

Thursday, April 23, 2026

7:00 a.m. — 8:15 a.m.

Breakfast

8:30 a.m.—8:45 a.m.

Welcome

Laval Miller-Wilson, Deputy Secretary
Office of Children, Youth and Families
Department of Human Services

Kevin M. Dougherty, Justice
Supreme Court of Pennsylvania

8:45 a.m. — 9:45 a.m.

Better Together: Communication That Builds Trust and Changes Outcomes

Shannon Smith, M.D.
Leadership Strategist/Pediatrician
Tri-State Telemed, LLC.



Communication is the cornerstone of successful relationships in professional settings and at home. Yet communication is often more complex than it appears, leading to misunderstandings, defensiveness, and stalled progress.

In this engaging session, Dr. Shannon Smith introduces practical, trauma-informed communication tools that help participants better understand behavior and respond in ways that build trust and connection. Drawing on neuroscience and real-world experience, participants will learn how stress and past experiences influence reactions in difficult conversations.

Attendees will gain simple, immediately applicable strategies including active listening, acknowledgment, curiosity-driven questions, and clear next steps that help move conversations from defensiveness to collaboration. Through real-world examples and interactive reflection, participants will leave equipped to apply these skills with colleagues, families, and the individuals they serve.

9:45 a.m. — 11:00 a.m.

Application to Practice, County Teams (Part I)

County teams will discuss the concepts of belonging and effective communication, considering the information presented during the Summit. Using the Better Together Action Plan (found in the program), teams will identify one or two action items for this topic that could advance practice in their county.

11:00 a.m. — 11:15 a.m. Break

11:15 a.m. — 12:15 p.m. From Silos to Solutions: Helping Children and Families Thrive

Moderator:

Christy Stanek, Deputy Director
Office of Children & Families in the Courts

Panel Members:

Honorable Tina Boyd
Court of Common Pleas of Berks County

Honorable George Wheeler
Court of Common Pleas of Tioga County

Honorable Jordan Yeager
Court of Common Pleas of Bucks County

Honorable Linda Cordaro
Court of Common Pleas of Fayette County

Tanya Stauffer, Administrator
York County Children and Youth

Pennsylvania is facing a mental health crisis. Together, we must respond. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), 2025 Pennsylvania Fact Sheet, there are 2,352,000 adults in Pennsylvania with a mental health condition. That is 7X the population of Pittsburgh. Furthermore, 193,000 Pennsylvania adolescents experience a major depressive episode each year. We can no longer stay in our professional silos. This issue is impacting everyone. We must come together and allow for difficult conversations about the real barriers facing dependent children and their families. The answers and solutions won't come from within our individual silos, but by coming together to find a different way for the children and families we serve. During this presentation, you will hear from four counties doing just that. In the Fall 2025, with the leadership of the dependency Judge and Child Welfare Administrator, these counties volunteered to test the resources and recommendations of the Mental Health Workgroup. They will share their system gaps and priorities, lessons learned, and suggestions for success as you move from silos to solutions in your own county's quest to address systemic issues for children and families facing mental health challenges.

12:15 p.m. — 1:30 p.m. Lunch

1:30 p.m. — 2:30 p.m.

Application to Practice—Breakouts by Professional Roles

Judges, Juvenile Court Hearing Officers, Administrators, Attorneys, Supervisors/Direct Service Professionals, Providers, and State Partners will meet with their colleagues to discuss strategies for belonging, effective communication, and fostering enhanced Mental Health practices within their professional roles and responsibilities.

2:30 p.m. — 2:45 p.m.

Break

2:45 p.m. — 3:45 p.m.

Helping the Helpers: Working Better Together

Ken Montrose, Director of Training & Publications
Steel Minds Training Academy



Families involved in the dependency system often rely on a network of supporters—relatives, friends, mentors, and others—whose influence can either strengthen or complicate someone's recovery journey. This session will help professionals examine strategies to identify, encourage, and develop healthy support systems for individuals struggling with substance use. We will emphasize that supporters recovering from their own substance use can be powerful resources.

Participants will explore why willing supporters sometimes hesitate to engage—especially when past experiences with the recovering individual have been painful—and how courts and service providers can respond with understanding, guidance, and appropriate expectations.

We will emphasize the conference theme, **Better Together**, and how we can work collaboratively toward the shared goal of promoting safety, stability, and long-term permanency for children

3:45 p.m. — 4:00 p.m.

Closing Remarks

Laval Miller-Wilson, Deputy Secretary
Office of Childre, Youth and Families
Department of Human Services

Kevin M. Dougherty, Justice
Supreme Court of Pennsylvania

5:30 p.m. — 7:30 p.m.

Chief Justice Max Baer Youth Scholarship Presentation & Dinner

Friday, April 24, 2026

7:00 a.m. — 8:15 a.m.

Breakfast

8:30 a.m. — 9:45 a.m.

Application to Practice, County Teams (Part II)

County teams will discuss the information provided by the mental health panel and the substance recovery keynote speaker. Using the Better Together Action Plan (found in the program), teams will identify one or two action items per topic that could advance practice in their county.

9:45 a.m. — 10:00 a.m.

Break

10:00 a.m. — 10:30 a.m.

Welcome & Report Out

Sandra Moore, MSW, Director
Office of Children & Families in the Courts

10:30 a.m. — 11:30 a.m.

Voices of Victory—Real Stories of Success

This presentation will provide attendees with real-life scenarios from the Pennsylvania Child Dependency System. Family panel members will describe their child dependency experience, what helped them most, and how they achieved success. Joining the family members will be several system professionals who will share their perspectives on how working collaboratively led to “Better Together” outcomes. The presentation will provide hope for future success while challenging attendees to evaluate their current practice.

11:30 a.m. — 11:45 a.m.

Table Top Awards

Laval Miller-Wilson, Deputy Secretary
Office of Children, Youth & Families
Pennsylvania Department of Human Services

11:45 a.m. — Noon

Closing Remarks

Sandra Moore, MSW, Director
Office of Children & Families in the Courts

Kevin M. Dougherty, Justice
Supreme Court of Pennsylvania

SAFE TRAVELS

