

# Meet us

Our stories and experiences help to  
Reimagining Colorado's Child Welfare System.



**Nyomi Davis** recently graduated from University of Denver with a Bachelor of Arts in socio-legal studies and public policy with a minor in business ethics and legal studies in June. Nyomi attended DU on a full ride scholarship from the Daniels Fund. In Fall of 2024, Nyomi will attend the University of Colorado Boulder Law School with a special interest in child advocacy while pursuing a J.D.. Nyomi is involved with Denver CASA as a volunteer in their Older Youth Program and is on the Colorado Office of Child Representatives Lived Experts Action Panel (LEAP) as a youth with experience in the foster system. Nyomi is a resilient, hardworking, and highly motivated individual who is pursuing a law career to help youth in similar situations. With LEAP, Nyomi has helped train GAL's and participated in the process for passing legislation to move Colorado to youth-directed representation in D&N and juvenile cases. She recently began working with the Butler Institute on their Colorado Child Abuse and Neglect Multidisciplinary and Cross-Jurisdictional Training Project and is a voting board member for Foster Source and the Colorado Department of Human Services' Reimagining Steering Committee.



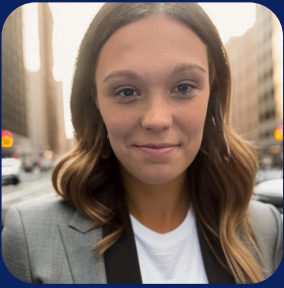
**Makita Cotto** is a youth advocate with lived experience. An alumni of the child welfare system, Makita's first experience with placement was at age 5 and after being in and out of placement emancipated at the age of 18. Makita is the mother of three beautiful children Makail who is 20, Mya who is 18 and Quinn who is 12. As teen mom Makita experienced homelessness and many other systematic barriers as she transitioned from foster care to adulthood. After emancipation Makita attended the Community College of Denver where she received her associates degrees in Paralegal studies. She then went on to attend University of Colorado at Denver where she received her bachelor's degree in Sociology. Makita is the Vice President of Talent Operations for DSST Public Schools. In her advocacy work, Makita has sat on the Families First Implementation team, Families First Transition Fund team, Colorado Partnership for Thriving Families Family and Caregivers space and the co-chair on Systemic Family Engagement Steering Committee. Makita was a strong advocate for the house bill 1038 passed in 2022 that increased youth voice and their ability to have a seat at the table. Makita's lived experience has allowed for major systems change across the State of Colorado.



**Joe Homlar** is the Child Welfare Division Director in the Office of Children, Youth & Families at the Colorado Department of Human Services. With over 17 years in child welfare services, Joe has been instrumental in developing and supporting family voice groups to challenge and strengthen child welfare and protection programs. Joe is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and has a background in clinical case coordination and school social work in various states across the US. Joe's dedication to enhancing child protection and maltreatment prevention services makes him a valuable asset in his role, where he continues to make a positive impact in the lives of vulnerable children and families.



**Ida Drury** is an Assistant Professor at the Kempe Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect. She is co-principal investigator for the Child Welfare Training System (CWTS) and the Kentucky implementation of Differential Response. Ida has more than twenty years of experience in the human services field, primarily in public child welfare. Prior to joining the Kempe Center, Ida was a research and data analyst for the Colorado Department of Human Services. Before that, she guided Colorado child welfare funding as the CAPTA administrator. From 2009-2012, she served as project director for the Colorado Consortium on Differential Response. Her early career was in Minnesota as a child welfare caseworker.



**Kaylie Weese** is an advocate for all people in her numerous endeavors. In 2018, Kaylie had her fourth child and was struggling with defining who she was after living only for her children for several years. It was at this time that she stumbled upon the work of a community leader through the Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County and never slowed down from there. Kaylie served as a Family Partner and then joined the Governing Board of ECPAC and then was elected Vice Chair after several years. Following this work as a Family Partner, in 2022, Kaylie was hired as the Family Engagement and Leadership Coordinator to continue the work that she had been doing with more community engaged. This work is fulfilling and amazing and she greatly enjoys the group of women that she works with everyday. As a Lived Experience Expert, she also lends her voice and experience to several organizations. Kaylie works with the Colorado Partnership for Thriving Families, the Rocky Mountain Family Engagement Collective, the Advancing Equity in Colorado Child Welfare Steering Committee and the Reimagining Child Welfare Steering Committee. Kaylie is also extremely active in the education of her 4 children. She is an Area Articulation Representative for the Pomona Area on the Jefferson County Public Schools District Accountability Committee, PTSA President at their Elementary School and PTSA Vice President at their middle school. Kaylie believes that all children and families need engagement within their families and community and she works to fill gaps where families just don't have the capacity to do so.



**Chelsey Hall** is the Director for Family and Community Engagement for the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), Chelsey oversees external engagement efforts, serves as the State's 2Gen Coordinator and administers the Department's Family Voice Council (FVC). The FVC is made up of members with lived-experience who provide feedback and input for positive system change. In previous roles within CDHS, Chelsey served as the Grant Development Specialist at the Office of Behavioral Health where she was responsible for federal reporting, application preparation and engaging stakeholders for all behavioral health grants. She also works on projects addressing benefit cliffs, lived-experience compensation policies, supplier diversity and increasing stakeholder engagement in the legislative and rulemaking processes. Chelsey finds fulfillment in visiting with and serving families holistically and on the weekends renovating her home and all things DIY.



**Cara Nord** is the Youth Empowerment Attorney (YEA) at the Office of the Child's Representative (OCR), a state agency that oversees the Guardians Ad Litem and Counsel for Youth who represent young people in many Colorado legal proceedings. As OCR's YEA, Cara champions OCR's statewide efforts related to the Foster Youth in Transition Program, child/youth court attendance, and child/youth surveys. She also leads OCR's Lived Experts Action Panel (LEAP), a group of young people with lived experience in truancy, child welfare, and/or juvenile delinquency systems who partner with OCR to improve laws, policies, and practice in ways that benefit young people. Before joining OCR, Cara litigated child welfare proceedings as an Assistant Attorney General in Washington State and an Assistant County Attorney in Colorado Springs; volunteered as a Big Sister; interned at a public defender's office where she represented children in At-Risk Youth and Child in Need of Services proceedings; completed Court Appointed Special Advocate training; and taught fourth grade in Washington, D.C., through Teach for America.



**Heather Hanson** is a Puerto Rican mom to three children (one of which is neurodivergent), a domestic violence survivor, and a former single mother. She holds two master's degrees as an Applied Anthropologist specializing in Structural Violence and a Librarian. For over a decade, she has championed the involvement of lived experiences in creating an inclusive society for thriving children and families. Heather is actively engaged in the Colorado Partnership for Thriving Families, the Reimagining Child Welfare Project, CDHS Family Voice Council (FVC), the Story of the Systems Project, the Rocky Mountain Family Engagement Collective, the Thriving Children Safer Families Movement, and Foster America, holding roles such as lived expert, co-founder, co-chair, leader, researcher, co-facilitator, advocate, mentor, and activist. Her vision and commitment revolve around promoting family-engaged systems that cleverly intertwine lived expertise, fostering a harmonious environment for positive change. Through her dedicated work, Heather endeavors to create a platform where holistic support for all families is not just a goal but a reality.



**Toni Miner** is a strong and well-respected advocate for parents and caregivers in Colorado. She is the mother of three daughters. She is the kinship caregiver for her three grandchildren, an adult granddaughter, a teenaged grandson and a 6-year-old granddaughter. Toni struggled with substance abuse issues and during that period of her life, her two oldest children were in and out of placements with relatives and friends. She has been in recovery for 22 years and continues to actively be involved in a recovery program. She is currently employed as a Circle of Parents Program manager at Illuminate Colorado. Toni has extensive experience working to develop a Parent Partner Program to provide peer support and mentoring to parents at risk or involved in the child welfare system. Prior to this, she worked as a Family Support Partner with Jefferson County Colorado Child and Youth Leadership Commission. In addition to mentoring families, she provided training to caseworkers, Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteers and kinship care providers.

Toni has been active in various councils, committees, and task forces at the local, state and national levels such as the Child Welfare System Team Decision-Making meetings, Domestic Violence/Child Protection Services Coordinating Council, State IV-E Waiver Oversight Committee, Children's Justice Act Task Force, Juvenile Justice Subcommittee, Human Trafficking Subcommittee and the Birth Parent National Network. She spoke at the State Capital with the Governor for the roll out of the state's new Child Protection hotline. Toni is the recipient of the 2016 Casey Excellence for Children Award. Toni provided testimony before Congress at the 2016 Education and Workforce Committee hearing. She is also the recipient of the 2021 Laura Elliot Making Miracles Happen Award.



**Crystal Ward Allen** has been a Strategic Consultant with Casey Family Programs, a national operating foundation focused on safely reducing the need for foster care, since 2014. Crystal worked at Public Children Services of Ohio for 24 years, 13 as the executive director; her early experience included as a juvenile probation counselor in Appalachia, Virginia; adolescent group care in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and child welfare in suburban Minnesota.

She is a Virginia Tech Hokie as well as an OSU Buckeye, loves to ride her bike, hike and enjoy music – and she has two adorable grandchildren. Crystal has volunteered with many state and community level boards and educational organizations, in addition to other professional experience.

Crystal is passionate about ensuring every child and youth has someone that is unconditionally crazy about them – thus, strengthening families is a must.



**Rebecca (Becky) Orsi-Hunt** is an Associate Research Professor at the Kempe Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect at University of Colorado Anschutz in Aurora. She does research and evaluation supporting child welfare systems reform. Becky enjoys active collaborations with child welfare professionals and Lived Experience experts. She brings to her work a growing curiosity about how data can be used more thoughtfully and justly. She is also interested in how research and evaluation can support “narrowing the front door” to the child welfare system so that most families can meet their needs outside that system. Becky has been a non-voting friend and ally of the Reimagining Child Welfare Initiative since October 2022. Along with her professional expertise, she brings lived experience as a parent by birth and by adoption of two thriving young adults.



**Alisiana Medina** recently graduated from University of Colorado, Denver with a Bachelor of Arts in criminal justice and minor in public administration in May 2024. Alisiana graduated from Community College of Denver with an Associates in applied science transfer and paralegal certification in 2016. In Spring of 2025, Alisiana will attend Law School with interest in becoming a guardian of ad litem/counsel for youth and tribal attorney. Alisiana is an enrolled member of Navajo Nation (Diné/Navajo). Alisiana has been a paralegal for seven years in both private and public firms and organizations. Alisiana is on various councils, memberships, and volunteering on LEAP (Lived Expert Action Panel) with the Office of Child Representatives, Colorado Department of Human Services (Child Welfare Division), Denver Indian Family Resource Center, Society of American Indian Government Employees, Colorado Commission on Indian Affairs, Local Access to Justice Committee (20th Judicial District) and Colorado Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Council with the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice Department of Public Safety. As a young person with lived experience in the foster care system, Alisiana has done a great deal of work with advocacy and shares incredibly important perspectives with stakeholders to inform change.



**Angela Lytle** is the Colorado Site Director with Foster America. Her career has been dedicated to serving those within the private and public sectors of child welfare and juvenile justice systems. She is driven by the desire for systemic change that allows holistic, multi-generational, family-centeredness honoring family preservation, empowerment, inclusion and the voices of those being served. In meaningful partnership with people impacted by the child welfare system and with governmental agencies, organizations and communities, Foster America designs and implements community-based, prevention oriented solutions. Angela's work in Colorado is centered around supporting the Reimagining Colorado Child Welfare Steering Committee helping to drive their transformative work forward in elevating family voice, building systems of prevention and advancing equity. Angela is a Colorado native and her favorite life roles include mother, wife, sister, daughter, and friend.

**Eric Rhodes**, a recent graduate of Colorado State University Global with a Bachelor's in Human Services, is a passionate advocate for social justice and systemic reform. His journey, marked by his experiences as a former foster child who aged out of the system at 18, has profoundly shaped his worldview and commitment to helping others.

Eric began his academic pursuits at Central Texas College, studying for an AA in Chemical Dependency Counseling. During this period, he actively engaged with communities, assisting those struggling with addiction to find treatment and recovery services. This work was not only a professional calling but a personal mission inspired by his own challenging past. His lived experiences have become a powerful testimony to his resilience and dedication. Eric has collaborated with LENS (Lived Experiences Navigating Stories and Systems), a group formed under the Kempe Center in Colorado, which focuses on leveraging personal narratives to influence training and legislative initiatives. Currently, Eric works in Wraparound Services as a Peer Recovery Mentor, supporting both youth and adults dealing with substance abuse and system involvement. His advocacy extends to populations that are often stigmatized and underserved, offering a perspective that emphasizes permanent, sustainable solutions over temporary fixes. Eric's unique insights and unwavering commitment make him a vital voice in the ongoing efforts toward social justice and reform.

**Nate Bustamante** is a dedicated father of three, and a parent advocate with a passion for improving child welfare services. His involvement in key state task forces and organizations underlines his commitment to making a difference in the lives of children and families. As a board member of the Child Welfare Family Advisory Council (FAC) and a participant in the Reimagining Child Welfare Committee, Nate strives to create positive change by advocating for reducing the unnecessary removal of children from their families and ensuring equitable access to services throughout Colorado. Nate continues to be a driving force in reshaping child welfare policies for the betterment of the community.

**Diane Smith** is a dedicated mother of three. Diane draws from her personal journey through foster care and child welfare systems to drive her work at Denver Parent Advocates Lending Support (DPALS) Program with Denver Human Services. As a co-founder of DPALS, she now serves as a peer navigator empowering parents facing similar challenges. Diane's fervor for helping families navigate obstacles and reunite fuels her commitment to strengthening families. Chairing the Substance Exposed Newborns Family Advisory Board, she leverages her experiences to advocate for children and families, striving to create lasting, positive impacts. Diane's tireless dedication embodies her mission to support and uplift those in need, equipping parents with the tools for success and fostering brighter futures for all.

**Joe Stroh** is the Director of Parent Advocacy for the Office of Respondent Parents Counsel. In this position he is responsible for overseeing the supervision and training of Parent Advocates as well as managing the Parent Advocate program. Additionally, he is also responsible for helping to manage and recruit for the Family Advocate and Social Worker programs associated with the Office of Respondent Parents Counsel. Previous to this role,, Joe was a contractor with the Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel, working directly with parents engaged in an open child welfare case. As a contractor, Joe primarily worked in the rural communities that comprise the Western Slope of Colorado. Prior to this position Joe was a Permanency Caseworker with the Mesa County Department of Human Services.

**Mollie Warren** is the Director of Family and Children Services for the Boulder County Department of Housing and Human Services, a role she has held since January 2022. With over two decades of experience in child welfare, social services, and family-strengthening initiatives, Mollie has built a reputation for system change and innovation. Before taking on her current position, she served for six years as Child Welfare and Adult Protective Services Deputy Division Director for the City and County of Denver. Her career also includes roles as a Program Associate at the National Council on Crime and Delinquency's Children's Research Center (now Evident Change), and as both a Child Welfare Practice Coach and Social Caseworker for Larimer County. Before her work in child welfare, Mollie's career spanned teaching Special Education in New York City, managing emergency home repair services in central Appalachia, and working as a Cognitive Therapist and Family Service Coordinator within Wyoming's Early Childhood Education system. Her extensive and diverse background equips her with a deep understanding of the complexities of the child welfare system, making her a dedicated advocate for advancing the well-being of children and families in Boulder County.

## Become part of the change!

If you are interested about becoming part of the Reimagining Child Welfare Steering Committee or have questions, contact Joe Homlar at [joseph.homlar@state.co.us](mailto:joseph.homlar@state.co.us).

**CO4Kids**

