



# STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES

---

Exploring Intersections of Child  
Protection, Immigration, and Criminal  
Justice

August 16-18, 2022 | 8:30 AM | POD-250

# MESSAGE OF GREETINGS FROM THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR OF THE RCYP PROJECT

---

## **Dr. Henry Parada**

Graduate Program Director, Cross-Appointed Professor,  
and Researcher

*School of Social Work, Toronto Metropolitan University*



On behalf of the Rights for Children and Youth Partnership (RCYP) Project, I am delighted to welcome you to the conference, *Strengthening Institutional Responses: Exploring Intersections of Child Protection, Immigration, and Criminal Justice to Better Support Caribbean and Latin American Children and Youth in Canada*, I am pleased that so many of our partners and guests from these systems are able to share in this event highlighting research, issues, practices and policies impacting protections for children and youth. I am also pleased that this conference is integrating the voices and lived realities of youth. Finally, I would like to thank our collaborators for helping to create a space for youth, researchers, practitioners and community members to come together around these important issues. It is my hope that this gathering will support the continuation of knowledge and growth in the child welfare community and inspire the next frontier of research and policy focused on child and youth rights.

The RCYP team is looking forward to a great conference!

---

# ABOUT THE CONFERENCE & RCYP PROJECT

---

The conference, *Strengthening Institutional Responses: Exploring Intersections of Child Protection, Immigration, and Criminal Justice to Better Support Caribbean and Latin American Children and Youth in Canada* is hosted by the **Rights for Children and Youth Partnership (RCYP)** project; a seven-year research and evidence creation developed to increase knowledge of factors which support or hinder the protection of children and youth rights in Central America, the Caribbean, and their diasporas in Canada.

The conference will be exploring intersections of the child welfare, immigration, and criminal justice systems in Ontario, Canada. The conference will centre more significant questions of collective commitment and responsibility to young people, including migrants and newcomers, to identify policies and programs that will more effectively support their wellbeing and ability to thrive in Canada. Our special focus is on children and youth from the Caribbean and Latin America, as these groups are disproportionately represented in all three systems.

Specific objectives of the conference are to:

- Share empirical, evidence-based research and projects discussing institutional practices (child protection, judicial and immigrations) and the impact on children and youth;
- Create a forum for youth with lived experiences of one or more of these systems to engage with researchers and practitioners on issues directly impacting their lives;
- Highlight current academic and practice-based knowledge about youth who interact with these systems to identify key gaps in knowledge, service, and policy;
- Foster multisectoral networking and collaboration to continue the sharing of knowledge and best-practices, and creation of new community-based initiatives and policies to achieve better outcomes for racialized and newcomer youth in Canada; and
- Deepen understanding of issues that racialized and newcomer children and youth face to improve ways they are supported within the child protection, immigration, and criminal justice systems.

For more information, please visit:



[RCYPARTNERSHIP.ORG](http://RCYPARTNERSHIP.ORG)



[FACEBOOK.COM/RCYPARTNERSHIP/](https://FACEBOOK.COM/RCYPARTNERSHIP/)



[@RCYPARTNERSHIP](https://www.instagram.com/RCYPARTNERSHIP)



[@RCYPARTNERSHIP](https://twitter.com/RCYPARTNERSHIP)

# DAY 1: IMAGINING JUST OUTCOMES

---

AUGUST 16, 2022

8:30 - 9:00 **Registration and Light Breakfast**

9:00 - 9:30 **Welcome Address**

Dr. Henry Parada

9:30 - 10:15 **Keynote Address**

Nicole Bonnie

10:15 - 10:30 **NETWORKING BREAK**

10:30 - 12:00 **Panel: Current Issues in the Child Welfare System**

Vania Patrick-Drakes, Heather O'Keefe, Richard Parker

*Moderator:* Kristin Roe

12:00 - 12:45 **LUNCH**

12:45 - 2:00 **Panel: Current Issues in the Criminal Justice System**

Dr. Rai Reece, Cheryl Cornejo, Marlon Merraro

*Moderator:* Safiyah Husein

2:00 - 3:00 **Multi-sectoral Training: Understanding Intersection of Child Protection and Immigration**

Child Welfare and Immigration Centre of Excellence team

3:00- 4:00 **Multi-sectoral Training: Understanding Intricacies in Criminal Justice**

Legal Aid Ontario team

4:00-4:15 **Closing Remarks**

# DAY 2: UNDERSTANDING SYSTEM OVERLAP

---

AUGUST 17, 2022

8:30 - 9:00 **Registration and Light Breakfast**

9:00 - 9:30 **Keynote Address**

MPP Doly Begum

9:30 - 9:45 **Welcome Address**

Dr. Usha George

9:45 - 11:15 **Panel: Current Issues in Immigration**

Anne Woolger, Steve Meagher, Allison Williams, Dennique Lavia,  
*Moderator: Sarah Pole*

11:15 - 11:30 **NETWORKING BREAK**

11:30 - 1:00 **Panel: Highlighting Multi-sectoral Approaches**

Charlotte Akuoko-Barfi, Henry Parada, Jane Stewart, Mobafa  
Baker, Yasmine Vertilus  
*Moderator: Irwin Elman*

1:00 - 1:45 **LUNCH**

1:45- 2:45 **Multi-sectoral Training: Crossover Youth and  
Young Adults**

Dr. Marsha Rampersaud

2:45 - 3:00 **NETWORKING BREAK**

3:00 - 4:00 **Multi-sectoral Training: Crimmigration**

Dr. Sarah Turnbull

4:00 - 4:15 **Closing Remarks**

---

# DAY 3 :

## THINK TANK: DEVELOPING MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACHES

---

AUGUST 18, 2022

8:30 - 9:00 **Registration and Light Breakfast**

9:00 - 9:15 **Welcome Address**

Daniel Sanchez Morales, Brenda Aleman

9:15 - 10:45 **Panel: Youth Advisory**

Megan Sutton, Bry Sanford, Richard Parker  
*Moderator:* Daniel Sanchez Morales

10:45 - 11:45 **Group Brainstorm:**

**Identifying Key Multi-Sector Issues**

Facilitated by Horace Spence

11:45 - 12:30 **LUNCH**

12:30 - 3:30 **Think Tank Event**

Facilitated by Horace Spence

3:30 - 3:45 **Closing Remarks**

Dr. Henry Parada & Dr. Marsha Rampersaud

# KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

---

## DAY 1



### **NICOLE BONNIE**

Nicole Bonnie has dedicated her professional life to creating sustainable change at the systemic level in child welfare. In 2019, she was named the first Black CEO in the history of Ontario Children's Aid Societies and in the province's child welfare sector. She has championed prevention strategies through community development and addressing service disparities to marginalized identities. Currently, in her role as the CEO at OACAS, Nicole oversees provincial child welfare initiatives and remains committed to equity integration at all levels of provincial work, including education and training, policies, governance, service excellence, and research and data. Nicole continues to be a strong advocate and champion of marginalized communities and works to centre their voice and needs in government relations and legislative initiatives. She has made, and continues to make, an extraordinary difference in the lives of children, youth, and families in the Ontario child welfare system.

## DAY 2



### **DOLY BEGUM**

Doly Begum is a second-term Member Provincial Parliament representing Scarborough Southwest from the Ontario NDP. She currently serves as the Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition and the Official Opposition Critic for Immigration Services and International Credentials. During her first term, Doly built a strong community presence and fought alongside Scarborough Southwest residents on issues such as healthcare, vaccine equity during the pandemic, tenants rights and housing, autism and special needs, affordable and accessible childcare, seniors care, and more. She has introduced and passed legislation that creates pathways to recognize the credentials and experiences of internationally trained professionals including healthcare workers. Her notable legislative work also includes Bills to improve road safety, improve childcare, gun control and community safety, consumer protection, and providing paid sick days to workers. She has worked with Filipino community members from across the province to enshrine Filipino Heritage Month into Provincial law, which is now marked every June. Locally, Doly has provided the community with open access to her office as their provincial representative. Throughout her first term, her team has worked on thousands of cases for the people of Scarborough Southwest. Prior to being elected, Doly was the former Co-Chair of the Scarborough Health Coalition and Vice-Chair of Warden Woods Community Centre, where she worked hard to make lives better for the people of Scarborough. Doly is a graduate of the University of Toronto and has a Masters in Development, Administration & Planning from University College London. She was elected to the Ontario Legislature in June 2018 and is the first Canadian of Bangladeshi origin to hold elected office at any level in Canada and was re-elected in June 2022.

# DAY 1 - PANEL: CURRENT ISSUES IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

---



## **KRISTIN ROE**

Kristin currently works in the child welfare sector as the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Lead at the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS). She brings over 15 years of experience in the areas of equity and anti-oppression in both the health and child welfare sectors. She designed the early implementation of a Children & Women's hospital's first Diversity, Equity and Inclusion program in Nova Scotia and coordinated one of Canada's first anti-Stigma programs for a multi-care mental health hospital. She continues to speak wholeheartedly about her lived experience navigating the mental health system.



## **VANIA PATRICK DRAKES**

Vania Patrick-Drakes is a social science researcher and mental health professional. She is a part of the OACAS as a program analyst on the One Vision One Voice program team to help address the disparities and disproportionalities that exist for Black children, youth, and families in Ontario. She has spent the past eleven years living in Barbados, where she worked with children and their caregivers to advocate for inclusive educational practices and improved mental health outcomes. Vania is currently completing a PhD in Social Policy, with a thesis centred around anti-Black racism.



## **RICHARD PARKER**

Cornelius Richard Parker is a former youth in care who has faced and overcome a lot of obstacles throughout his life. Originally from Ottawa, he came to Toronto to play soccer and fell in love with the city. Gifted with the ability to play soccer at a high level, he travelled to eight countries and all over the United States and Canada with the support of the Children's Aid Society. He graduated from Bill Crothers Secondary, a high school for high performance athletes, in 2015 and went to York University for Social Work, later switching to Communication and Media Studies. He graduated from Carleton University in 2020 and will be furthering his education at Humber College in Child and Youth Care. It's been his dream to shine some light on the care experience – the good, the bad and what needs to be fixed. He aims to remove the stigmas of the foster care system, which prevent youth from reaching their full potential in life.

# DAY 1 - PANEL: CURRENT ISSUES IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

---



## **HEATHER O'KEEFE**

Heather O'Keefe founded StepStones for Youth and has successfully brought this registered charity from a small grassroots volunteer-run organization to a respected industry leader. She believes that Ontario can do better at raising the youth in our foster care system and with a greater focus on supporting youth to increase belonging, educational attainment, employment and housing stability – the greater community benefits. Heather has developed an innovative solution to address a housing, education and employment crisis that exists for youth transitioning from the foster care and group home system. This program has proven results in significantly increasing employment, educational attainment and support networks and reducing homelessness, criminal involvement, and isolation for youth who have been involved in the child welfare system. Heather also developed and has managed all organizational functions of an overnight summer camp for girls with a history of trauma/abuse and/or economic hardship. Heather also consults and supports other charities with strategic planning, program development, research, and increasing productivity. Heather previously worked for over 12 years as a child protection worker conducting child abuse investigations using forensic interviewing and family-based interviewing techniques and has extensive experience working in the foster care and group home system as both a foster care support worker and a foster parent.



## **ROSARIO ELMY**

Rosario Elmy is currently an Immigration Specialist with the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence at Peel CAS. She has worked with Peel CAS for 12 years and during this time, has had the opportunity to work in various departments with the agency as a Family Placement Worker, Case Conference Facilitator, Community Engagement Presenter and Refugee Response Project. Her educational background is in Marriage and Family therapy and school counseling. In her current role, she has worked closely with various organizations at the local, provincial and federal levels, including CBSA, CIC, IRB, Global Affairs Canada, other children's aid societies, and OACAS. She is bilingual and bicultural.

# DAY 1 - PANEL: CURRENT ISSUES IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

---



## **MARLON MERRARO**

Marlon Merraro is a well-recognized social systems architect with a clear focus on poverty reduction and addressing the social determinants of health within a dynamic framework of equity and inclusion. He brings 25 years of experience in senior leadership positions within the non-profit sector and municipal government spearheading strategic strategies and tactical methods that address complex social issues, resulting in improved and more equitable health and community services.



## **SAFIYAH HUSEIN**

Safiyah Husein is a Senior Policy Analyst at the Centre of Research & Policy at the John Howard Society of Ontario. She participates in the Centre's research and policy activities, supports the public education activities of the Society, and liaises with local offices and community partners on reform initiatives. Safiyah has drafted reports, submissions and public education materials on criminal justice issues including bail, the impact of police records on employment and correctional healthcare. Safiyah holds a BSc in Psychology from York University and a JD from the University of Windsor Faculty of Law. Safiyah completed her articles at the Office of Ontario Ombudsman and was called to the Ontario Bar in June 2018.



## **RAI REECE**

Dr. Rai Reece is an interdisciplinary scholar-activist. Her work examines how carceral processes in Canada are organized and maintained by historical and contemporary narratives and practices of colonial violence specific to anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism. More broadly, her work explores the intersection of punishment and misogynoir as legally and socially enacted via governance and white settler capitalism. A central feature of her work explores how community-based ethnographic pedagogy can be a tool for social activism and the limitations to that praxis.



## **CHERYL CORNEJO**

Cheryl is currently the Program Coordinator for the Violence Reduction Program at Toronto Community Housing.

# DAY 1 - MULTI-SECTORAL TRAINING: PRESENTED BY THE CHILD WELFARE AND IMMIGRATION CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

---



## **FATIMA MUKAI**

Fatima Mukai is a Child Protection Worker and Immigration Specialist at Peel Children’s Aid Society in the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence. Fatima joined Peel CAS in 2017 as a specialized ongoing worker with a team dedicated to servicing families and children experiencing immigration and settlement issues. Fatima has 20 years of experience, working with vulnerable families and joined the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence in 2020 as an immigration specialist.



## **NATALIA VALENCIA**

Natalia Valencia is the Research and Data Project Coordinator at the Ontario-wide Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence at Peel CAS. She is committed to addressing complex social and policy issues through collaborative action, and data-driven strategies with an intersectional, gender-informed lens.



## **ROSARIO ELMY**

Rosario Elmy is currently an Immigration Specialist with the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence at Peel CAS. She has worked with Peel CAS for 12 years and during this time, has had the opportunity to work in various departments with the agency as a Family Placement Worker, Case Conference Facilitator, Community Engagement Presenter and Refugee Response Project. Her educational background is in Marriage and Family therapy and school counseling. In her current role, she has worked closely with various organizations at the local, provincial and federal levels, including CBSA, CIC, IRB, Global Affairs Canada, other children’s aid societies, and OACAS. She is bilingual and bicultural.

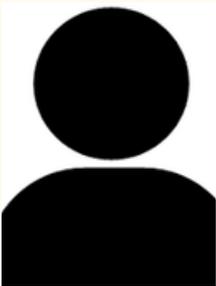
# DAY 1 - MULTI-SECTORAL TRAINING: PRESENTED BY LEGAL AID ONTARIO

---



## **BEN LISTON**

Ben Liston has been a staff lawyer at the Refugee Law Office since 2013. He represents refugee claimants, persons facing removal from Canada, and persons in immigration detention. He regularly appears before all four Divisions of the Immigration and Refugee Board and at the Federal Courts.



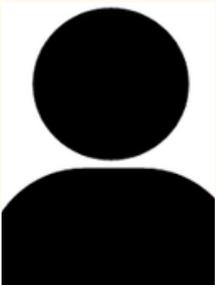
## **CECILIA FEARON-FORBES**

Cecilia Fearon-Forbes (“Celia”) is criminal defence lawyer working with the Senior Counsel Programme at Legal Aid Ontario (LAO). Cecilia graduated from the University of the West Indies (U.W.I.) with a Bachelor of Laws, and graduated with a Master of Laws from the University of Toronto. Called to the Bar in 2004, she started briefly working in bankruptcy law, but decided to pursue a different line of practice. Celia started working with LAO in 2005 as criminal law Duty Counsel at the Brampton Courthouse, one of the busiest courthouses in Canada, and has been working as a Senior Counsel in Brampton since 2014. Celia serves some of the most vulnerable individuals who do not qualify for Legal Aid certificates.



## **JANE STEWART**

Jane Stewart is a staff lawyer at Justice for Children and Youth, practicing in all areas of the clinic’s work. Jane was called to the bar in 2010 after articling with the Department of Justice’s Legal Excellence Program, and practiced with the Department of Justice and a boutique Indigenous law firm prior to joining JFCY in 2015. Jane has appeared before numerous tribunals and at all levels of court in Ontario, as well as the Federal Court, Federal Court of Appeal, and Supreme Court of Canada, where she has argued a number of children’s rights issues on behalf of JFCY, and regularly represents young people with youth criminal justice matters. Jane is also Vice-Chair of the Ontario Bar Association’s Child & Youth Law Section.



## **GIA PFLUCKER**

Gia is the Programs and Services Director at the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples.

## DAY 2 - PANEL: CURRENT ISSUES IN IMMIGRATION

---



### **ANNE WOOLGER**

As the founding director of Matthew House, Anne has been working with refugees in Toronto since 1988. She has a BA (Hons) from Queen's University and a Master's degree in Theology. She also holds a Certificate in International Human Rights Law from the International Institute of Human Rights, Strasbourg, France. Since beginning her work at a city-run shelter for refugees in 1988, Anne has helped with the hands-on resettlement of approximately 4,000 refugees in Toronto from 101 different nations. Anne's vision was the catalyst behind the establishment of Matthew House Toronto as close to a dozen other refugee shelters across Canada and the USA



### **STEVE MEAGHER**

Steve Meagher is the Director at the Centre for Refugee Children, an initiative providing specialized services and support to refugee and migrant children in Ontario. Established in 2021, the Centre for Refugee Children has a particular focus on supporting unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) who are navigating the refugee claim process or other immigration proceedings in Canada. Steve also serves as chair of the Unaccompanied and Separated Children Network, which brings together stakeholders from various sectors to discuss public policy, access to justice and children's rights issues for unaccompanied and separated children in the province.

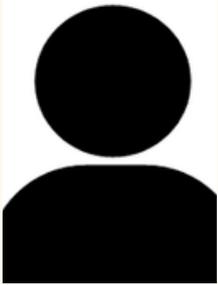


### **ALLISON P. WILLIAMS**

Allison joined JFCY in October 2019 to provide summary legal assistance and referrals to JFCY callers; and is now in the role of Litigation Lawyer. Allison originally hails from Northwestern Ontario and attended Osgoode Hall Law School after completing a BA from Queen's University and a MA from the University of Toronto. While at Osgoode, Allison received an Ian Scott Public Interest Fellowship and spent a summer working for the Ground Council Treaty # 3 Women's Council. Following law school, Allison articulated at the Office of the Children's Lawyer before being called to the bar in Ontario in 2016. Prior to joining JFCY, Allison spent several years working at a small firm practicing primarily immigration and refugee law, administrative law, and family law.

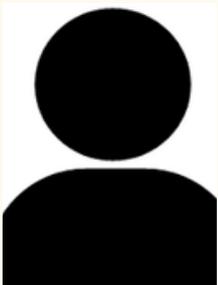
## DAY 2 - PANEL: CURRENT ISSUES IN IMMIGRATION

---



### **SARAH POLE**

Called to the New Zealand bar in 1997, Sarah practiced family, employment and immigration law before moving to Canada in 2002. She has extensive experience in youth justice education and has focused in particular on youth facing personal and systemic barriers to education success, and on increasing legal sector diversity. The founder and Director of CASA – Childhood Arrivals Support & Advocacy Program, Sarah's former roles include Executive Director of the Law in Action Within Schools (LAWS) Program which is the youth outreach partnership of the University of Toronto Faculty of Law and Osgoode Hall Law School at York University; Acting Director of Education for the Canadian Civil Liberties Association; and Director of Provincial Programs for the Ontario Justice Education Network. Sarah's commitment to ensuring education access and success for young people has been recognized with awards including a Law Foundation of Ontario Community Leadership in Justice Fellowship, and a Toronto Foundation Vital People Award.



### **DENNIQUE LAVIA**

As the CASA Program's Project Assistant, Dennique's work consists of facilitating, coordinating, and administering various CASA projects and initiatives. Dennique is in her fourth year of the Law & Society program at York University and she hopes to one day become an immigration lawyer. Dennique has lived experience as a youth living with precarious status and understands the severity of need for access to resources and education for undocumented youth living in Canada. With CASA projects and initiatives, Dennique hopes to bring awareness to these barriers and help to close the gap between undocumented youth and access to post-secondary education.

## DAY 2 - PANEL: HIGHLIGHTING MULTISECTORAL APPROACHES

---



### **CHARLOTTE AKUOKO-BARFI**

Charlotte Akuoko-Barfi is an instructor at Toronto Metropolitan University. Charlotte is a Social Worker by profession with extensive experience in Child Welfare. She holds an MSW degree and has worked in the social work field for more than 30 years in numerous capacities and has also actively engaged in many collaborative initiatives with community agencies.



### **HENRY PARADA**

Dr Henry Parada (MSW, PhD) is currently the Director of the Immigration and Settlement Graduate Program and Professor in the School of Social Work at Toronto Metropolitan University. The Doctor obtained his Bachelors and Masters in Social Work and his Ph.D. in Sociology. Before beginning his academic career, he worked for nine years as a child protection worker. His current research program, focused on child protection, family violence and children's rights in seven regional areas, received a Partnership Grant from SSHRC for a seven-year international project entitled the Rights for Children and Youth Partnership.



### **JANE STEWART**

Jane Stewart is a staff lawyer at Justice for Children and Youth, practicing in all areas of the clinic's work. Jane was called to the bar in 2010 after articling with the Department of Justice's Legal Excellence Program, and practiced with the Department of Justice and a boutique Indigenous law firm prior to joining JFCY in 2015. Jane has appeared before numerous tribunals and at all levels of court in Ontario, as well as the Federal Court, Federal Court of Appeal, and Supreme Court of Canada, where she has argued a number of children's rights issues on behalf of JFCY, and regularly represents young people with youth criminal justice matters. Jane is also Vice-Chair of the Ontario Bar Association's Child & Youth Law Section.



### **MOBAFA BAKER**

Mobafa joined StepStones in 2021 as a Program Director. He has a long history of working with young people, including as a youth advocate on the international stage, program facilitator on issues of HIV and AIDS, equity, diversity and inclusion, and sexual reproductive health and rights. He has also assisted youth who have become in conflict with the law, supported families navigating family violence, and managed transitional services for youth leaving care. His passion for helping young people and the wider community is mirrored in his educational pursuits. He has a Masters in Adult Education and Community Development, post-graduate diploma in Youth Work and Community Studies and a BSc in Social Work. He also devotes time to assisting organizations improve their strategic outcomes and improve services for their clients.

---

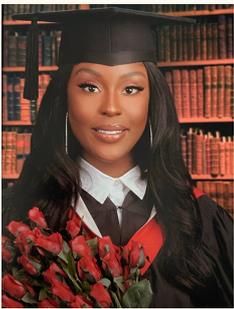
# DAY 2 - PANEL: HIGHLIGHTING MULTISECTORAL APPROACHES

---



## **IRWIN ELMAN**

Irwin Elman was Ontario's Child Advocate from 2008-2019. He currently serves as a Fellow with the Laidlaw Foundation, Amicus to the Coroner of Ontario Child Death Review System and Global Strategic Advisor to Until the Last Child. He is a proud parent to two teen boys.



## **YASMINE VERTILUS**

As a former youth in care whose life was positively impacted by CCAS, Yasmine decided to pursue an education in social work to give youth the same hope and perseverance her case worker gave me. As someone who knows through professional and lived experience how much support youth and other marginalized communities need, she found it her passion to be a catalyst of change.

# DAY 2 - MULTI-SECTORAL TRAINING PRESENTED BY:

---

D R . M A R S H A R A M P E R S A U D



## **MARSHA RAMPERSAUD**

Marsha Rampersaud is an Assistant Professor in the Law and Society Program at York University. Her research examines the experiences of children, youth, and families engaging with state policies and laws. She has more than 10 years of experience working with youth and adults who have experienced incarceration or are at risk of contact with the legal system. Marsha is currently a Research Associate with the RCYP research team and StepStones for Youth, where she helps with research and evaluation to support transformative change to systems that most impact young people, including the child protection, immigration, education, and criminal justice systems.

D R . S A R A H T U R N B U L L



## **SARAH TURNBULL**

Dr Sarah Turnbull is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Legal Studies at the University of Waterloo. She researches, teaches, and supervises in the areas of critical border and migration studies and border criminology; criminology and sociolegal studies; punishment, parole, and reentry; postcolonial, antiracist, and feminist thought; and qualitative research methods. Current projects include a research monograph, tentatively titled *Migration Penalty: Detention and Deportation in (Post)colonial Britain* (Routledge), based on a multi-sited ethnography of immigration detention in the United Kingdom; a SSHRC-funded study of immigration detention reform in Canada; and the Prison Transparency Project, a collaborative and comparative study examining carceral transparency in Canada, Spain, and Argentina. Sarah is a Fellow at the Balsillie School for International Affairs and Co-lead of the Migration, Mobilities, and Social Politics Research Cluster.

## DAY 3 - PANEL: YOUTH ADVISORY PANEL

---



### MEGAN HUTTON

Megan Hutton is a child and youth advocate with the Child welfare political action committee and Pape adolescent centre in the youth council. She went into foster care around the age of 11, and throughout the years of her experience, she was able to find her voice of being an advocate. She grew up in Toronto, living in community housing where 11 years later she would end up in foster care causing her to move to Brampton. She has been in foster care for 7 years, and everything she saw, she made sure to remember that for the one day when youth are given an opportunity to talk and that someone will listen.



### BRY SANFORD

Bry has been through care from the ages of 13 to her current age which is 18 years old. She has struggled with going through the justice system as a youth herself. Having personally gone through it, she has felt like the justice system is unfair in many ways. When she was as young as possibly 7 years old or younger she was going through sexual abuse and then had to go to court several times for her case to get settled but in the end nothing ended up happening to him. Some of Bry's interests include making her own research reports, any form of art, reading and writing. She also likes to watch videos on mental health as well as advocate for what she believes in during her free time.



### RICHARD PARKER

Cornelius Richard Parker is a former youth in care who has faced and overcome a lot of obstacles throughout his life. Originally from Ottawa, he came to Toronto to play soccer and fell in love with the city. Gifted with the ability to play soccer at a high level, he travelled to eight countries and all over the United States and Canada with the support of the Children's Aid Society. He graduated from Bill Crothers Secondary, a high school for high performance athletes, in 2015 and went to York University for Social Work, later switching to Communication and Media Studies. He graduated from Carleton University in 2020 and will be furthering his education at Humber College in Child and Youth Care. It's been his dream to shine some light on the care experience – the good, the bad and what needs to be fixed. He aims to remove the stigmas of the foster care system, which prevent youth from reaching their full potential in life.



### DANIEL SANCHEZ MORALES

Daniel is currently in the last semester of his BSc. Honours in Psychology at York University. He works as an Undergraduate Research Assistant for the RCYP project and as a Clinical Research Project Assistant in the Neuroinflammatory Clinic at The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids). He enjoys supporting and mentoring Latinx and Black youth to succeed academically and personally.

## O U R T E A M

---



### **HENRY PARADA**

Dr Henry Parada (MSW, PhD) is currently the Director of the Immigration and Settlement Graduate Program and Professor in the School of Social Work at Toronto Metropolitan University. The Doctor obtained his Bachelors and Masters in Social Work and his Ph.D. in Sociology. Before beginning his academic career, he worked for nine years as a child protection worker. His current research program, focused on child protection, family violence and children's rights in seven regional areas, received a Partnership Grant from SSHRC for a seven-year international project entitled the Rights for Children and Youth Partnership.



### **MARSHA RAMPERSAUD**

Marsha Rampersaud is an Assistant Professor in the Law and Society Program at York University. Her research examines the experiences of children, youth, and families engaging with state policies and laws. She has more than 10 years of experience working with youth and adults who have experienced incarceration or are at risk of contact with the legal system. Marsha is currently a Research Associate with the RCYP research team and StepStones for Youth, where she helps with research and evaluation to support transformative change to systems that most impact young people, including the child protection, immigration, education, and criminal justice systems.



### **VERONICA ESCOBAR OLIVO**

Veronica Escobar Olivo is currently the Research Coordinator of the Rights for Children and Youth Partnership (RCYP) based in the School of Social Work at Toronto Metropolitan University. Additionally, she supports, consults with, and works on other research projects that focus on various topics, including settlement and belonging in diasporic communities; entrepreneurial activities of newcomers; and the protection and rights of young people in the education, child protection, and judicial systems. She has a Masters in Immigration and Settlement and Bachelors in Sociology.



### **BRENDA ALEMAN**

Brenda Aleman is currently a fourth year Bachelor of Arts student in Psychology at Toronto Metropolitan University. She is currently the Communications and Outreach Coordinator for the RCYP. As a first generation Latin American in Canada, she is passionate about the experiences of navigation in the multiple systems and of the experiences of both immigrant youth and families. She has a keen interest in the stigma and experiences of mental health within immigrant youth and their families.

## O U R T E A M

---



### **IMAN HASSAN**

Iman Hassan is a fourth-year Bachelor of Social Work student pursuing a double minor in psychology and criminology at Toronto Metropolitan University. She is currently the Events Logistics Coordinator for the RCYP and has a significant interest in research, academic projects, policy, and supporting organizations that adopt an anti-oppressive worldview, like herself. Iman has worked in various capacities in child services, the non-profit sector, and the municipal system.



### **MACKENZIE LECLAIRE**

Mackenzie Leclaire is a second-year master's student in the Sociology program at the University of Waterloo and is the Volunteer Coordinator for the RCYP. Mackenzie earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and Legal Studies from the University of Waterloo in 2021. Her SSHRC-funded master's thesis research focuses on the utilization and influence of restorative justice programming on the reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals. In 2023, Mackenzie hopes to attend law school in pursuit of becoming a criminal lawyer to support individuals navigating the complexities and nuances of the criminal justice system.



### **LAURA PEREZ GONZALEZ**

Laura completed a Master's in International Development Studies that focused on non-formal education in the Caribbean. She has over five years of experience conducting research and leading education and gender-focused programs with communities in Canada, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa. Her research focuses on education, immigration, women's empowerment, and their intersectionalities in the experiences of youth. As a Research Assistant in the Rights for Children and Youth Partnership, she has co-written articles on the experiences of immigrant Latin American and Caribbean parents as they navigate Ontario's education system with their children.



### **DANIEL SANCHEZ MORALES**

Daniel is currently in the last semester of his BSc. Honours in Psychology at York University. He works as an Undergraduate Research Assistant for the RCYP project and as a Clinical Research Project Assistant in the Neuroinflammatory Clinic at The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids). He enjoys supporting and mentoring Latinx and Black youth to succeed academically and personally.

## O U R T E A M

---



### **MA PIA CATHERINE CAUDRA**

Ma. Pia Catherine Cuadra is a Research Assistant at Rights for Children and Youth Partnership (RCYP) and a Bachelor of Social Work student at Toronto Metropolitan University. She brings over four years of experience working with children and families of diverse backgrounds in Ontario. She also holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Social Service Worker diploma with a certificate in Indigenous Studies: First Peoples in Canada. Pia is greatly passionate about social justice and community engagement.



### **KRISTIN SWARDH**

Kristin Swardh holds a Master of Social Work degree specializing in Social Justice and Diversity from the University of Toronto. Kristin is a registered social worker and has engaged in interdisciplinary social work practice for over eight years. Kristin's professional approach has addressed social issues surrounding gender, child protection and human rights. Her work has taken her across Canada and East Africa in the government and non-profit sectors to bring a social justice lens to research projects and frontline work.



### **SARAH TURNBULL**

Dr Sarah Turnbull is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Legal Studies at the University of Waterloo. She researches, teaches, and supervises in the areas of critical border and migration studies and border criminology; criminology and sociolegal studies; punishment, parole, and reentry; postcolonial, antiracist, and feminist thought; and qualitative research methods. Current projects include a research monograph, tentatively titled Migration Penalty: Detention and Deportation in (Post)colonial Britain (Routledge), based on a multi-sited ethnography of immigration detention in the United Kingdom; a SSHRC-funded study of immigration detention reform in Canada; and the Prison Transparency Project, a collaborative and comparative study examining carceral transparency in Canada, Spain, and Argentina. Sarah is a Fellow at the Balsillie School for International Affairs and Co-lead of the Migration, Mobilities, and Social Politics Research Cluster.



### **IRWIN ELMAN**

Irwin Elman was Ontario's Child Advocate from 2008-2019. He currently serves as a Fellow with the Laidlaw Foundation, Amicus to the Coroner of Ontario Child Death Review System and Global Strategic Advisor to Until the Last Child. He is a proud parent to two teen boys.

# OUR TEAM

---



## **DANIELLE UNGARA**

Danielle Ungara’s professional experience spans nearly two decades. Within social work, Danielle has worked across various sectors including healthcare and on the board of a mental health agency. Danielle’s Master’s thesis was award-nominated and has been published. Since its launch in 2018, Danielle has co-managed operations for the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence. Managing a multi-disciplinary team, Danielle’s team promotes equitable outcomes for children experiencing an intersecting immigration need. Danielle’s Ontario-wide portfolio includes strategies for sector-wide capacity building, communications and data, and research and partnership development. In 2019/20, Danielle designed and implemented a number of initiatives, including provincial roundtable and national dialogue series. These three events brought together regional, provincial, and national professionals in child welfare, immigration sector leaders, and academics, to explore issues and trends facing children and families receiving child welfare services. Danielle has been invited to speak about child rights and innovation, and currently sits on multi-year advisories regarding research and practice with University of Toronto and the Ontario Association of Social Workers.



## **KIMBERLY ROACH**

Kimberly Roach joined Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) in 2015 as policy counsel and lead of LAO’s Racialized Communities Strategy. Kimberly Roach joined Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) in 2015 as policy counsel and lead of LAO’s Racialized Communities Strategy. Kimberly has worked as a legal service provider in all regions of the province served by LAO, and is keenly aware of the issues faced by racialized and vulnerable communities in different areas of the province. In addition to an LL. B from the University of Ottawa, Kimberly also holds a B.A. Honours in History and Political Science and an M.A. in History with a focus on the African Diaspora.



## **DINA ZALIKIND**

Dina Zalikind (she/her) is Criminal Policy Counsel at Legal Aid Ontario. Dina has worked in a number of Legal Aid offices, including as criminal duty counsel in Newmarket, College Park and 1000 Finch, and as criminal defence counsel in Brampton. Before joining Legal Aid Ontario in 2015, Dina practiced criminal defence and was an agent for the Public Prosecution Service of Canada.

# OUR TEAM

---



## **HEATHER O'KEEFE**

Heather O'Keefe founded StepStones for Youth and has successfully brought this registered charity from a small grassroots volunteer-run organization to a respected industry leader. She believes that Ontario can do better at raising the youth in our foster care system and with a greater focus on supporting youth to increase belonging, educational attainment, employment and housing stability – the greater community benefits. Heather has developed an innovative solution to address a housing, education and employment crisis that exists for youth transitioning from the foster care and group home system. This program has proven results in significantly increasing employment, educational attainment and support networks and reducing homelessness, criminal involvement, and isolation for youth who have been involved in the child welfare system. Heather also developed and has managed all organizational functions of an overnight summer camp for girls with a history of trauma/abuse and/or economic hardship. Heather also consults and supports other charities with strategic planning, program development, research, and increasing productivity. Heather previously worked for over 12 years as a child protection worker conducting child abuse investigations using forensic interviewing and family-based interviewing techniques and has extensive experience working in the foster care and group home system as both a foster care support worker and a foster parent.



## **MOBAFA BAKER**

Mobafa joined StepStones in 2021 as our Program Director. He has a long history of working with young people, including as a youth advocate on the international stage, program facilitator on issues of HIV and AIDS, equity, diversity and inclusion, and sexual reproductive health and rights. He has also assisted youth who have become in conflict with the law, supported families navigating family violence, and managed transitional services for youth leaving care. His passion for helping young people and the wider community is mirrored in his educational pursuits. He has a Masters in Adult Education and Community Development, post-graduate diploma in Youth Work and Community Studies and a BSc in Social Work. He also devotes time to assisting organizations improve their strategic outcomes and improve services for their clients.



## **RACHAEL GUSTAVE**

Rachael Gustave (she/her) is a master's student of Immigration and Settlement Studies at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU). Her research interests include social cohesion, youth education, and urban sustainability. Through her community engagement, she seeks to explore holistic and integrative approaches that respond to social ills and bring about positive change.

## O U R T E A M

---



### **EMMA BARZ**

Emma Barz (she/her) is the Manager of the Policy and Strategic Research department at Legal Aid Ontario (LAO). Emma's background is in family law, and before becoming Manager in May 2021, Emma was LAO policy counsel with primary responsibility for family law for six years. Emma has also worked as a staff duty counsel at the Toronto North Family Court (47 Sheppard), as counsel at the Ministry of the Attorney General's Operational Support Branch, and as a staff lawyer at the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, where she provided family legal services to people who have experienced domestic violence.



### **RICHARD PARKER**

Cornelius Richard Parker is a former youth in care who has faced and overcome a lot of obstacles throughout his life. Originally from Ottawa, he came to Toronto to play soccer and fell in love with the city. Gifted with the ability to play soccer at a high level, he travelled to eight countries and all over the United States and Canada with the support of the Children's Aid Society. He graduated from Bill Crothers Secondary, a high school for high performance athletes, in 2015 and went to York University for Social Work, later switching to Communication and Media Studies. He graduated from Carleton University in 2020 and will be furthering his education at Humber College in Child and Youth Care. It's been his dream to shine some light on the care experience – the good, the bad and what needs to be fixed. He aims to remove the stigmas of the foster care system, which prevent youth from reaching their full potential in life.



### **USHA GEORGE**

Dr. Usha George is recognized for her expertise in newcomer settlement and integration. She is a Professor in the School of Social Work at Toronto Metropolitan University and the current Academic Director of the Toronto Metropolitan Centre for Immigration and Settlement (TMCIS). Dr. George is the former Interim Vice President of Research and Innovation and the Dean of the Faculty of Community Services (2006-2017). In 2015, she was awarded the Errol Aspevig Award for Outstanding Academic Leadership. Dr. George came to Toronto Metropolitan University in 2006 from the Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, where she had been the Associate Dean since 1999. She is the past director of the Ontario Metropolis Centre of Excellence for Immigration and Settlement. Her main areas of teaching, research, and professional activity are social work with diverse communities, and newcomer settlement and integration, with an emphasis on examining policies and programs to ensure newcomers have the supports they need to settle and become contributing members to Canadian society.

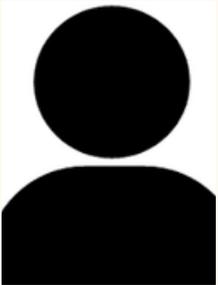
# OUR TEAM

---



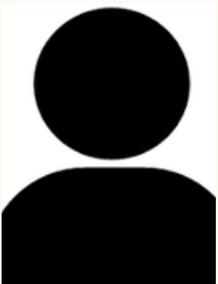
## **TEARNEY MCDERMOTT**

In addition to coordinating research activities, publications, knowledge mobilization, and trainings at the Toronto Metropolitan Centre for Immigration and Settlement (TMCIS), Tearney McDermott currently coordinates, assists, and consults on a number of research projects focused on racialization and citizenship; refugee resettlement; newcomers' entrepreneurial activity; and newcomer and diaspora youth's protections and rights within education, child welfare, and judicial systems. She holds a masters in Immigration and Settlement Studies from Toronto Metropolitan University and a bachelor of arts in Environmental Studies and Religious Studies from Queen's University.



## **MARCUS PRATT**

Marcus is currently the Acting Director General, Policy and Strategic Research at Legal Aid Ontario.



## **OSCAR VIGIL**

Oscar presently holds the Executive Director position at the Hispanic Canadian Heritage Council.

# T H A N K   Y O U

---

## FUNDERS

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)  
Faculty of Community Services (FCS), Toronto Metropolitan University  
Office of the Vice-President of Research and Innovation (OVPRI), Toronto  
Metropolitan University  
The Rights for Children and Youth Partnership (RCYP), Partnership Grant

## SSHRC CONNECTION GRANT CO-APPLICANTS AND COLLABORATORS

Dr. Marsha Rampersaud, York University  
Dr. Sarah Turnbull, University of Waterloo  
Dr. Usha George, Toronto Metropolitan Centre for Immigration and Settlement  
Danielle Ungara, Peel Children's Aid Society & Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence (CWICE)  
Heather O'Keefe, Stepstones for Youth  
Marcus Pratt, Emma Barz, Kimberly Roach, & Dina Zalkind, Legal Aid Ontario  
Irwin Elman, Former Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth  
Oscar Vigil, Hispanic Canadian Heritage Council (HCHC)

## SPECIAL THANKS

Brenda Aleman	Veronica Escobar Olivo	Joyce Mgbolu
Mobafa Baker	Alicia (Hong) Gan	Richard Parker
Nicole Bonnie	Maria Garcia	Shardaine Rowe Brown
Doly Begum (MPP)	Rachael Gustave	Daniel Sanchez Morales
Katherine Cirilincione	Iman Hassan	Kristin Swardh
Sean Condon	Mackenzie Leclaire	Natalia Valencia
Ma Pia Cuadra	Tearney McDermott	

THANK YOU TO OUR  
COLLABORATORS!

SSHRC  CRSH

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada  
Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada

