

***TRACK TO
SUCCESS***
2026 IOWA APSE
CONFERENCE

Prairie Meadows Casino, Racetrack, & Hotel

Altoona, IA

September 21–22, 2026



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FOR WE ARE LEADERS OF
INCLUSIVENESS AND
COMMUNITY, OF **LOVE,**
EQUITY, AND JUSTICE.

— JUDY HEUMANN



SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

SEPTEMBER 21 - SEPTEMBER 22

Monday, September 21

9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Pre-Conference (Separate Registration Required)
Presented by Dr. Joseph Jones

1:00 PM - 2:30 PM

Conference Kickoff
Keynote Speaker: Cody Clark

2:30 PM - 2:45 PM

Break
Vendors & Exhibits

2:45 PM - 4:15 PM

Breakout Sessions

4:15 PM - 4:30 PM

Break
Vendors & Exhibits

4:30 PM - 5:00 PM

Networking & Social

5:00 PM - 6:30 PM

Awards Dinner & Ceremony

Tuesday, September 22

8:00 AM - 9:15 AM

Registration & Info Table is Open
Breakfast on Your Own

9:15 AM - 10:30 AM

Breakout Sessions

10:30 AM - 10:45 AM

Break
Vendors & Exhibits

10:45 AM - 11:45AM

Breakout Sessions

11:45 AM - 1:15 PM

APSE-Provided Lunch
National Updates

1:15 PM - 1:30 PM

Break
Vendors & Exhibits

1:30 PM - 3:00 PM

Breakout Sessions

VIEW MAP



MONDAY
SEPTEMBER 21

9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Salons 2 & 3



Pre-Conference

**Registration Required*

Dr. Joseph Jones

Chief Community Impact Officer
United Way of Central Iowa

Staying on Track: Advocacy Tools for the Journey Ahead

Your organization is a voice and advocate for the people you serve, and building a strong grassroots network doesn't have to be overwhelming. This session covers the basics of legislative and executive branch advocacy for disability employment and supported employment services, the differences between education, advocacy, and lobbying, and how to build the coalitions that turn advocacy into results. With public policy and funding facing real uncertainty, and the people who rely on your services facing added pressure, now is the time to prioritize your voice and use it well.

We'll cover:

- Finding your "why" for advocacy
- Who should be at the table
- Building policy and position statements that promote supported employment
- Putting your team and volunteers to work for the cause
- Building coalitions and lasting relationships with elected officials

Dr. Joseph Jones is the Chief Community Impact Officer at United Way of Central Iowa. He previously served as chief of staff to the president at Des Moines University Medicine and Health Sciences and as executive director of The Harkin Institute for Public Policy & Citizen Engagement. Joseph holds an MPA and a PhD from Drake University, where he received the Distinguished MPA Alumnus Award. A Shreveport, Louisiana native, he's most proud of having visited all 99 of Iowa's counties, and he shares a home with his Newfoundland, Toulou Marie, and a flock of backyard chickens.

MONDAY
SEPTEMBER 21

1:00 PM - 1:15 PM



Bishop Ballroom



Conference Kickoff

Mistie Johnson, MBA

President, 2023 - 2026
Iowa APSE Chapter

Welcome to the 2026 Iowa APSE Conference ***Your Track to Success!***

We all know that the path to employment success looks different for everyone. Rarely is it a straight line. Along the way, there may be unexpected turns, roadblocks, challenges, and opportunities for growth before finding the right fit.

This year, Iowa APSE is bringing together dynamic speakers, innovative exhibitors, and valuable resources designed to help you learn, grow, and collaborate. Whether you're just beginning the journey or looking for new strategies, you'll gain practical tools and fresh ideas for every stage.

We are thrilled you've chosen to join us as we continue building more inclusive employment opportunities across Iowa, together.

Mistie Johnson, MBA, has spent over 16 years advocating for people with disabilities. She earned her Community Work Incentives Coordinator (CWIC) certification through Virginia Commonwealth University in 2011 and now serves as Project Director and CWIC at Disability Rights Iowa, where she supports the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program across Iowa and Northwest Illinois.



MONDAY
SEPTEMBER 21

1:15 PM - 2:30 PM



Bishop Ballroom



Keynote Speaker

Cody Clark

Magician & Disability Advocate

Cody Clark Magic

Dis-Impos-Ability

Magician and disability advocate Cody Clark will explore the early influences of educators, therapists, and family members, examining both effective strategies and missed opportunities. This insight will empower service providers to better foster success for individuals with disabilities.

Cody Clark is a professional magician and autistic self-advocate from Louisville, KY. Through magic shows and talks for audiences ranging from schools to corporations, he shares how autism shapes his view of the world and that people with autism share the same goals as anyone else. His past clients include the University of Kentucky, Energizer Holdings, and Domino's Pizza, and he's testified before the U.S. House Small Business Committee.

Find him at codyclarkmagic.com or @codyclarkmagic.

2:30 PM - 2:45 PM



Exhibitor & Vendor Area



Break

Grab a coffee and check out our vendors and exhibits.

2:45 PM - 4:15 PM

Breakout Sessions



Salon 1

Game On! Gamification & the Environmental Inventory Challenge - Part 1

Bethany Friedl & Joe Murphy

This interactive session explores gamification and how game design boosts engagement in professional learning. Participants experience game-based activities through the Environmental Inventory Challenge, analyzing a workplace environment and a job seeker's needs, then debrief on person-centered employment practices.



Salon 2

Planning Inside, Outside & All Around The Tracks: Pathways to Post-school Success for Every Student

Kelsey Teeter

This session explores how schools support college and career readiness, and what that means specifically for students eligible for special education. Participants will think creatively about different ways to engage youth in higher education, employment, and lifelong learning, while identifying practical solutions to the gaps and barriers that often stand in the way of a successful transition to post-school life for these students.



Salon 3

Bridging the Gap: Understanding VR, Medicaid, & Employment

SueAnn Morrow, PhD & Ashlea Lantz

Vocational Rehabilitation and Medicaid/DD services share a commitment to helping people with disabilities live meaningful, inclusive lives, though the systems operate under different rules and expectations. This session explores where they align, where tensions arise, and how VR, Medicaid, providers, and partners can coordinate more effectively toward high-quality competitive integrated employment.

MONDAY
SEPTEMBER 21

4:15 PM - 4:30 PM



 **Exhibitor & Vendor Area**

Break

Grab a coffee and check out our vendors and exhibits.

4:30 PM - 5:00 PM



 **Exhibitor & Vendor Area**

Networking & Social

Join the Iowa APSE board to network, relax, and enjoy hors d'oeuvres sponsored by Iowa APSE.

5:00 PM - 6:30 PM



 **Bishop Ballroom**

Awards Dinner & Ceremony

Celebrate excellence in inclusive employment! Join the Iowa APSE Board for dinner as we recognize and honor the remarkable achievements of the nominees and winners of the 2026 Iowa APSE Awards.

The 2026 Iowa APSE Conference was made possible by:

IOWA
Vocational Rehabilitation
Services

TUESDAY
SEPTEMBER 22

8:00 AM - 9:15 AM



 **Entryway**

Registration Table Open

Check in and get settled. Breakfast is on your own.

9:15 AM - 10:30 AM

Breakout Sessions

 **Salon 1**

From Goals to Growth: Writing Clear Employment Plans & Supporting Long-Term Retention of LTSS Recipients

Duane Schumate

LTSS recipients with complex needs often require extensive, individualized support to succeed at work, and the greatest barrier is often clear, consistent documentation to justify and maintain those supports. This session gives employment professionals tools for writing employment goals and documentation that capture job duties, support needs, and realistic progress, strengthening retention through clear planning and coordinated communication.

 **Salon 2 (Virtual)**

Living Life Through the Side Door: The Power of Relationships, Curiosity, & Connection in Employment Services

Ciara Ladroma

What if the best employment opportunities aren't found through the front door, but through the "side door," the relationships and genuine connections we build in our communities? This session explores how employment specialists and leaders can use authentic relationship-building and community engagement to create stronger outcomes for people with disabilities, leaving attendees with practical tools for lasting employment success.

Salon 3

Manufacturing Partnerships That Work: Relationship-Based Job Development for People with Disabilities

Jodi Bell

Manufacturing employers continue to face workforce shortages, while people with disabilities remain underrepresented in these sectors. This session offers a practical, relationship-based approach to job development, grounded in relationship-building rather than transactional placement and drawing on decades of hands-on experience. Attendees will learn a proven framework, the Relationship, the Ask, the Offer, and the Execution, for strong placement outcomes and long-term success.

10:30 AM - 10:45 AM



Exhibitor & Vendor Area

Break

Grab a coffee and check out our vendors and exhibits.

10:45 AM - 11:45 AM

Breakout Sessions

Salon 1

Level Up Your Job Coaching: Putting Gamification into Practice - Part 2

Bethany Friedl & Joe Murphy

Gamification isn't about making job coaching childish or turning activities into competitions. It's about intentionally designing learning experiences that encourage participation, practice, feedback, and independence. Building on the first session, this explores how Employment Support Professionals can incorporate gamification into everyday coaching, with practical examples for teaching job tasks, workplace communication, and problem-solving, plus hands-on strategies for lasting success.

Salon 2

Turning Objections into Opportunities: Effective Employer Engagement in Supported Employment

Judy Warth

Join us for this interactive session exploring strategies for uncovering, understanding, and addressing employer objections to hiring the workers we support. Participants will identify common objections, understand the concerns behind them, apply strategies to respond confidently, and reframe objections into opportunities for partnership, practicing responses to real-world scenarios.

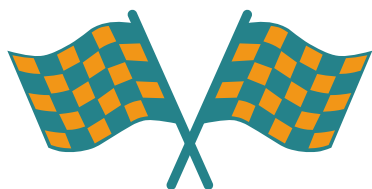
Salon 3

On the Right Track: Preparing the Next Generation of Disability & Rehabilitation Professionals

Jess Kreho & Ashlea Lantz

Discover how Drake University is preparing the next generation of disability and rehabilitation professionals through its undergraduate Disability & Rehabilitation Services major and master's-level Rehabilitation Counseling program. Students gain hands-on experience in advocacy, employment supports, and community inclusion, building rewarding careers while strengthening the disability and rehabilitation workforce.

11:45 AM - 1:15 PM



Bishop Ballroom

Lunch & APSE Updates

Enjoy lunch on us while catching up on the latest National and State APSE updates.

1:15 PM - 1:30 PM



Exhibitor & Vendor Area

Break

Grab a coffee and check out our vendors and exhibits.

TUESDAY
SEPTEMBER 22

1:30 PM - 3:00 PM

Breakout Sessions



Salon 1

MCOs & Employment First: Building Bridges to Competitive Integrated Employment

John McCalley, Kaily Hoard, Jim Plorins, & Donna Wendt

Learn how Iowa's three Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) are working to promote employment opportunities and outcomes for their members. You'll get an overview of each MCO's employment initiatives, resources, and success stories.



Salon 2 (Virtual)

Artificial Intelligence & the Future of Employment Support

Ryan Kurt

Artificial intelligence is changing how employment services are delivered, from job matching to long-term support. In this session, Ryan Kurt of the AI Lab, will share examples and offer guidance for incorporating practical AI tools into employment support work.



Salon 3

Save. Plan. Empower: The Benefits of an IAble Account

Kristi Onstot

Join Kristi Onstot from State Treasurer Roby Smith's office for an introduction to IAble, a savings tool that helps people with disabilities save money without impacting eligibility for Medicaid and SSI. Assets in an IAble account are excluded from these programs' resource limits and can cover qualified expenses like housing and transportation. Attendees will learn about eligibility and investment options.

***The 2026 Iowa APSE Conference
was made possible by:***



2026 PRESENTORS

BIOGRAPHIES



Jerri Bell

Senior Employment Specialist
One Vision

Jeri Bell is a Senior Employment Specialist with 36 years at One Vision, where she's built a career grounded in relationships, community collaboration, and inclusive employment. Known as the "Mayor of Clear Lake," Jeri is widely recognized for her deep connections with employers, community partners, and workforce leaders across the region.



Bethany Friedl

Employment & Development Coordinator
Networks for Training & Development

Bethany Friedl, MBA, CESP, holds a Bachelor's from Concordia University, St. Paul, and an MBA from Iowa State University. She's a certified Gallup Strengths Coach and Master Craftsman in Gamification, with over a decade in Supported Employment building effective hiring and training practices. Outside of work, she enjoys baking and her fur babies.



Kaily Hoard

Employment Subject Matter Expert (SME)
Iowa Total Care

Kaily serves as Iowa Total Care's Employment Subject Matter Expert (SME), bringing over 15 years of experience in employment services and inclusive workforce development. Her background spans care management and community engagement, and she's dedicated to helping people with disabilities access meaningful employment opportunities across Iowa.



Jess Kreho

Senior Consultant
GriffinHammis Associates

Jess Kreho is a Senior Consultant with Griffin-Hammis Associates, focused on Customized and Supported Employment. She previously coordinated the Iowa Coalition for Integration and Employment and has worked in the field since 2004 in direct service and leadership roles. She holds a Master's from Drake University and has served on the APSE board since 2021.

2026 PRESENTORS

BIOGRAPHIES



Ryan Kurt

Founder & CEO

The AI Lab

Ryan Kurt is the founder and CEO of The AI Lab, an invite-only executive community helping leaders and their workforces navigate and adopt AI responsibly. He also serves as the first Executive in Residence for AI-Enabled Education at the University of Iowa's Tippie College of Business, with more than 13 years at the forefront of generative AI.



Ciara Ladroma

Senior Associate

Griffin-Hammis Associates

Ciara Ladroma is a Senior Associate with Griffin-Hammis Associates and a national trainer in Customized Employment. With more than 15 years in disability services, she has trained and mentored hundreds of employment professionals nationwide, known for her expertise in networking and relationship-building.



Ashlea Lantz

Co Founder

Value Inclusion, Inc.

Ashlea brings nearly 20 years of expertise in disability employment, from Customized and Supported Employment to systemic change. As Director of Employment at Candeo, she tripled the size of the state's largest supported employment program. A past president of Iowa APSE, she holds a master's from Drake University.



SueAnn Morrow, PhD

Retired

Dr. SueAnn Morrow is technically retired, though her career says otherwise. She's worked as a special education teacher, consultant, principal, and Director of Special Education, and co-founded EDGE, Inc., a nonprofit serving adults with disabilities. She now consults on Medicaid audits and vocational rehabilitation contracts nationwide.

2026 PRESENTORS

BIOGRAPHIES

**John McCalley**

*Whole Health and Equity Director,
Wellpoint Iowa*

John McCalley is the Whole Health and Equity Director at Wellpoint Iowa, an Elevance Health Company. With a 38-year career spanning Medicaid managed care, public policy, and public administration, he led creation of Wellpoint Iowa's first Health Impact Plan, addressing health disparities and community integration. He holds a BA from UNI and a Harvard Health Equity Certificate.

**Joe Murphy**

*Transition & Employment Coordinator
Networks for Training & Development*

Joe Murphy, CESP, joined the Networks team in 1998 through the CareerNet program, helping people with significant disabilities find employment. He now serves as Transition and Employment Coordinator and is a certified business life coach with a Level 2 Gamification certification from Sententia.

**Kristi Onstot**

*Executive Secretary to Treasurer Roby Smith
Iowa State Treasurer's Office*

Kristi Onstot earned her bachelor's degree in psychology from Iowa State University and has worked with the Iowa State Treasurer's Office for seven years. Since March 2024, she has served as Executive Secretary to Treasurer Roby Smith. She remains active with the Outreach team, educating Iowans about IAble, Iowa's Achieving a Better Life Experience program.

**Jim Plorins**

*Employment Specialist
Molina Healthcare*

Jim Plorins is an Employment Specialist at Molina Healthcare, dedicated to helping individuals secure meaningful employment and build skills for long-term career success. Through person-centered support and community engagement, he's known for his dedication, problem-solving, and passion for helping others reach their full potential.

2026 PRESENTORS

BIOGRAPHIES



Duane Schumate

Co-Owner
Elevations Consultation LLC

Duane holds a BA in Psychology and an MEd in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Missouri. He co-owns Elevations Consultation LLC and serves as a training associate at the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston, with 30+ years of leadership in state government and APSE.



Kelsey Teeter

Lead for Secondary Transition
Iowa Department of Transportation

Kelsey serves as the Iowa Department of Education's Lead for Secondary Transition. With nearly 20 years across disability, education, and employment, she's committed to improving outcomes for individuals with disabilities.



Judy Warth

Program Manager & Employment Training Specialist
University of Iowa Center for Disability & Development

Judy Warth is a program manager and employment training specialist with the University Center for Excellence on Developmental Disabilities at the University of Iowa. She serves as Iowa APSE's lead trainer for job development and job coaching classes, working with youth transitioning from school to work.



Donna Wendt

Strategy & Program Director, Long-Term Services & Supports (LTSS)
Wellpoint Iowa

Donna Wendt is the Strategy and Program Director for the LTSS team at Wellpoint Iowa, formerly Amerigroup. Since joining in 2015, she's held roles in utilization management and provider relations. She previously served as Case Management Director for County Community Services for 18 years. A lifelong Iowan and Cyclone, she's passionate about helping people thrive.

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2025 - 2026

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STAY TUNED!

2027 Iowa APSE Summit

Dates & Location to be
Announced



