

PATC 2025 Schedule & Session Descriptions



DAY 1: Tuesday, September 30, 2025

9 – 9:15 am

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS: *Kristin Ahrens, Deputy Secretary, Office of Developmental Programs; Lynn Pascoa, Director, Bureau of Supports for Autism and Special Populations; Amy Alford, Clinical Director, Bureau of Supports for Autism and Special Populations*

9:15 – 10:30 am

DISABILITY HAS NO LOOK: REIMAGINING COMMUNITY THROUGH THE LENS OF DISABILITY

Dr. Kerry Magro

What if inclusion wasn't about asking disabled individuals to adapt to society—but asking society to evolve for all? In this powerful keynote, Dr. Kerry Magro, an award-winning disability rights advocate and full-time professional speaker who was nonspeaking until 2.5 and diagnosed with autism at 4, explores how we can move beyond performative inclusion to true belonging. Drawing on his lived experience and work with organizations across the country, Kerry unpacks practical strategies to help communities reframe accessibility, redefine success, and embrace neurodiversity and disability as vital parts of our shared human experience.

11:30 am – 12:45 pm

STARTING AND SUSTAINING AN EMPLOYMENT JOURNEY

Facilitated by Joyce Bender, Bender Consulting Services; Kait Gillis, Nour Coffee; Connie Feda, Cookie Cookie Ice Cream; Erin Willem, White Cane Coffee; Russell Goddard, PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation; Katherine Becker, Keystone Human Services

Our expert panel of disability employment specialists, entrepreneurs, providers, and individuals from across Pennsylvania will discuss why competitive integrated employment is important from the perspective of the individual, the business, and the community at large, and then delve into their own experiences. Our panelists include Pennsylvania entrepreneurs who have autism, provider agencies with innovative employment supports programs, and business leaders whose mission is to create inclusive, integrated workspaces. This session will help to provide a roadmap for starting and sustaining an employment journey.

1:30 – 2:30 pm

CYBER SAFE, NOT SORRY: TOOLS FOR THE AUTISTIC COMMUNITY

Andrea Layton, MA, BCBA, ASERT Director; Kelly Fisher RN, CFN

In a world where so much of life happens online, staying safe on the internet is more important than ever—especially for autistic individuals, who face unique challenges when navigating digital spaces. This session is designed to provide practical, easy-to-understand guidance and tools on how to recognize online risks, set healthy digital boundaries, and communicate safely with others on the internet.

2:45 – 3:45 pm

VALUED SOCIAL ROLES

Darcy Elks, Vision for Equality; Mary Elks

Join Darcy and her daughter Mary in this discussion of their experiences of how a family/individual go about navigating their community to find fulfillment and building their own role in a community. They will also elaborate on what activities, steps, or actions one can take to find their place. This session will identify the needs, challenges, and actions for getting started.

9 – 10:30 am

BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR COMMUNITY SUCCESS

Al Condeluci, PhD

A key role for human service professionals and community leaders is to create opportunities for community participation and success for the folks they serve. Yet, many vulnerable clients remain isolated or off-set from community and struggle with the social ramifications of poverty, unemployment, difficulty with housing and transportation. Others who might be placed in the community may not truly be included in everyday life opportunities. It is clear that traditional methodologies have not brought many successes. To this end, this interactive session will introduce and explore this macro challenge and examine ways and means to greater community success for the people being supported or served. Clear strategies will be outlined and explored as we examine a more macro perspective on the notion of community building.

11:30 am – 12:45 pm

ALTERNATIVE AUGMENTATIVE COMMUNICATION (AAC) IN THE COMMUNITY

Erin M Edwards, MS, BCBA, LBS and Shannon Welch, MS, CCC-SLP, Penn State College of Medicine

With most average Americans having a phone or tablet with them consistently, we now live in a world where there is very little stigma to carrying around an electronic device. As a result, we also have greater opportunities for communication with high-tech AAC in the community. While other types of AAC can be used successfully in the community, high tech AAC has the advantage of being readily available on a common device and also readily understood by communication partners. In this session we will discuss the use of ecological inventories and individualizing the AAC device to meet the unique needs of the user. We will then review some of the key components to teaching AAC users to initiate and communicate in community settings and how this is a critical step that contributes to generalization and overall independence.

1:30 – 2:30 pm

CHOICE, DIGNITY, AND PARTICIPATION: MAKING INCLUSION A REALITY FOR AUTISTIC ADULTS

Mark Salzer, Ph.D., Professor of Social and Behavioral Sciences Director, Temple University Collaborative on Community Inclusion of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities

Too often, autistic adults find themselves on the sidelines of community life—wanting to participate more fully in work, school, social, and leisure activities, but facing barriers that hold them back. This session explores why community participation and inclusion are not just “nice to have” but are essential for health, wellness, and a fulfilling life. Together, we’ll unpack the powerful role of beliefs about choice, dignity of risk, and self-determination, as well as the impact of environments that either open doors or create roadblocks. Attendees will gain practical strategies for direct support professionals, family members, and allies to foster authentic opportunities for connection, growth, and belonging. Expect to leave with fresh insights, concrete ideas, and a renewed commitment to supporting autistic adults in living the lives they want and deserve.

2:45 – 4:00 pm

ADVOCATING FOR INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

Facilitated by Leon Ford; Courtney Johnson, Matt Smith, Rachel Guttentag, Kristen Phillips

How do Pennsylvania’s self-advocates go about driving community change to allow people of all abilities and backgrounds to thrive? This panel discussion will explore tactics for building communities with inclusive practices. Communities can include our relationships to physical spaces and to one another, meaning accessible infrastructure and communication are foundational to a thriving community. For people with autism, navigating communities that lack accessibility, or inclusive accommodations can be a challenge and their relationships to their communities can suffer as a result. A healthy community can be a driver for collective action and positive change where everyone thrives. The voices of autistic individuals you will hear from during this panel are integral to shaping the future.