

WELCOME TO OUR
KQ Newsletter
we're so glad you're here!

LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Dear KCSEA Members,

What an incredible gathering we had at the 2025 KCSEA Educational Conference, held June 12–13 at the Ramada by Wyndham Downtown Topeka Hotel! Our theme, “Strengthening Partnerships for a Brighter Future,” resonated throughout the two days as we connected, learned, and re-energized our shared commitment to child support and human services.

From the stirring opening ceremonies—featuring Meghan Reynolds’s rendition of the National Anthem and an electrifying performance by Topeka High Drum Line—to the interactive and heartfelt keynote address by Maureen Leif, the spirit of partnership and collaboration was palpable from the start.

Attendees participated in a rich and diverse array of position specific, professional development, and CLE sessions designed to inform, inspire, and elevate practice across all areas of child support services. These sessions addressed topics such as case management fundamentals, financial systems, intergovernmental collaboration, workforce development, and legal and ethical considerations. We also explored timely innovations, including trauma-informed communication, the use of AI in legal research, and advancing tribal partnerships. The sessions reflected our commitment to equipping professionals at every level with the tools and perspectives needed to serve Kansas families with excellence and compassion.

This conference would not have been possible without the incredible efforts of our board, volunteers, presenters, and members. I want to extend a special thank you to the following outgoing board members for their dedicated service and leadership: Nicolette Bennett, Sarah Delgado, Terri Greer, Kristie Haynes, Shannon Kroh, Lori Myers, and Brandi Ridgeway. Your time, talent, and energy have helped shape a stronger KCSEA, and we are deeply grateful.



We also offer a warm welcome to our new board members, who will be introduced later in this newsletter. We’re excited to work alongside them as we continue building on our momentum.

Importantly, we offer heartfelt thanks to our 2025 conference sponsors, whose generous support made this event possible: Platinum Sponsors: SMI and YoungWilliams; Gold Sponsors: Maximus and Veritas HHS; Silver Sponsor: Conduent; and Bronze Sponsors: Auctor and US Bank.

In addition, we are grateful to the many vendors and individuals who donated items to our silent auction, raffles, and fundraising activities. Your contributions play a vital role in supporting our scholarship program and organizational mission.

As we turn toward the future, we are already beginning preparations for the 2026 KCSEA Conference. If you have suggestions for session topics, speakers, or other ideas to enhance next year’s event, we want to hear from you! Please reach out any time at admin@kcsea.org.

Thank you again for your continued involvement and support. Together, we are building stronger partnerships, and a brighter future, for Kansas families.

Amy Pfeifer
President, Kansas Child Support Educational Association

KCSEA Keynote Recap

By Dustin Whitaker, KCSEA Past-President

"Holding Each Other Up: The Human Side of Partnership" presented by Maureen Leif, J.D., President and Founder of Grays Peak Strategies.

Maureen's keynote address offered valuable insights into the dynamics of partnership, emphasizing the importance of treating colleagues with respect and consideration. She advocated for a transition from transactional partnerships to human-centered collaborations rooted in mutual trust, care, and relational accountability. She defined partnership as a relationship in which all parties are jointly committed to the success of shared endeavors, processes, or projects, and stressed the necessity of fostering personal connections and trust among partners.

Maureen provided actionable strategies for personalizing partnerships, including reframing the questions we ask. The conventional, transactional model, characterized by clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and outputs—where success is measured by compliance, timeliness, and accuracy—tends to foster siloed, task-driven relationships grounded in systems, policies, and rules. By contrast, her recommended human-centered approach prioritizes mutual trust, care, and relational accountability, redefining success as connection, responsiveness, and collective well-being. This model encourages viewing partnership as a shared narrative that values belonging, equity, and sustainable impact, supported by more meaningful and relational engagement.

VOLUNTEER FOR THE 2026 KCSEA CONFERENCE

Not ready to become a member or join the board but want to dip your toes into getting involved? KCSEA is seeking enthusiastic volunteers for the 2026 KCSEA Conference.

Volunteering is a fantastic way to:

- Expand your knowledge
- Connect with the child support community
- Demonstrate leadership potential
- Boost your resume

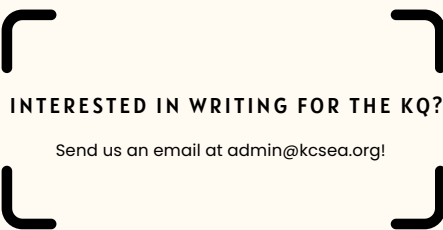
SIGN UP

She further highlighted the significance of celebrating acts of care to strengthen organizational culture. Treating individuals as partners—rather than problems—creates opportunities for growth and innovation, cultivating a positive and supportive environment.

Additionally, Maureen underscored the value of co-design, promoting collaborative design and planning with partners instead of limiting interactions to task coordination.

To illustrate these principles, she referenced the story of the Three Sisters—corn, beans, and squash—from Native communities. This agricultural tradition demonstrates how co-planting these crops fosters mutual support and thriving, symbolizing the benefits of cooperative relationships.

The presentation concluded with a reflective challenge: Consider the impact if every interaction today conveyed greater care. What positive effects might this generate for the families and communities we serve?



KCSEA 2025-2026 New Board Members



Board Members (Left to Right): Rachel Wheeler, Jennifer Pettengill, Ashley Dexter, Courtney Sweeney, Helen White, Jennifer Janssen, Meghan Reynolds, Tori Baire



Ashley Dexter:

"I bring the national perspective of the child support community given my role in projects across the country and with national organizations such as NCSEA, ERICSA, WICSEC, and NCSSD."



Courtney Sweeney:

"I am a very organized person, strong communication skills, self motivated, have managed a team of three people for over 5 years, and strength in balancing competing demands. I also have a passion for child support and have spent the last 8 years working in child support in various roles."



Helen White:

"As someone who has been a judicial law clerk, private family law attorney, and now an attorney for the Department of Children and Families (DCF), I have the experience and knowledge on how to facilitate communications and clarify misunderstandings between parties."



Jennifer Janssen:

"I am excited by the opportunity to learn from other members and grow. I'd like to help in any capacity."



Jennifer Pettengill:

"My 10 years' experience in the call center dealing customer service/issues/concerns and then as the ombudsman I am no stranger to unhappy clients. Being able to display empathy and elevate the customers experience is my specialty. Also, with assisting with outreach understanding customers' needs, struggles, frustrations allow me to provide feedback to staff of how we can better serve our customers and the communities!"



Meghan Reynolds:

"As a young professional trained in trauma informed care, I believe my unique perspective on social work and my yearning to learn and grow and challenge oppressive systems can help lead Kansas child support into the 21st-Century. I'm specifically passionate about supporting our non-custodial parents by connecting them with community partners, as well as communicating in a sensitive and unbiased manner with the families we serve."



Rachel Wheeler:

"I am very interested in joining KCSEA and I believe my years of experience in Child Support Services have equipped me with the skills and knowledge to effectively contribute to KCSEA's strategic goals. I am skilled at creative solutions, communication, and adaptability in life and work."



Tori Baire:

- Great at researching
- Thorough decision maker
- Love to hear everyone's point of view
- Experience in child support
- Strong trainer with passion for child support
- In school again for a business/training management degree, so have current knowledge of new and updating business practices and have tons of ideas on how to train and improve processes.

CELEBRATE EXCELLENCE: 2025 KCSEA ANNUAL AWARD WINNERS

Each year, we take time to recognize the extraordinary dedication, innovation, and heart that our colleagues bring to the field of child support. The KCSEA Excellence Awards are our opportunity to shine a light on the individuals and teams who go above and beyond in serving Kansas families. To all of our winners: thank you. Your work represents the best of what we do—and the heart behind why we do it. This year's award winners are:



TEAM AWARD:

This award recognizes a group whose collaboration and shared commitment result in meaningful, measurable outcomes.

WINNER: YoungWilliams Quality Assurance Team

This six-person team is the definition of collaboration and excellence. From processing self-assessments and ombudsman complaints to helping with enforcement, training insights, and daily quality monitoring—they are everywhere, doing everything, and doing it well. Their coordination with management ensures that standards are not only met but exceeded. Their behind-the-scenes work makes everything run more smoothly—and we're proud to recognize them today.



OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP AWARD:

Leadership is not about a title—it's about action, influence, and impact. This award is for someone who inspires excellence in others while rolling up their sleeves to get the work done.

WINNER: Phil Goetz

Phil has been a foundational part of Kansas's child support legal framework for over two decades. As Managing Attorney, he supervises a team of 15 lawyers across the state, takes the lead in hiring and training, and is always the first to volunteer when coverage is needed. He pushes forward with tireless energy and unwavering commitment—while still taking the time to cheer for his team's successes. His leadership makes a lasting impact, every single day.



DISTINGUISHED SERVICE:

This award recognizes long-term, exemplary commitment to the mission of child support enforcement and service. The recipient this year is someone who embodies that spirit.

WINNER: Heather Webb

Heather has dedicated herself tirelessly to the field, consistently going the extra mile to ensure families are supported with compassion and professionalism. Whether it's answering difficult questions or streamlining casework, Heather's work ethic and wealth of experience have made her a trusted and invaluable asset to her team and the families they serve.



FORCE MULTIPLIER AWARD:

This award celebrates someone whose leadership amplifies the effectiveness of their team—someone who brings out the best in others.

WINNER: Lee Ellsworth

Lee shows up every day with positivity and purpose. As a supervisor, he lifts his team not just through policies and practices, but through personal connection. He doesn't rely on impersonal messages—he picks up the phone, checks in, and builds trust. His approach blends strength, empathy, and professionalism in a way that makes people want to follow his lead.



PROGRAM AWARENESS AWARD:

This award goes to someone who actively increases public understanding and engagement with child support services.

WINNER: Jennifer Morales

Jennifer exemplifies outreach. Whether she's at Work for Success programs, federal halfway houses, or local conferences, she meets people where they are—offering not just information, but support, encouragement, and follow-up. As a trainer, she also ensures new hires are equipped to make a difference. Her work through the IRIS platform and continued education programs demonstrates her unwavering dedication to improving how we serve families.



INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP/COLLABORATION AWARD:

This award highlights those who find new and better ways to work together across teams and functions to deliver stronger results.

WINNER: Stacey Fitch

Stacey's two decades of experience have culminated in a unique leadership style that blends innovation, communication, and collaboration. She has bridged gaps across customer service, enforcement, and finance departments—creating unity, fostering mutual respect, and guiding her teams with clarity and shared purpose. Her ability to align people and processes is a model of effective cross-functional teamwork.

2025 JIM ROBERTSON SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS



Adam Watkins:

Kansas State University
Biology and Pre-Med



Preslie May:

Missouri State University
Nursing



Kylie Dexter:

Arizona State University,
Edson College of Nursing
and Health
Innovation/Nursing

AUGUST IS CHILD SUPPORT AWARENESS MONTH



This month is dedicated to highlighting the importance of child support programs and their impact on families. Below is how CSS Admin and contractors plan to celebrate! This year is extra special as we also commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Child Support program. CSS Admin, Maximus, and YoungWilliams are pulling out all the stops to make this a memorable celebration for everyone.

YoungWilliams:

YoungWilliams is joining the festivities by creating special 50th-anniversary t-shirts to mark this significant milestone. They're also showing appreciation for their hardworking caseworkers by hosting a well-deserved lunch.

Maximus:

Maximus is planning a month-long celebration filled with fun and appreciation. Their offices will be decked out in green to honor Child Support Awareness Month. They'll also be hosting games and offering prizes for children, along with goody bags for customers throughout the entire month of August. And to recognize the incredible efforts of their own team, Maximus will be presenting awards and providing meals for their staff each week of August.

CSS Admin:

Beyond the office celebrations, CSS Admin is also embracing the spirit of giving! They are holding a school supply drive to benefit the students and teachers at Royal Valley Elementary School in Hoyt, Kansas.

UPCOMING SILENT AUCTION

When: August 4th through August 8th

What: Signed KU memorabilia

Where: Download the GiveButter app and follow the QR code on the flyer! [Click here to view the flyer and spread the word!](#)

In Support Of: The Jim Robertson Scholarship. For more information on the scholarship [click here](#).

ERICSA 2025 RECAP

Written by: Tulasi Long and Natalie Williams

Natalie and Tulasi attended their 1st ERICSA conference together in May. The conference was held in beautiful Norfolk, Virginia, home to the world's largest naval base, the North American Headquarter for NATO, and the USS Wisconsin battleship. This year's theme was "Anchoring Families – Empowering Communities." There were over 40 workshops to choose from- personal development, intergovernmental, simulation, legal, technology, policy and case management.

Natalie strategically selected sessions that would equip child support workers with effective tools to enhance their services. Two standout sessions were particularly informative: "Help! How to Handle Self-Employed Parents" and "Serving the Unrepresented."

The first session provided valuable insights on navigating the complexities of child support in the gig economy, focusing on creative strategies for obtaining wage information from self-employed parents. This knowledge will enable child support workers to better handle cases involving non-traditional income sources.

The second session highlighted the challenges faced by unrepresented individuals in accessing the judicial system and child support services. Many parents, both custodial and non-custodial, struggle to navigate the system due to limited resources, remote locations, or unfamiliarity with legal jargon and procedures. The session offered practical tips and strategies for child support workers to bridge this gap and provide more effective assistance to these individuals.

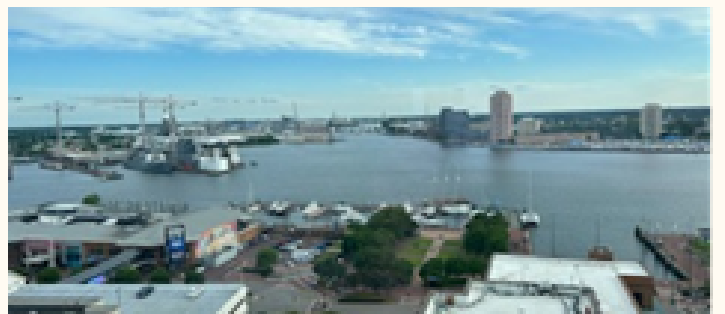
By equipping workers with these tools and knowledge, we can improve the overall delivery of child support services and make a positive impact on the lives of families and children.

Tulasi's selected sessions geared towards professional development- "Effective Communication: Building Stronger Connections" and "Clearer Messages & Creating a Vision for Change: Thriving Through All Transitions."

The first session offered techniques for active listening and understanding how to adapt your approach based on your audience; and how to ensure your messages are clear, concise and impactful.

The second session was engaging and interactive, the presenters were great, they even did some real live skits which were hilarious. This session offered strategies to overcome resistance to change; build resilience and adaptability during transitions; and recognize the positive aspects of change, focusing on how it drives efficiency, innovation, and improved outcomes.

Natalie and Tulasi enjoyed meeting new people, eating great food, lovely views of the Chesapeake Bay and their walks around town and along the waterfront. This conference was a great experience, and we hope to go back next year.



Did You Know?

This year the IV-D Child Support Program celebrates its 50th anniversary of operation, marking the anniversary of the passing of Title IV-D of the Social Security Act.



Celebrating **50 years** of Child Support!
1975-2025

[Click here to reflect on 50 years of Child Support with NCSEA!](#)