

TOGETHER WE CAN CONFERENCE 2026

A STATEWIDE CONFERENCE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, THEIR FAMILIES, AND THE PROFESSIONALS WHO SUPPORT THEM.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: CHRIS ULMER

Chris Ulmer is the founder of the leading neurodiversity movement, SBSK (Special Books by Special Kids). Chris travels the globe meeting friends with a diagnosis and sharing their stories on social media. He believes that when we take the time to hear someone's story and view life from their perspective, we learn and grow as humans, making the world a better place. Together Chris and the SBSK community are promoting conversations on acceptance and inclusion around the world.

CONFERENCE AGENDA

8:15 am - 4:00 pm

EXHIBITORS LOCATED THROUGH DOORS BEHIND MAIN LOBBY

See the Exhibitor Raffle form in your conference packet and find out **how you can enter to win from over \$2,000 in prizes!**

QUIET ROOM LOCATED NEAR THE CHILDCARE AREA

See the Registration Desk Attendant for access to the Quiet Room.

8:15 am - 9:00 am	Lobby	<p style="text-align: center;">REGISTRATION/CHECK-IN & CHILDCARE DROP-OFF</p> <p>Sign in and pick up your conference packet and name badge. Early entry will not be permitted except for those utilizing childcare. Those registered for childcare are allowed to enter the childcare area only at 8am to check child(ren) in.</p>
9:00 am - 9:15 am	Upstairs	<p style="text-align: center;">OPENING REMARKS & KEYNOTE INTRODUCTION</p>
9:15 am - 10:15 am	Upstairs	<p style="text-align: center;">MORNING KEYNOTE</p> <p>The Power of Acceptance and Positivity <i>Chris Ulmer</i></p> <p>I have made it my life's mission to normalize the diversity of the human condition by showcasing how understanding, positivity, and acceptance can make a better world for all. Together, we will explore these concepts and more through my experiences with the worldwide acceptance movement, Special Books by Special Kids (SBSK). (Facebook.com/specialbooksbyspecialkids)</p>

10:15 am - 10:45 am

CONFERENCE BREAK

ROOM A-1 SIBSHOPS	<p>Sibshops <i>Andrea Carlson; ASK Resource Center Family Support Specialist Supervisor, Sibshops Facilitator</i></p> <p>Siblings of children with disabilities or special health needs have their own feelings and experiences—and they deserve support too. Sibshops are fun, welcoming recreation programs created just for siblings to connect, share, and feel understood.</p> <p>Pre-registration required for entry into Sibshops</p>
ROOM A-2 SIBTEENS	<p>Sibteens <i>Tara Conley, Iowa SIBS; Sibteen Facilitator</i></p> <p>Sibteen workshops are laid-back, fun programs for teens ages 14–19 who have a sibling with support needs. Meet other teens who “get it,” hang out, swap real-life stories, and pick up tips for handling the ups and downs of having a sibling with a disability. Be yourself, make new friends, and remember—you’re not alone. Bonus: every participant has a chance to win a gift card!</p> <p>Pre-registration required for entry into Sibteens</p>
ROOM B EDUCATION	<p>Get in the Know: What Iowa’s Director of Special Education Wants Families to Know <i>Leisa Breitfelder, MMS, PK–12 Administration & Superintendent Endorsements; Special Education Division Director, Iowa Department of Education</i></p> <p>Families will have the opportunity to meet Iowa’s new Director of Special Education, Leisa Breitfelder, and learn about current priorities and initiatives across the state. This session will also share the Director’s vision and future plans for strengthening special education services for students with disabilities and their families.</p>
ROOM C POSTSECONDARY TRANSITION	<p>Where will They Live? Exploring Living Options After High School <i>Craig Barnum, Jena Luksetich, Brenda Janisch, MS/LMHC;</i> <i>Parents with experience transitioning a child into a group home, independent living, and living at home.</i></p> <p>Families will explore a range of living options for young adults with disabilities and hear real-life experiences from families who have chosen different paths. This session will highlight how families made decisions about living arrangements and what they learned along the way to find the right fit for their child and family.</p>
ROOM D HEALTH AND WELLBEING	<p>Understanding School Health Services: What Families Need to Know <i>Melissa Walker, MSN, ARNP, FNP-C; Administrative Consultant, Bureau of Special Education Finance, Data and Accountability</i></p> <p>Your child’s health and safety at school depend on good teamwork, clear communication, and careful record-keeping. In this session, families will learn how school nurses work with staff to support student health, how medications are handled, and how schools document care to help keep students safe.</p>
UPSTAIRS YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT LEADERSHIP	<p>Round table Sessions <i>How to Pay the Bills: Judy Warth, BBA, CESP; Program Manager, Center for Disabilities and Development</i> <i>Learn about Voc Rehab: April Allen; Counselor, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation</i> <i>Being a Life Long Learner: Evan Murdock; Self-advocate,</i> <i>Ashlyn Brokaw; Self-advocate,</i> <i>Kelsey Teeter; Secondary Transition Consultant, Iowa Department of Education</i></p> <p>In this interactive breakout session, Youth Leaders will rotate in small groups to three different presenters. Youth Leaders will learn practical tips for managing money, budgeting, and paying bills with confidence, explore what it means to be a lifelong learner by hearing from colleges and students in inclusive college programs, and learn how Vocational Rehabilitation can support them in exploring careers, finding a job, and succeeding at work.</p> <p>Pre-registration required for entry into the Youth and Young Adult Leadership Conference</p>

Lunch can be enjoyed in the exhibit hall, an open breakout room, or outside.
There are optional lunch-and-learn sessions during lunch, as well.

**ROOM A-1
SIBSHOPS**

Sibshops will eat lunch together

Andrea Carlson; ASK Resource Center Family Support Specialist Supervisor, Sibshops Facilitator

**ROOM A-2
SIBTEENS**

Sibteens will eat lunch together

Tara Conley; Iowa SIBS; Sibteen Facilitator

**ROOM B
ASK Each Other
Support Group**

12:00 - 12:45 pm

ASK Resource Center Staff

An optional 45 minute support group session.

The ASK Each Other Support group is a place for parents to come alongside each other to share your lived experiences and collaborate. Lead by an ASK Resource Center Family Support Specialist, get a taste of what an ASK Each Other Support Group feels like and meet other families to connect with.

**ROOM C
ASK Each Other
Mentor Network**

12:00 - 12:30 pm

Kasey Vermillion; ASK Each Other Mentor Network Coordinator; Family Mentors

An Optional 30 minute information session.

The ASK Each Other Mentor Network connects families with shared experiences to provide meaningful support and connection. Join this session to learn how mentors and mentees are matched, the support mentees receive, and how mentors are trained for their role.

**UPSTAIRS
YOUTH AND
YOUNG ADULT
LEADERSHIP**

Youth and Young Adult Leaders will eat lunch together

Finding Your Rhythm: 5 Lessons in Leadership

Brad Gerard; CHASE Program Director, Families Together, Inc.

Leadership doesn't look just one way — and neither do you. In this interactive breakout, youth leaders will explore how to use their unique creative strengths to shape their leadership style and make a real impact. Participants will reflect on their personal values to uncover the “why” behind their leadership, learn how to build a team of people who share their vision, and practice strong listening skills to ensure their ideas truly meet community needs. The session will also introduce

Make sure to check out the resource fair during lunch!

1:00 pm - 2:00 pm

BREAKOUT SESSION

ROOM A-1 SIBSHOPS

Sibshops

Andrea Carlson; ASK Resource Center Family Support Specialist Supervisor, Sibshops Facilitator

Sibshops will continue their activities and connecting with each other.

ROOM A-2 SIBTEENS

Sibteens

Tara Conley; Iowa SIBS; Sibteen Facilitator

Sibteens will continue their activities and connecting with each other.

ROOM B EDUCATION

Partners in Success: Families and Professionals Supporting Challenging Behavior

Kindra Tolley; Parent

Brenda Janisch, MS/LMHC; parent and Northwest AEA Challenging Behavior Specialist

Dr. Matt O'Brien, PhD, BCBA-D; Clinical Associate Professor of Pediatrics-Psychology, Stead Family Children's Hospital

In this session, a panel of parents will share their personal journeys navigating challenging behaviors within the school system. Joining them is Dr. Matt O'Brien, a specialist in neurobehavioral psychology from the UI Stead Family Department of Pediatrics. Together, they will discuss strategies that work, the hurdles they've cleared, and how to build a school team that truly understands your child's unique needs. You will walk away with practical, "family-tested" tips and professional insights to help you foster strong partnerships and support your child's behavioral and academic success.

ROOM C POSTSECONDARY TRANSITION

Exploring College Life: Pathways, Programs & Possibilities

Summer Murdock; Parent

Angela Brokaw; Caregiver

Kelsey Teeter; Secondary Special Education Program Consultant, Iowa Department of Education

Thinking about college can feel overwhelming, but there are many pathways and opportunities for every student. In this session, participants will explore college program options in Iowa for young adults with disabilities and learn about the academic, social, and independent living experiences that are part of college life. Participants will also hear from two parents whose children with disabilities are currently attending college as they share their early concerns, lessons learned, and successes. This session is designed to help students and families better understand their options and feel more confident about the possibilities of college.

ROOM D HEALTH AND WELLBEING

You're Not Alone: Where to Turn for System Support

Director Zachary Rhein, B.A., M.A.; Director of Aging and Disability Services, Iowa HHS

Marissa Eyanson; Behavioral Health Division Director, Iowa HHS

Finding the right services for your child can be overwhelming, but you're not alone in the process. This session will introduce families to Disability Access Points (DAPs) and Behavioral Health Navigators—two key supports that can help connect you to services in Iowa. You will learn how these systems operate, how they relate to each other, and how to get started. Families will also have the chance to share their experiences and learn from one another.

UPSTAIRS YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT LEADERSHIP

Continuation of Finding Your Rhythm: 5 Lessons in Leadership

Brad Gerard; CHASE Program Director, Families Together, Inc.

Leadership doesn't look just one way — and neither do you. In this interactive breakout, youth leaders will explore how to use their unique creative strengths to shape their leadership style and make a real impact. Participants will reflect on their personal values to uncover the "why" behind their leadership, learn how to build a team of people who share their vision, and practice strong listening skills to ensure their ideas truly meet community needs. The session will also introduce simple organizational tools to help turn great ideas into action without creating chaos. Youth leaders will leave feeling more confident, grounded in their values, and ready to lead with purpose.

2:00 pm - 2:15 pm

CONFERENCE BREAK

ROOM A SIBSHOP AND SIBTEENS	<p>Mic Check: Share Your Story with Podcasting <i>Brad Gerard; CHASE Program Director, Families Together, Inc.</i></p> <p>Siblings have powerful stories and perspectives that deserve to be heard. In this interactive session, participants will learn how to turn their lived experiences into a podcast—from developing an idea and finding their voice, to recording and building a platform that connects community members!</p> <p>Pre-registration required for entry into Sibshops and Sibteens</p>
ROOM B EDUCATION	<p>What Changed? A Year in Review of Iowa Special Education Law <i>Stephanie Petrillo, B.A., J.D.; Staff Attorney, Disability Rights Iowa</i></p> <p>Families will learn about recent changes in Iowa special education law and what they mean for students with disabilities. This session will highlight important legal decisions and policy updates and explain how these changes may affect students, families, and schools in practical ways.</p>
ROOM C POSTSECONDARY TRANSITION	<p>Stronger Together: A Journey in Family and Self-Advocacy <i>Bella Arenas and Laura Perez Salcedo; Family, Self-advocate and Parent Emmalynn and Elizabeth Matthies; Family, Self-advocate and Parent Grace Nelson; Self-advocate Rebecca McMahan; Parent</i></p> <p>Hear from youth leaders and parents as they share how advocacy evolved over time — from early support to youth confidently leading and speaking up for themselves. Panelists will reflect on how advocacy skills were encouraged and strengthened across different settings and relationships, and youth leaders will speak directly about developing their own voices, building confidence, and claiming autonomy in decisions about their lives. Participants will leave with practical ideas for how young people with disabilities can take an active role in shaping their futures, and how the adults in their lives can support that journey while making space for youth leadership.</p>
ROOM D HEALTH AND WELLBEING	<p>Understanding the HOME Project: What Iowa Families Need to Know About Changes to Disability Waivers <i>Kera Oestreich; Deputy Director of Policy, Iowa HHS</i></p> <p>Iowa is making changes to disability waivers through the HOME (Hope and Opportunity in Many Environments) Project. This session will help families understand what the HOME Project is and why the state is redesigning Home and Community-Based Services. Participants will learn about key changes, including new age-based waivers, updates to assessments, and how services may be organized in the future. Families will also learn what these changes may mean for children and youth with disabilities and how to stay informed during the transition. This session will provide clear, practical information to help parents feel more confident navigating these upcoming changes.</p>
UPSTAIRS YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT LEADERSHIP	<p>Building Independence: What It Looks Like for Each Individual <i>Michael Biermann; Self-advocate Laney Beadle; Self-advocate</i></p> <p>Youth Leaders will hear from Michael and Laney, two young adults with disabilities who are also in a dating relationship, as they share where they live and the supports that help them succeed. They will talk about the meaningful activities they enjoy, including employment and volunteering, and what helps them stay involved and successful. Participants will also get ideas for building relationships, having fun, and creating a life in the community after high school.</p>

3:15 PM - 3:30 PM

CONFERENCE BREAK

3:15 PM

SIBSHOPS AND SIBTEEN PICK-UP: Participants of Sibshops and Sibteens will need to be picked up by a parent or guardian at the end of the last breakout session. Siblings are welcome to join families for closing remarks and call to actions.

3:30 PM -
4:00 PM

Upper
Level

CLOSING REMARKS AND CALL TO ACTION: ASK Staff will wrap up the day of learning and share takeaways from the day of connecting with everyone at the conference.

EXHIBITOR FAIR DRAWING—MUST BE PRESENT TO WIN: Over \$2,000 in prizes will be drawn. See the Exhibit Raffle Form in your packet to learn more. **Place your completed form in the raffle drawing box located in the Exhibit Hall beside the ASK table by 3:00 pm to be included in the drawing.**

Drawing is at 3:50 pm in the Keynote Room upstairs. Must be present to win.

4:00 - 4:30 pm

CHILDCARE PICK-UP

CHILDCARE PICK-UP

Children must be picked up no later than 4:30 pm.

THANK YOU Easterseals Bob and Billie Ray Child Development Center staff
for providing a fun and inclusive environment!

CONFERENCE MATERIALS

All available presentation materials (PowerPoints, handouts, etc.) will be posted to:
<https://www.askresource.org/togetherwecan> after the conference.

All conference attendees will receive email notice when the items are available.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A **HUGE THANK YOU** to the partner organizations, sponsors, volunteers, exhibitors and attendees for being a part of the 14th Annual Together We Can Conference!
This one-of-a-kind, statewide event would not be possible without your continued support.

CONFERENCE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Listed alphabetically by member type and last name

PARENTS:

Katie Mulera
Leila Hussein
Mollie Carstens
Rhonda Haitz

YOUNG ADULTS:

Bella Arenas
Connor McMahon
Emmalynn Matthies
Grace Nelson
Jack Lehman
Peter Vermillion
Zach Nolin

ASK STAFF ON PLANNING COMMITTEE:

Kelli Carnahan, Communications and Training Coordinator Statewide
Susie Lund, Training Coordinator Statewide
Pam Woelber, Post-Secondary Transition Coordinator Statewide

PRESENTER BIOGRAPHIES

Listed alphabetically by first name

Angela Brokaw is Ashlyn's grandmother and is supporting her as she transitions to college. She advocates on Ashlyn's behalf and helps guide her through the disability services process. Drawing on knowledge and experience from past employment, Angela works to ensure Ashlyn understands the supports available and has the tools she needs to succeed. Her goal is to help Ashlyn navigate college with confidence, access the right resources, and build a strong foundation for her future.

Ashlyn Brokaw is a student at Southwestern Community College in Creston, IA who is creative at graphic design enjoys anime, digital art, and visual storytelling. She is dedicated to developing design skills and using creativity to share ideas and connect with the community.

Isabella (Bella) Arenas Perez is a ninth grade student in Ankeny, Iowa. She has Cerebral Palsy and is passionate about advocating for people with all kinds of disabilities. She uses an eye gaze device, called Tobii Dynavox, to support her success in academics, communication, and leadership. Through this device, she has been able to participate in the I-YETI Council and help plan the youth branch of this conference.

Brad Girard, the Program Director for Families Together CHASE, brings a wealth of experience and personal insight to his role, empowering young individuals with disabilities and mental health challenges to thrive. With over four years as CHASE Program Director, Brad has played a pivotal role in shaping the program's initiatives, incorporating evidence-based practices and innovative strategies to support youth development.

Brad's passion for his work stems from his own journey of overcoming challenges with a dual mental health diagnosis of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and bipolar disorder type II. Drawing from his lived experience, he has developed many of the tools and techniques that form the core of CHASE's 8-week youth program, blending personal insight with professional expertise to create a supportive and transformative environment for participants.

Brenda Janisch is the proud mother of two adopted children. Her son, Anthony, is 21 and has autism and ADHD; he works part time and lives at home. Her daughter, Sadie, is a junior in high school who receives special education services for reading, math, and writing and is currently working with Vocational Rehabilitation to explore post-graduation options, including employment or a 4+ transition program.

Brenda is a Social Emotional Behavioral Health Coach with Northwest Area Education Agency, a role she has held for 19 years. She works alongside school teams to develop Functional Behavior Assessments and evidence-based Behavior Intervention Plans. Brenda is passionate about supporting students and helping school teams create environments where every learner can succeed.

Craig Barnum spent 32 years as an educator in Iowa with teaching experience in elementary, middle, and high school. He spent the bulk of his career as a central office administrator at Cedar Rapids Prairie and at Cedar Rapids Community Schools. After his retirement from K12 education, Craig continued his career journey at Everway where he is a product manager for software that supports teaching and learning. Craig and his spouse, Jeri, have three children. Their youngest child, Koan, is a person with significant developmental challenges: he has no verbal language, is wheelchair-bound, and requires feeding/toileting assistance. Koan is currently a senior at Iowa City West High School and transitioned into his community supported living (group home) arrangement in May of 2025.

Elizabeth Matthies is Em's mom. Professionally, Elizabeth has worked in the fields of special education and social work. Elizabeth currently works as a case manager for a local non-profit serving adults with special needs. Elizabeth has served as an advocate and taught self-advocacy skills for nearly 30 years.

Emmalynn (Em) Matthies is a junior at Ames High. She was born with a chronic health condition and as a Deaf individual. Em has had bilateral cochlear implants since she was a toddler. She went through intense SLP for many years, as she has chosen to use Listening and Spoken Language to communicate. Em enjoys reading, Greek Mythology, Legos, and volunteering in her community. Em is a nanny for a local family and works in her church nursery. Em plans to pursue a degree in Communication Disorders and ASL with a career goal of becoming a Speech Language Pathologist.

Evan Murdock is a dedicated community member and IT student who strives to make his community a better place by listening to and connecting with others. Living with autism, dyslexia, ADHD, and anxiety has shaped his strong determination to overcome challenges each day. Through hard work, support, and perseverance, Evan has developed skills in communication, learning, and employment, including more than four years working at Fareway, where he enjoys meeting and helping people and animals. He is passionate about technology and is working toward an Information Technology Certificate to continue building his skills and contribute positively to his community and future workplace.

Grace Nelson is a junior studying Political Science, English, and Disability Studies at the University of Iowa. Grace is involved with political and disability advocacy across the local, state, and national levels. She has held roles such as President of Students for Disability Advocacy at UIowa (SDAI), Disability Constituency Senator in the UI Undergraduate Student Government (USG), and various roles with local, state, and national representatives and political organizations. Grace is passionate about grassroots, community-driven, youth-led change, and hopes to pursue a career in disability law and public policy.

Jena Luksetich is on ASK's Corporate Advisory Board and is a Web Content Manager for RELI Group. She's worked in federal government healthcare and tech since 2011 and is passionate about helping grow nonprofits and organizations. Jena and her husband, Scott, have a blended family of five young adults. Her oldest son was diagnosed with autism when he was three and Jena experienced lots of support from other parents who have children with disabilities. She strives to give back to others the knowledge, support, and guidance she has received, and continues to advocate for disability and civil rights.

Judy Warth is a program manager with Iowa's University Center for Excellence on Disabilities. Judy is curious about everything except knitting. She loves the adventure of helping people have the lives they want and deserve to have. Her motto is "if it is not fun, don't do it!" Her work revolves around values, employment, self-advocacy (healthcare, employment, sexual), transition to adulthood, leadership and community inclusion. She supports, trains and work for people with disabilities in schools, families, businesses, community rehabilitation programs and clinics. She also loves animals, kayaking and communing with God and Nature.

Her work within Iowa's UCEDD/CDD is diverse including job coaching and job development, teaching classes for job coaches and job developers through Iowa APSE, serving as LEND core-faculty for self-advocates and community trainees, working with youth and teams within the Iowa City Community School District to transition from school to work, supporting the MFP team on employment related issues and staffing the CDD Transition to Adulthood Clinic.

Kelsey Teeter currently serves as the Secondary Special Education Program Consultant with the Iowa Department of Education. Previously, Kelsey worked in the secondary school setting providing transition services. With 15+ years of experience in the field of disability, education, and employment; Kelsey maintains a strong commitment and passions for improving the outcomes, equity, and inclusion of individuals who experience disabilities.

Kindra Tolley is an educator with 25 years of experience as a special education teacher. She is also a parent and advocate, drawing on her personal experience supporting her children in the education system. Kindra currently has two children in school—an eighth grader with a 504 plan and a fourth grader with an IEP and Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). Her perspective as both an educator and parent informs her commitment to supporting students with diverse learning and behavioral needs.

Laney Beadle is a woman with strong beliefs. She loves BIG and will tell anyone about her boyfriend Michael, her family, and her doodle. Laney is proud to volunteer at the local care center, church camp and does a great job keeping the family home in tip top shape. Laney loves her church, her nieces, her Godchildren and all of her family and friends and the Biermanns. Most of all Laney loves to plan dates and trips with her one and only, Michael.

Laura Perez is a dedicated parent of two children, including a daughter with support needs, and brings her lived experience to everything she does. Originally from Colombia, she moved to Iowa in 2008 and has since become a passionate advocate for children with different abilities. Her experiences as a parent inform her work in the Ankeny School District, where she serves as a paraprofessional supporting students in special education. She also helps families navigate the journey of raising children with diverse needs.

Leisa Breitfelder began her career as both a special education and general education teacher, building a strong foundation in meeting the needs of all learners. She later served as an AEA special education consultant before transitioning into district leadership. Leisa was a special education director for 10 years - two years at Clear Creek Amana Community School District and eight years at Linn-Mar Community School District - where she led system-wide efforts to strengthen services and outcomes for students with disabilities. She then served for two years as a shared superintendent for North Linn Community School District and Central City Community School District.

Leisa currently serves as Iowa's State Director of Special Education, where she continues to champion high expectations and equitable access for students with disabilities. She holds a master's degree as a Child Development Specialist, along with administrative and superintendent licensure. Her passion centers on closing the achievement gap for students with special needs and creating school environments where every student feels a true sense of belonging.

Marissa Eyanson serves as the Director of the Division of Behavioral Health for the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services. Prior to stepping into her current role in March of 2020, she served as the policy director across the full spectrum of Iowa Medicaid's programs. Throughout her career, Marissa has focused on leveraging systems and teams to achieve high quality outcomes through improvement in organizational structure, program management, and policy development.

From her first job as a direct support professional to her work in Medicaid managed care, Marissa has focused on the intersections between behavioral health, system and network capacity, and improved outcomes. She brings a unique ability to pivot perspectives from provider to payer to regulator. Marissa is the architect of Iowa's Behavioral Health Service System and ensured its' successful installation by building strong partnerships, articulating clear vision, and aligning activity to purpose. Marissa is a life-long small-town Iowan and graduate of Iowa State University. She and her husband have two adult children and enjoy time spent with family, their pets, and travelling.

Matt O'Brien is a faculty member in the UI Stead Family Department of Pediatrics at the University of Iowa's Carver College of Medicine. With over a decade of experience, Dr. O'Brien specializes in neurobehavioral psychology, focusing specifically on supporting individuals with neurodevelopmental disabilities and their families.

As a dedicated clinician, Dr. O'Brien has spent more than 10 years directing clinics that specialize in the assessment and treatment of severe and challenging behaviors. His work is rooted in finding practical, effective solutions for complex behavioral needs.

Melissa Walker MSN, ARNP has been employed at the Iowa Department of Education since 2013. Her role is an Administrative Consultant of School Health and School Nursing Services. She covers 5 program areas: School Nursing/Health Services, Employee Health, Environmental Health, Complex Disease Management, and Health Screening/Health Promotion. She assists families as integral education team members in supporting their children who experience the needs for health services.

Michael Biermann is a fifth-generation farmer, a disabilities advocate and a public speaker. Michael is a son, a brother, an uncle, a loyal friend, a proud dog dad, and a longtime partner to his beloved Laney. Michael also happens to be a person living with an intellectual disability. Michael believes strongly in the power of opportunity and advocates that all people should exercise their right to every opportunity life can offer. As a middle-schooler, Michael was asked to share his experiences at a conference and quickly learned the importance of one's story and thus began his public speaking endeavors. Since that time, Michael has been a regular guest speaker and contributor at various colleges and conferences telling stories of his full and opportunity-filled life.

Rebecca McMahon is a Des Moines native and mother to four children, ages 12-18. She most recently worked as a public information officer for the State of Iowa. For over a decade she worked as a private investigator in Washington, D.C., and taught criminal investigation at Georgetown University Law Center. She is now a stay-at-home mom, caretaker, and an advocate for her children.

Stephanie Petrillo, B.A., J.D. joined Disability Rights Iowa in 2022 after graduating with honors from Drake Law School. While at Drake, Stephanie focused on public policy and civil rights law, and interned with non-profits and government entities. This work highlighted for her how the issues people with disabilities face are connected and intertwined, and the important role that she has when advocating for her clients. Prior to law school, Stephanie graduated from Grand View University with a bachelor's degree in History and a minor in the Logos Honors program. Stephanie's work at DRI includes helping clients with special education, employment, guardianship, and accommodation issues, as well as educating lawmakers on these topics. In her free time, Stephanie enjoys reading and learning new things, playing board games, and crocheting.

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Summer Murdock is a dedicated advocate and professional with more than 25 years of experience in community, employment, and disability services. She has worked extensively to support children, youth, and adults with disabilities, helping connect individuals and families with meaningful opportunities and resources. Summer collaborates with families, employers, and government partners to strengthen systems of support and promote inclusive communities across southwest Iowa. She is passionate about advancing opportunities that empower people with disabilities to live, work, and thrive in their communities.

Zachary Rhein, B.A., M.A serves as Iowa's Director for the Aging and Disability Services division within the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Zach has over 20 years of experience working in federal and state government and nonprofit organizations, where he has designed and improved programs that meet individuals' basic needs. The work he leads at HHS focuses on ensuring that all Iowans, no matter where they live, get the right support to live healthy and independent lives.