

# *Children's Law Conference Presenters*

## **Keynote: Ashley Rhodes-Courter**

**Ashley Rhodes-Courter** is the quintessential American success story. Born in 1985 to a single teen mother, by the age of 3 she was in Florida's foster care system where she spent almost ten years being shuttled between 14 homes—some quite abusive—before being adopted from a Children's Home at the age of twelve.

Despite her ordeal, she excelled in school because she believed that, "my education was the one thing nobody could take from me." Early in her life she felt compelled to advocate for herself and the other children she lived with, particularly in the abusive foster homes.

Her efforts and academic achievements landed her Eckerd College's Trustee Scholarship—the school's most prestigious full-tuition award. She graduated with honors and ahead of schedule earning a double major in Communications and Theater and a double minor in Political Science and Psychology. Ashley then went on to earn a Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Southern California.

During her undergraduate studies, she was one of 20 college students selected for the USA Today All-USA Academic Team and was named one of GLAMOUR Magazine's Top Ten College Women. She was also selected as one of the four Golden BR!CK Award winners for outstanding advocacy for community change by DoSomething!. As part of their campaign, she was featured on 25 million bags of Cool Ranch Doritos.

On June 1, 2003, the New York Times Magazine published her grand prize winning essay about her adoption day. She expanded her essay into a memoir, *Three Little Words*, which was published by Simon & Schuster in January 2008 and quickly became a New York Times, then International bestseller. Her first memoir is currently being made into a major motion picture. The book has been adopted by schools and communities as part of One School, One Book initiatives across the country. Ashley's second book, *Three More Words*, is being published in 2015 and has already been receiving awards.

Internationally recognized, Ashley has been featured on *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, *Nightline*, *Nancy Grace*, *ABC Primetime*, *Montel Williams*, and other national media outlets. She frequently appears in local television and newspaper markets when she travels for her speeches. She hosted a television program called "Explore Adoption" which was produced by the State of Florida to raise the public's awareness of foster children in need of loving and permanent homes. This segment won an Emmy in 2009.

In 2010, Ashley was selected to represent and mentor as part of Levi's Shape What's To Come campaign, an online, global community for women that offers opportunities to exchange ideas, collaborate, and provide support to one another. Her work with Levi's was featured at the TED Women's Conference in Washington, D.C.

Recognizing that child welfare issues are universal, Ashley spent time in Europe, South Africa, and China studying child welfare and social policies. She serves on many national, local, and international boards for agencies and groups that work in the mental health, human rights, education, and social work fields. She has also been a volunteer Guardian ad Litem (or CASA) and as a foster parent, has cared for over 20 children.

Since the age of 14, Ashley has advocated for the nearly half-million children still in foster care in America by giving speeches throughout the U.S. and abroad. She has spoken on Capitol Hill, has been invited to the White House, and has taught at numerous colleges and conferences for elected officials, judges, social workers, policy makers, and families. As an adult, she has broadened her compelling message to address educators, youth, and corporations that strive to empower the lives of others.

In April 2012 the St. Petersburg, FL Chamber of Commerce selected Ashley as the International Woman of the Year at their Iconic Women's event.

At the age of 26, Ashley ran for the Florida State Senate — a race the media dubbed the “David and Goliath of races.” Ashley also founded her own non-profit organization, The Foundation for Sustainable Families, which provides services, education, organic food gardens, and outreach for communities, foster and adoptive families, mothers, and youth.

Ashley has turned her pain into power and her inspirational story of resilience, philanthropy, and overcoming hardships resonates with audiences of all ages and backgrounds.

**Amanda Gibson Adler, JD**, joined the Children’s Law Center in December of 2015, where has served as Senior Resource Attorney to the Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children. In that position, she works with policymakers, service providers and stakeholders to identify the most pressing needs of children in the state and to make policy and legislative recommendations to improve the lives of South Carolina’s youngest citizens. The Committee on Children was created by statute and membership is comprised of six legislative members, three citizens appointed by the Governor, and the directors of five child-serving agencies. Among other work, the Committee also makes an annual report to the Governor and General Assembly.

Amanda began her legal career in education law and policy at SC Appleseed. For fifteen years, her efforts were focused on representing students with special needs to access an appropriate education. She has written training materials and presented for a wide range of audiences and has published on topics related to student drop-out, teacher retention, and school finance. She also worked as Director of the Rural Education Finance Center of the Rural School and Community Trust.

Amanda is a former educator who has taught in public schools in South Carolina and Georgia. She is the proud spouse of a public school teacher and parent of three public school students. She currently volunteers with her children’s elementary school PTO and with the Orphan Care Committee of her church. Amanda has a law degree from the University of South Carolina School of Law and a B.A. in Political Science from Emory University.

**Melissa Carter, JD**, is a Clinical Professor of Law at Emory Law School and Executive Director of the Barton Child Law and Policy Center, a multidisciplinary child law program seeking to promote and protect the legal rights and interests of children involved with the juvenile court, child welfare, and juvenile justice systems, and to prepare the next generation of juvenile law attorneys. In that role, she is responsible for the administration of the Center, directing the public policy and legislative advocacy clinics, and teaching a related course in child welfare law and policy. She has authored several publications on child welfare topics, contributed to the drafting and passage of multiple pieces of state legislation, and is a frequent presenter on juvenile law topics. Before accepting her faculty appointment, Melissa served as Georgia’s Child Advocate, the state’s child welfare ombudsman, and she has held previous positions with Georgia’s Court Improvement Project and as an associate attorney focusing on adoption, juvenile court, and assisted reproductive technology cases. Melissa was appointed by Governor Nathan Deal to serve as a member of the Child Welfare Reform Council, Commission on Family Violence, and State Juvenile Justice Advisory Group. She also serves as an advisor to the Supreme Court of Georgia Committee on Justice for Children and on the boards of Voices for Georgia’s Children and the Multi-Agency Alliance for Children. Melissa earned her Bachelor of Science and *Juris Doctorate* from the University of Illinois.

**Dr. Aleksandra Chauhan, JD**, is an assistant public defender in Richland County, Columbia, South Carolina. In 2015-2016, she obtained two federal grants to open a juvenile reentry program at the Richland Public Defender’s Office. The Juvenile Reentry team that she supervises consists of a social worker, youth advocates and a civil attorney. It focuses on assisting youth involved in the criminal justice system with tools to be successful upon their transition to the community. Dr. Chauhan received her Ph.D. from the Department of Political Science at the University of South Carolina. During her doctoral studies she focused on researching the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the impact the UN Committee has on the

implementation of the Convention across the globe. After obtaining her Ph.D., she studied law and in 2013 received her J.D. at the University of South Carolina School of Law. In addition to representing youth, Dr. Chauhan is on the Board of Directors of the Lawyers' Committee for Children's Rights and is a co-director of the Southern Juvenile Defense Center.

**Josh Gupta-Kagan, JD**, is an Assistant Professor of Law and specializes in child welfare and juvenile justice. Prior to becoming a professor, he practiced as a Senior Attorney at the Children's Law Center, a legal services organization in the District of Columbia devoted to a wide range of children's legal issues. He worked at the DC Children's Law Center for six years, representing children and family members in District of Columbia Family Court cases, and advocating for legislative reforms. He has contributed to a statute governing custody actions filed by third parties, the re-establishment of a housing program for families of children at risk of entering foster care, the expansion of guardianship subsidies to non-kin and extension of subsidies to age 21, and various District statutes and regulations related to abuse and neglect law and education law.

Professor Gupta-Kagan's scholarship has addressed topics including the Fourth Amendment rights of children and families during child protection investigations and at school, improved juvenile and family court procedures, and policy reforms to improve the child welfare system, better enable children to leave foster care for permanent families, and better govern custody disputes between parents and third parties who have raised children. His scholarship is available at <http://ssrn.com/author=996191>.

**Dottie C. Ingram, Esq.**, is the Area IV Regional Attorney with the South Carolina Department of Social Services. She has previously served as the managing attorney at Anderson County DSS. She is a native of Columbia South Carolina. She graduated from the Richland County public schools. She attended The University of South Carolina where she received a Bachelor of Arts. In 1991, Ms. Ingram graduated from Northern Illinois University, College of Law. While in law school she was research assistant at the Illinois Office of State Appellant Defenders. After law school, Ms. Ingram became the staff attorney for The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) representing children involved in custody disputes in Circuit and Chancery Courts, Memphis, Tennessee. Her family relocated to Greenville, South Carolina and began private practice in Greenville, SC in January 1994. Ms. Ingram provided contract legal services to Pickens County DSS from 1995-2005 and then became a full time attorney with Anderson DSS from 2005 until present. Ms. Ingram was a legal consultant/ trainer with the USC Center for Children and Family Studies from 1998-2006 for Child Sexual Abuse. She co-authored a Guardian ad Litem training manual for SC Guardian Services and has served as an instructor to attorney and non-attorneys statewide on this issue. She has served as a mock trial coach for the mock trial team at the University of South Carolina Upstate. Ms. Ingram is grandmother to seven children.

**Dr. Richard Kagan** provides training on traumatic stress and complex trauma treatment including *Real Life Heroes*® certificate training programs. He has had extensive leadership experience in non-profit child and family services as director of professional development, QI, research, and psychological services and has served as the principal investigator for two SAMHSA-funded National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) community practice site grants. Dr. Kagan has also served on the NCTSN Steering Committee, the NCTSN Affiliate Advisory Board, the Complex Trauma and Child Welfare Committees, and co-led development of the NCTSN curriculum, *Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Traumatic Stress*. He was formerly Director of Research and Consultation for the Sidney Albert Training and Research Institute at Parsons Child and Family Center in Albany, New York, a NCTSN community services site since 2002.

Dr. Kagan is the author and co-author of ten books: *Families in Perpetual Crisis* with Shirley Schlosberg (Norton), *Turmoil to Turning Points; Building Hope for Children in Crisis Placements* (Norton), *Wounded Angels; Lessons from Children in Crisis* (Child Welfare League of America); *Rebuilding Attachments with Traumatized Children* (Routledge); *Healing from Losses, Violence, Abuse, and Neglect* (Routledge), the *Real*

*Life Heroes Life Storybook 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> editions* (Routledge), the *Real Life Heroes Practitioner's Manual* (Routledge), the *Real Life Heroes Toolkit for Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Families* (Routledge), and *Wounded Angels; Inspiration from Children in Crisis* (Routledge). He has published over thirty articles, chapters, and papers on practice and research issues in trauma therapy, child welfare, foster care, adoption, training implementation, program evaluation, and quality improvement in family service and behavioral health treatment programs. Dr. Kagan's presentations, articles, and books highlight practical and innovative approaches that practitioners and organizations can utilize to help children and families strengthen resilience and reduce traumatic stress. Further information about Dr. Kagan's publications and training programs can be found at [www.reallifeheroes.net](http://www.reallifeheroes.net).

**Kate Kleinfelter** is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist who has been working with South Carolina's youth and families for 25 years. She was born and raised in Knoxville, Tennessee, obtained her Bachelor's Degree in psychology at Clemson University (go Tigers), and received her Ph.D. in clinical-community psychology at The University of South Carolina (go Gamecocks). Dr. Kleinfelter has worked for DMH, COC, USC, non-profits, and in private practice. In addition to her clinical work, she has conducted research and co-authored journal articles in the areas of domestic violence, substance abuse, and youth assessment.

Throughout her career, Dr. Kleinfelter (most call her "Dr. K") has provided training to clinical staff, educators, and parents across the state on topics such as Adolescent Self-Injury, Working with Girls in the Juvenile Justice System, Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace, and High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder. Dr. Kleinfelter also has been the sole trainer in the state of South Carolina on use of the CALOCUS, an assessment instrument presently required for youth psychiatric admissions and rehabilitative services. Currently, she is the supervising psychologist for the Midlands Consultation and Evaluation division at the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice (SCDJJ), where she provides guidance to staff conducting court-ordered psychological evaluations in 25 counties and supervises reports for court. In addition, she completes court-ordered pre-waiver evaluations, trains staff on the appropriate use of psychological tests, and has served on the SCDJJ psychological evaluation workgroup for the past two years.

**Andrea Lauricella** is Nationally Board Certified in Biology and has been teaching for 20 years with the last five in Virtual Education with South Carolina Virtual Charter Schools, SCVCS. Prior to teaching with SCVCS, she taught at Lugoff Elgin High School, Terry Parker High School and was the Lead Science Teacher, curriculum writer and teacher trainer for Duval Public Schools, in Jacksonville, Florida.

**Candice Lively, JD**, currently serves as the Deputy Solicitor in the Sixth Circuit for Chester County, South Carolina. She graduated from the University of South Carolina School of Law in 1996 and moved to the Horry County area to start her legal career. She lived there for 17 years and focused on criminal trial work and family court cases. She initially worked as a defense attorney gaining trial experience with the Horry County Public Defender's office where she handled felony trials and juvenile cases. When she left that office, she worked in the private sector and focused on family law handling divorce, child custody, DSS matters, and adoption cases. In May 2007, she accepted a position with the Fifteenth Circuit Solicitor's office and ran the special victim's unit concentrating on prosecuting sexual assault cases and child abuse/homicides. In 2012, she moved back to Columbia, S.C., and accepted a position with the U.S.C. School of Law, Children's Law Center, as their Senior Resource Attorney. She taught the Children in the Courts course for the Law School and the Children's Law Externship. She served on the Children's Law Faculty during the implementation of the Children's Law Concentration curriculum. She served as the state coordinator for the *ChildFirst* forensic interview program. She was chosen to participate in the ACEs training program and became a Master Trainer for Children's Trust in 2013. Lively facilitated the development of the State Drug Endangered Children Guidelines winning a national award for the work done by the state's alliance. She's served on several statewide task forces and organizations to improve the outcomes of vulnerable children within the state, including Silent Tears, Human Trafficking Task Force, ICAC, and SCPSAC.

**Mike Mathison, JD**, is a Legal Fellow with the Richland County Public Defender's Juvenile Reentry Project. He primarily focuses on clearing civil legal barriers for justice-involved youth and young adults. Much of this work involves representing and advising students and parents with school issues, including special education and discipline. He also assists clients with housing, employment and benefits. He is a graduate of the University of South Carolina School of Law, where he was awarded the CALI Award for Excellence for his work as a student attorney with the Juvenile Justice Clinic. Before law school, Mike spent several years as a law clerk and paralegal for a civil litigation firm on Hilton Head Island, SC. Mike also has experience in real estate, appellate practice and general civil litigation matters.

**Shannon Piller** has served as a law enforcement officer and government contractor for approximately 19 years and has served in the following units: Uniformed Patrol; Directed Patrol Unit (DPU; Auto Theft Unit; Special Weapons and Tactics Team (SWAT); and Vice/Narcotics Unit, and Human Trafficking.

Shannon also deployed to Iraq as an International Police Advisor during Operation Iraqi Freedom. While deployed overseas, Shannon worked closely with members of Naval Special Warfare (NSW) SEAL Team One, the US Army 10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group (10<sup>th</sup> SFG) (ODA 093) and the US Marine Corps II Marine Expeditionary Force, Police Transition Team 1, Task Force 1/3, Regimental Combat Team 2, while training and leading an Iraqi Police Special Response Unit (SRU).

Shannon is currently serving as the Greenville County Sheriff's Office Human Trafficking Investigator and GCSO SWAT Maritime Tactical Operations Team Leader. Shannon is also a Task Force Officer (TFO) with the US Dept. of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). Shannon's duties as the HSI TFO involve the targeting of international and domestic human trafficking organizations through long-term investigations. Shannon currently holds numerous certifications in the areas of advanced SWAT tactics, advanced human trafficking/human smuggling, maritime tactical operations, chemical munitions, WMD incident response, and clandestine methamphetamine lab and suspected lab response.

Shannon has presented at numerous events throughout South Carolina, and the South East on human trafficking. Shannon developed an advanced human trafficking investigation class and teaches law enforcement from around South Carolina. Shannon has presented and taught at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) in Brunswick GA during their advanced human trafficking/human smuggling course, teaching Special Agents from around the country on human trafficking investigations. He is the recipient of the following: **Distinguished Service Ribbon**, Greenville County Sheriff's Office 2006; **Letter of Commendation**, United States Marine Corp Police Transition Team 1, Task Force 1/3, Regimental Combat Team 2, II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) July 2007; **Letter of recommendation, commendation** US Army 10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group (A) ODA 093-March 2007; **Medal of Valor**: South Carolina Sheriff's Association. July 2013; and **Promotion to Master Deputy** August 2014

**Terri D. Pope, MSW** will be providing the training for Independent Living at the upcoming Children's Law Conference. Mrs. Pope has been working with the SC Chafee Independent Living Program for 6 years. She obtained her BSW at Columbia College, and her MSW from the College of Social Work at the University of South Carolina.

**Dr. David B. Stout, Ed.D.**, is the Director of the Office of Adult Education and GED Testing Program within the State Department of Education and has worked in adult education for over 30 years. Prior to this, he worked in adult education offices around the state of South Carolina, including Barnwell, Bamberg, Allendale, and Fairfield counties. He also currently serves as an Executive Committee Member of the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education. In July 2011, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Award, issued by the American Council on Education's GED Testing Service. In his free time, Dr. Stout enjoys spending time with his wife of 35 years and their son.

**Dr. John L. Thompson II, Ed.D.**, has been the Assistant Director of ATEC career center in Kershaw County for three years. He was the Director of the Continuous Learning Center (CLC), the alternative school in Kershaw for sixteen years. He worked three years as assistant director of CLC before becoming the director and worked as a teacher/coach at Camden High School prior to coming to CLC. He is President of the South Carolina Alternative School Directors Association. He is a community leader and an expert on local gangs and their activity in the community.

John graduated from The University of South Carolina in 1979 with a B.S. in Education. He received his M.S. in Administration and Supervision from Winthrop University in 1990. In 2005, he received his Doctorate of Educational Leadership from Nova South Eastern University.

John is married to Renee Johnson Thompson and they have four daughters: Cammy, Laurel, Jonellen and Charleston. He also has three grandsons: Bayne and Finley Simmons and Dru Edgerton. He is constantly working with local law enforcement agencies and civic groups in an effort to better the lives of Kershaw County's students and their families.

**Tracey Tucker, JD, MSW**, is currently employed as a Social Worker with the Holistic Juvenile Reentry Program at the Richland County Public Defender's Office. She received a Bachelor of Science in Education from the University of Georgia and Master of Social Work and J.D. from the University of South Carolina. Tracey has worked with various vulnerable populations with the South Carolina Departments of Health and Environmental Control, Mental Health and Juvenile Justice. She currently advocates for juvenile justice reform in South Carolina and is a 2015 Youth Justice Leadership Institute Fellow with the National Juvenile Justice Network.

**Judge Jerry D. (Jay) Vinson, Jr.** graduated from Francis Marion College, cum laude, with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology. He received his Juris Doctorate Degree in 1985 from the University of South Carolina School of Law and was admitted to practice law the same year.

Following law school, he served as a law clerk to the Honorable John H. Waller, Jr., Circuit Court Judge of the Twelfth Judicial Circuit. After completing his clerkship, he joined the firm of Turner, Padget, Graham and Laney, P.A. and later practiced law with his wife, Flo Lester Vinson, in The Vinson Law Firm, P.A. Judge Vinson merged his practice with the law firm of McDougall & Self, L.L.P, where he practiced until his election to the bench in 2004. He is admitted to practice before the United States District Court, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals and the United States Supreme Court.

Judge Vinson has been active with Francis Marion University, where he has been named both Outstanding Alumnus and Outstanding Biology Alumnus. He has served as FMU Alumni President and as a member of the Board of Directors of the Francis Marion University Foundation. He has also served on the Board of Directors for the Florence Symphony Orchestra, the Master Works Choir and the Florence Kiwanis Club. Judge Vinson was also active in the South Carolina Bar serving as a member of the House of Delegates and as a member, and former chair, of the Family Law Section Council. He is a member, and past chair, of the South Carolina Bar Law Related Education Committee. He has been a frequent speaker at Family Law CLE programs.

Judge Vinson is former Chair of the Family Court Bench Bar Committee and serves as chair of the Best Legal Practices sub-committee. Judge Vinson served on the Governor's Task Force for Children in Foster Care and Adoption Services. Judge Vinson is also a member of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and served on the Council's Board of Trustees. He is past president of the South Carolina Conference of Family Court Judges and a former member of the Family Court Judges Advisory Committee.