

The 2nd Annual CELEBRATION OF DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS

April 10, 2026 8:30 am - 4:30 pm

ABOUT THE CELEBRATION:

This special event will be filled with information, training, and resources designed to assist the Direct Support Professional (DSP) in professional and personal everyday lives. It is a day designed to celebrate the DSPs, who are the backbone of the provider agencies. We want to acknowledge the hard work that you do every day.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER AND STAR GUESTS:



Keynote Speaker

Tamar Heller, Ph.D.
Distinguished Professor,
Department of Disability
and Human Development,
University of Illinois,
Chicago



Amy Dee
Master storyteller and
brilliant comedian



Dan Law
Founder of Partnership to
Advance Responsible
Technology and Associate
Director at The Andy Warhol
Museum

CCA Commonwealth Charter Academy
Homestead Waterfront
162 East Bridge Street
Homestead PA 15120

DSPconference2026@gmail.com 412.735.0947

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DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS

AGENDA

8:30 am	Registration Opens, Breakfast
9:00 am	Welcoming remarks: Honored Guest to be announced
9:15 am	Keynote Speaker: Tamar Heller, Ph.D., <i>Aging in America and the Intellectual Disability Population</i>
9:45 am	Star Guest: Dan Law, <i>A Conversation Regarding AI, Artificial Intelligence, It's here, how it may or may not shape our DSP and Provider worlds</i>
10:45 am	Giveaways
10:45 am	Morning Breakout Sessions
12:00 pm	Lunch provided
1:00 pm	Star Guest: Amy Dee, Humor Through Storytelling
2:00 pm	Direct Support Professional Recognition Awards, presented by Brenda Bulkoski, Director, Allegheny County Office of Developmental Supports
2:30 pm	Afternoon Breakout Sessions
3:30 pm	Giveaways
4:30 pm	Jazz session with Ronnie Weiss at nearby Courtyard Marriot

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SPEAKERS AND SPECIAL GUESTS:

Keynote Speaker

Tamar Heller, Ph.D.

Distinguished Professor, Department of Disability and Human Development, University of Illinois, Chicago. Dr. Heller directs the Institute on Disability and Human Development and is Co-Principal Investigator of the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Family Support. Her research focuses on self-directed and family support, long term services and support, and bridging aging and disabilities. Dr. Heller has written over 270 publications, including 6 books. She is past board President of the Association of University Centers on Disabilities and served on the Executive Council of the International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

Amy Dee

Amy Dee is recognized by audiences across the country as a master storyteller and brilliant comedian. She combines her background in standup comedy and theatre with her RN degree and experience as a successful business owner to deliver hilarious stories and valuable content on the brain and behavior. Her authentic spirit and down to earth approach have made her one of the most sought-after speakers throughout the United States.

Dan Law

Dan Law is the Associate Director at the Andy Warhol Museum and a co-founder/board member of the nonprofit Partnership to Advance Responsible Technology. The Warhol is one of the four Carnegie Museums in Pittsburgh, PA. The Warhol holds the largest collection of Warhol's artworks and archival materials, the greatest single collection of ephemera documenting Warhol's life.

The Partnership to Advance Responsible Technology (PART) is a Pittsburgh-based, independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit think-tank that engages key, multi-sector stakeholders to ensure the responsible research, development, deployment, and governance of emerging and data-driven technologies, notably artificial intelligence.

Brenda L. Bulkoski

Brenda L. Bulkoski, M. Ed. has been the director of the DHS Office of Developmental Supports (ODS) since September 2019. As Director, Brenda oversees the daily operations of the Office of Developmental Supports. This includes assuring compliance with the Pennsylvania Administrative Entity Operating Agreement, continued development of best practices as it relates to services to those in need, and maintenance of a strong and varied network of programs to meet the needs of individuals registered in ODS.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS:

● Conflict Resolution

Molly Loney and Patricia Taylor Nobody really likes conflict, but it can arise anywhere at anytime and make our work and home situations not very pleasant. In this session, approaches and strategies will be demonstrated.

● The Art of Play

Adam Zahren We often think of playing is just for children. However, playing has many benefits for adults too. Such as, increasing wellness and health, creativity, and general well-being. Which is positive in one's professional and personal life. In this session techniques for play will be discussed and experimented.

● Importance of Good Finance

Jeff Smonskey Sometimes we just don't know where to turn for our finances. Especially when we are overwhelmed by the day-to-day routine. We may not be thinking about saving money, planning for the future such as a mortgage, education, Heck, let's face it, sometimes we don't know the options that are out there. In this session, resources and ideas will be presented.

● Physical and Emotional Well-Being

Dr. Susan Amorose If you are stressed, tired, worried and depleted then this session is for you. In this session you will learn what grounding and centered means and be taught techniques that can bring you peace and reconnect with what best serves your life.

● Customer Service

Wendy Lydon Being a Direct Support Professional can be hard work, and sometimes we can forget why we are here and who our customer is. In this session, we will learn how we can better serve our customers (consumers and families).

● What It Takes to Get You to the Next Step of Supervisor

Tim Hinds and Erin Sogal So, you have mastered your job, and you want to move up in your organization, and the next step is a supervisory/management position. What new skill set will be asked of you? How do you take what you learned along the way and apply to this new position? What does it take to be a good supervisor? This session is designed to assist you in preparing for your next career move.

PRESENTERS:



Susan M. Amorose, DMQ, RMT, holds a doctorate in the Ancient Chinese practice of Medical QiGong and is a clinical practitioner, certifying instructor, curriculum designer and speaker for integrative healing and alternative therapies, including Reiki, QiGong, Yin Yang theory, Sacred Geometry, oils, essences and meditation. Susan is a certified Reiki Master Teacher of the Usui Shiki Ryoho. Susan's practice offers specialized content and courses for stress-reduction, improved wellbeing, grounding, team-building



Tim Hinds, is a creative strategist, entrepreneur, and disabled business leader with a lifelong, newly recognized disability that has shaped his communication style, leadership philosophy, and sense of empathy. As the founder and CEO of TrailBlaze Creative—a disability-owned marketing and communications firm—Tim helps mission-driven organizations amplify their message, build authentic brands, and engage communities through inclusive, purpose-led strategies. His firm has led crisis communications and rebranding work for disability providers across Ohio and Pennsylvania, including a nationally recognized campaign in East Palestine, Ohio, following the 2023 train derailment. In his own act of community resilience, Tim created the *Stronger than Hate* symbol that became globally viral following the Tree of Life shooting in Pittsburgh in 2018.



Molly Loney, MSW, operated Community Residential Programs for adults with developmental disabilities for over 40 years. Molly's programs served over 115 people supported by approximately 200 Direct Support Professionals. Molly has considerable experience assisting staff to resolve work and interpersonal conflicts and providing strategies to develop positive professional relationships.



Wendy O. Lydon, LPBC, is a Business Coach and Senior Vice President of ThisleSea Business Development. Her background and expertise combines astute strategic, business and project/program management skills with over 20 years' experience that enables her to assist clients to generate revenue and profit growth. In addition, Wendy's expertise includes formal training in leadership, teamwork, strategic planning, human resources and healthcare legislation.

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PRESENTERS:



Jeff Smonskey, Dollar Bank, is a seasoned community banker with 23 years of experience dedicated to helping individuals and businesses achieve their financial goals. Known for his personalized approach and deep understanding of the financial landscape, Jeff has built lasting relationships by providing tailored solutions that empower clients to succeed. His commitment to community development and financial education has made him a trusted advisor and leader in the banking industry.



Erin Sogal, Vice President, TrailBlaze Creative, is a dynamic leader whose career blends creativity, efficiency, and heart. Her career path has been anything but ordinary, spanning roles with small agencies, a broadcast television station, and several large companies. Along the way, she has collaborated on projects with leaders and changemakers, including Dan Rather, Mel Robbins, Colin Powell, and LeBron James' I Promise School. Erin is especially proud of her ability to capture powerful narratives and to connect with people.



Patricia R. Taylor is a retired Director of Training and Development for Partners For Quality. She has 40 plus years of working in the field of developmental disabilities in Western Pennsylvania. Patricia has over 25 years of experience designing and delivering training to Direct Support Professionals and management staff.



Adam James Zahren, leader of Z Affect, holds a BA in English from Allegheny College with an emphasis in creative writing and a focus on poetry and non-fiction. Adam earned an MA in Social Justice and Community Organizing from Prescott College. Former Program Director of Playful Pittsburgh, Adam is highly familiar with the importance of play in the lives of all people of any age. Z Affect aims to educate professionals about the importance of infusing playfulness into everyday interactions and structures. Adam loves playing board games, painting, writing essays, and creating poetry in his free time.

“Play is the highest form of research” – Albert Einstein

A CELEBRATION OF DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS

REGISTRATION

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Title: _____ Agency: _____

Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

★ Registration deadline is April 3, 2026 ★

I would like to attend the following Breakout Sessions (choose morning and afternoon sessions):

Morning Breakout: Select 1st, 2nd, and 3rd choices.

Conflict resolution	<input type="checkbox"/> 1st choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 2nd choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 3rd choice
The Art of Play	<input type="checkbox"/> 1st choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 2nd choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 3rd choice
Importance of Good Finance	<input type="checkbox"/> 1st choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 2nd choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 3rd choice
Physical and Emotional Well-Being	<input type="checkbox"/> 1st choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 2nd choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 3rd choice
Customer Service	<input type="checkbox"/> 1st choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 2nd choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 3rd choice
Getting to the Next Step of Supervisor	<input type="checkbox"/> 1st choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 2nd choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 3rd choice

Afternoon Breakout: Select 1st, 2nd, and 3rd choices.

Conflict resolution	<input type="checkbox"/> 1st choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 2nd choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 3rd choice
The Art of Play	<input type="checkbox"/> 1st choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 2nd choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 3rd choice
Importance of Good Finance	<input type="checkbox"/> 1st choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 2nd choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 3rd choice
Physical and Emotional Well-Being	<input type="checkbox"/> 1st choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 2nd choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 3rd choice
Customer Service	<input type="checkbox"/> 1st choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 2nd choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 3rd choice
Getting to the Next Step of Supervisor	<input type="checkbox"/> 1st choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 2nd choice	<input type="checkbox"/> 3rd choice

Please let us know if an adjustment or accommodation for a reason related to a medical condition is needed:

Email completed registrations to: DSPconference2026@gmail.com