cumber Primary School, and graduated from the Cayman Islands High School. He received an academic scholarship from major international accounting firm, Price Waterhouse (now PricewaterhouseCoopers), to attend university, graduating with honours from Ohio State University. While there, Mr. Anglin was a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honour Society and the Golden Key Honour Society.

In April 2000, Mr. Anglin left a very lucrative professional career to represent his people. He was first elected in November 2000. Mr. Anglin served three terms (2000-2013) as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. During the 2009-2013 term, he was appointed the Minister of Education. Mr. Anglin was re-elected to Parliament after a twelve-year absence and is a member of the governing National Coalition for Caymanians.



Honourable Isaac Rankine

Minister for Social Development & Innovation and Minister for Youth, Sports, Culture & Heritage

Honourable Isaac Douglas Rankine, in his second term as the elected Member of Parliament for the constituency of East End, was sworn in on 6 May 2025 as Minister for Youth, Sports, Culture & Heritage and Minister for Social Development & Innovation, in the Cayman Islands. In addition, he is a member of the Parliamentary Management Commission Council.

Mr. Rankine recognises the importance of policies that preserve our heritage, ensure that the youngest to the most senior persons in our community are supported and served, and that social strategies are developed to meet the needs of our community. His vision for a country that represents the Caymanian values of our forefathers - built to thrive in a robust global environment - is embedded in his efforts to serve the Cayman Islands.



Dr. Temple Grandin

Professor of Animal Science, Colorado State University

Dr. Temple Grandin is a professor of animal science at Colorado State University. When she was two and a half years old, she had no speech and all the symptoms of severe autism. Early intensive speech therapy enabled her to speak by age four. Her mother always encouraged her interest in art and urged her to draw many different things. Good teachers and mentors were essential for Temple's success.

Her high school science teacher challenged her with interesting projects where she had to figure out how to make things work. When studying in school became a pathway to becoming a scientist, she was motivated to study.

An HBO movie titled Temple Grandin was made about her life and Temple was inducted into The National Women's Hall of Fame and The Academy of Arts and Sciences. Facilities she has designed handle over half the cattle in the U.S. Some of her most important books are New York Times bestseller *Animals in Translation*, *Thinking in Pictures*, *The Autistic Brain* and *The Way I See It*.



Denis Olarou

Director and Legal Counsel, Autism Cayman

Denis is a partner in Carey Olsen's dispute resolution, litigation and insolvency practice, advising on Cayman Islands and British Virgin Islands law. He has extensive experience acting on complex, high-value and multi-jurisdictional matters, including insolvency and restructuring, fraud and asset recovery, shareholder disputes and international arbitration.

As the father of a 12-year-old autistic daughter, he has developed a deeply personal understanding of both the challenges and the opportunities that exist within the community. Denis is particularly passionate about encouraging the development of policies and practical initiatives that improve access to education, healthcare and community support for autistic children and adults. Through his involvement in this symposium and related efforts, he hopes to contribute to a more inclusive Cayman community - one where neurodiverse individuals are better understood, supported and empowered to thrive.



Desirée Powery-Tatum

President and Treasurer, Autism Cayman

Desirée Powery-Tatum is Caymanian and a proud educator in the private and public schools for over 12 years. Her 13 year old son is autistic and non-speaking. He inspires her daily to advocate for the rights of those who face challenges because of their neurodiversity. She is passionate about inclusion and believes that all people have a right to the same quality of education, opportunities and services. She hopes to bring awareness and to see positive changes to the Cayman community, where policies and practical changes are put into place for the benefit of autistic children and adults.

Desirée received an associate degree in social studies at the University College of the Cayman Islands (UCCI). This enabled her to move to the United States where she earned her Bachelor of Business Administration (Finance) degree at Florida International University. After returning to Grand Cayman, Desirée worked in the financial services industry for several years before deciding to change career paths to earn a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) from the University of Sunderland (UK).



Daniel Altneu

Partner, Bedell Cristin

Daniel Altneu is a partner in Bedell Cristin's private client team and advises families on wills and long-term estate planning for vulnerable dependents. A qualified Trust and Estate Practitioner (TEP) and full member of STEP, Daniel works closely with parents and caregivers to structure testamentary trusts, advise on guardianship and mental capacity issues and assist families with probate and administration matters.

Daniel is recognised by Legal 500 Caribbean as a "Next Generation Partner" and by Chambers High Net Worth as "Up & Coming". He is known for delivering clear, compassionate advice on planning issues, including permanency planning for children and adults who require lifelong care and support.



Deshane Gutierrez Lopez

Clinical Psychologist, Aspire Therapeutic Services

Deshane Gutierrez Lopez is a chartered clinical psychologist and certified autism specialist with nine years of experience. She is a licensed psychologist in Belize, UK and with the Cayman Islands Council for Professions Allied in Medicine.

Deshane currently practices at Aspire Therapeutic Services, providing neuroaffirmative psychological assessment and evidence-based therapy to children, adolescents and adults with a focus on autism and ADHD. She is currently a PsyD candidate, with doctoral research exploring gender disparities in autism assessment pathways in the Cayman Islands and Belize.



Arianna Simonetta McCoy

Occupational Therapist, KidsAbility

Arianna McCoy is a Caymanian occupational therapist at KidsAbility Paediatric Therapy Clinic. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Health and Medical Sciences from the University of Warwick and a Master of Science in Occupational Therapy from the University of Essex, where her research explored the role of occupational therapy in paralympic sport participation and performance.

Arianna is registered with the UK Health and Care Professions Council and Cayman Islands Council for Professions Allied with Medicine, and has clinical experience across paediatric, geriatric, community and acute care settings. Her work has included supporting children with autism spectrum disorder, sensory processing differences and attention difficulties, as well as contributing to emotion regulation, fatigue management and sensory-friendly educational environments.



Sloane Pharr-Strang

Developmental Support Services Manager, The Wellness Centre

Sloane Pharr-Strang is the developmental support services manager at The Wellness Centre. She has worked in the field of ABA supporting autistic individuals and their families for 20 years. She is also a Cabinet-appointed member of the National Council for Persons with Disabilities.

Her certifications and affiliations include: Board Certified Behaviour Analyst, International Behaviour Analyst, ESDM Certified Therapist, Trained P-ESDM Coach and Level 2 Trained Facilitator in ACT for parents and caregivers of people with developmental disabilities.



Ally Olarou

Director and Secretary, Autism Cayman

An experienced nonprofit leader and operations specialist, Ally Olarou currently serves as director and secretary of Autism Cayman. In this role, she provides strategic oversight and governance while helping to guide the organisation's mission, programmes and community impact. Ally previously worked with the Cayman Heart Foundation, the national charity for cardiovascular health in the Cayman Islands.

Before transitioning into the nonprofit sector, Ally built a robust career with EY based in London, where she spent over ten years in a variety of global roles spanning operations management, knowledge strategy and communications. She holds a BSc in History, Philosophy and Social Studies of Science from University College London and a MSc in electronic publishing from City University of London, combining a strong academic foundation in the role of information, technology and communication in society. Bringing together deep experience in operations, content strategy and nonprofit leadership, Ally is committed to strengthening organisations that deliver meaningful social impact.



Shannon Seymour

Director, The Wellness Centre

Dr. Shannon Seymour, PhD, is a licensed psychologist with over 25 years of experience specialising in neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), ADHD, and learning disorders, as well as related conditions like anxiety, OCD, and ARFID. She holds a PhD in psychology and master's degrees in clinical psychology and developmental disabilities.

In 2010, Dr. Seymour helped establish the Cayman Islands' first autism diagnostic panel, improving access to local services. Her clinic, The Wellness Centre, introduced ABA therapy locally and was among the first trained in the Early Start Denver Model (ESDM). Today, the centre offers a range of supports, including The Butterfly Connection, a free community space for girls and young women. Dr. Seymour is the Director of The Wellness Centre and President of the Cayman Islands Psychological Association.



Janelle Tibbetts

Founder and Director, Spark! School of Performing Arts

Janelle Tibbetts is the founder and director of Spark! School of Performing Arts, where she combines her passion for the arts with over 15 years of experience as a music educator and performing arts leader. She is dedicated to creating high-quality performing arts learning environments that balance excellence, inclusion and meaningful engagement, supporting individuals to develop confidence, creativity and a strong connection to the arts.

She holds a Bachelor of Music in Music Education (summa cum laude) from Florida International University and a Master of Science in Education specialising in curriculum, instruction and assessment from Walden University. Janelle leads innovative performing arts programmes with a focus on music education, and works with educators to support high-quality, inclusive practice. Her work is also informed by her lived experience, shaping a deeper understanding of how individuals process, engage and navigate both learning and everyday environments.



Lana Hargrave

Owner, Tukka East & West & Cayman Parrot Sanctuary

Lana Hargrave is a dedicated advocate for autism awareness and inclusion in the Cayman Islands. Originally from Canada, Lana has called the Cayman Islands home since 2004, and lives with her husband, Ron Hargrave, and their four children who were all born in the Cayman Islands. Together as a family, the Hargraves own and operate family-friendly ventures including Tukka Restaurants and the Cayman Parrot Sanctuary.

Lana's advocacy journey began with her daughter, Kinsley, who was diagnosed with autism in 2016 at the age of three. This personal experience ignited a deep passion for supporting individuals on the autism spectrum and their families within the community. Committed to making a meaningful impact, Lana focuses on raising awareness of autism across the Cayman Islands while promoting understanding, acceptance and inclusion. She is especially passionate about creating supportive spaces that provide learning opportunities, foster independence and open pathways to meaningful employment for both children and adults on the spectrum.



Laura Kelly

Speech and Language Therapist, Cayman Islands Health Services Authority

Laura Kelly is a dynamic, neurodiversity-affirming paediatric speech and language therapist with the Health Services Authority (HSA) who has called the Cayman Islands home for the past eight years. Her passion for our community extends to her role as vice president of the Cayman Islands Early Childhood Association and being the first certified perinatal practitioner in the Cayman Islands. She is an advocate for infant and maternal mental health and believes that communication and connection begin in the womb. Laura has launched Babble Boot Camp, a proactive approach for at risk infants. She knows that supporting babies before they show signs of delay is crucial in decreasing the number of children requiring support in the future.

Graduating with a master's degree in speech-language pathology from the University of Buffalo at New York, Laura has over 24 years of clinical expertise with communication disorders. She strives to ensure each patient's voice is heard no matter how they communicate. Laura prides herself on making connections while working collaboratively with families and the community. She believes we are stronger together.



Phillippa Miller

SENCO/ School Inclusion Specialist, Department of Education Services

Phillippa Miller is a special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) with 20 years of experience across education and the charity sector, supporting children and young people with diverse disabilities. She began her career as a one to one assistant in a specialist provision for autistic students before training as an english and drama teacher. In Cayman for almost a decade, she has worked at the Lighthouse School as the vocational teacher and at CIFEC as a SENCO and school inclusion specialist.

Her wider experience includes leading summer schemes and residential camps for disabled teens and young adults with UK national organisations Mencap and Whizz-Kidz. She holds a postgraduate advanced diploma in arts psychotherapy, is a mental health first aider, and a trained senior lead for mental health in schools. As both an educator and the parent of a neurodivergent child, Phillippa brings a dual perspective that informs her advocacy for compassionate, inclusive person-centred support.

SPEAKERS



Louise Pennington

Registered Speech Therapist, Lead - Allied Health, Student Support Services, Department of Education Services

Louise Pennington is a specialist speech and language therapist with over 30 years' experience supporting autistic individuals across education, health and social care. She is the Allied Health Team Lead for the Department of Education, overseeing speech and language therapy and occupational therapy services in schools and early years settings.

Louise advocates for neuro-affirming practice, focusing on communication, sensory regulation and social-emotional wellbeing to support inclusive learning. She has led whole-school autism-informed initiatives, including work with the Elizabeth Newson Centre, and contributed to evidence-based approaches endorsed by the Autism Education Trust (UK). Her work includes advocating for autistic women and girls, advising on sensory considerations and supporting the publication "Is That Clear? Effective Communication in a Neurodiverse World." She is committed to person-centred, needs-led practice, learning from neurodivergent perspectives to drive inclusive, system-level change in education and healthcare.



Ben Meade

Master of Ceremonies

Ben Meade is the Senior Manager of Brand and Communications at Dart. He works closely with the organisation's senior leaders across a diverse portfolio spanning multiple industries, including real estate development, hospitality, finance, retail, media and entertainment. He has served as a board member of the Cayman Islands Film Commission since 2021. A former journalist, his career included stints at the BBC World Service, the Caribbean Media Corporation and news director at local TV station Cayman 27.

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