

# Stepping UP For Kids Awards Luncheon



October 12, 2018 • Norwood Hills Country Club



**STLCANN**

A Partnership that *CARES* for Families



St. Louis Child Abuse & Neglect Network

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# **Stepping UP For Kids Awards Luncheon**

## **Program**

Prelude Music	Point of View Jazz Ensemble, HEAL Center for the Arts <i>Harvey Lockhart, Director</i>
Call to Order and Welcome (11:45 a.m.)	<b>Brenda Maly and Yolanda West</b> <i>Co-Chairs, St. Louis Child Abuse &amp; Neglect Network</i>
Lunch	
Welcome and Introduction of Emcee (12:15 p.m.)	<b>Brenda Maly and Yolanda West</b>
Recognition of Sponsors & Special Guests	<b>Cynthia Williams, MSW</b> <i>Washington University Brown School of Social Work</i>
Musical Interlude	Point of View Jazz Ensemble, HEAL Center for the Arts
Guest Speaker	<b>The Hon. Judge Robin Ransom</b> <i>22nd Circuit Court of St. Louis, Family Court Division</i>
Presentation of <i>Stepping Up for Kids</i> Awards	<b>Cynthia Williams</b>
Closing Comments	<b>Cynthia Williams</b>
Recessional Music	Point of View Jazz Ensemble, HEAL Center for the Arts

## **Thank You to Our Sponsors**

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## GUEST SPEAKER

### Hon. Judge Robin Ransom 22nd Circuit Court, City of St. Louis Family Court Division

Hon. Judge Robin Ransom has served in the 22nd Judicial Circuit in the City of St. Louis since 2008, currently in the Family Court Division. Beginning January 1, 2019, she will be the presiding judge of the 22nd Circuit, the first African American female judge to serve in this position.

Judge Ransom grew up in the Fairground Park neighborhood of north St. Louis. She obtained her undergraduate degree from Douglas College-Rutgers University in 1988 and graduated from the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Law in 1991. She began her career as an assistant public defender for the St. Louis County Circuit Court and then an assistant prosecuting attorney. She joined the legal department of the St. Louis County Family Court—Juvenile Division in 1996 until she was appointed as a Family Court Commissioner for the 22nd Judicial Circuit in 2002. She continued in this role until her 2008 appointment as judge by Gov. Matt Blunt.

The parent of two adopted children, Judge Ransom has joined in community efforts to promote adoption.



## MISTRESS OF CEREMONIES

### Cynthia D. Williams, MSW Washington University Brown School

As the oldest of five children in a family that was among the first to racially integrate University City, Cynthia D. Williams has made it her personal mission to empower those who feel marginalized or powerless to find their voice.

Since graduating with her master's degree from Washington University in St. Louis, George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Cynthia has served as an integral member of the school for over 39 years. Currently assistant dean for community partnerships, she is well known for her patience, intelligence, and ability to find solutions that unify people while respecting individual and community voices.

Cynthia also served for approximately 15 years as a foster parent to children whose behavioral issues impeded adoption. She has taken an active role in developing coursework and providing training to assist birth and foster families during the reunification and adoption process, and to support other foster families in navigating the challenges of caring for displaced and high-risk children.



We extend our heartfelt thanks to the foster, kinship, guardian and relative families for their tireless supply of love and nurturing to vulnerable children.

CPP congratulates and is proud of the hard work of all of the Stepping Up for Kids award recipients. Thanks also for the diligent and extremely hard work being done by all of the CPP staff to ensure the health and safety of children and youth entrusted to their care.

Thank you all!!!



Epworth Children & Family Services  
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Youth In Need  
Together we make a difference!

CPP is a consortium of social services agencies working together to provide foster care case management, adoption, guardianship, and resource development services in St. Louis City, St. Louis County, St. Charles County and Jefferson County.

*Member Agencies:*  
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Family Forward  
Youth In Need

Congratulations Valerie Njiiri!

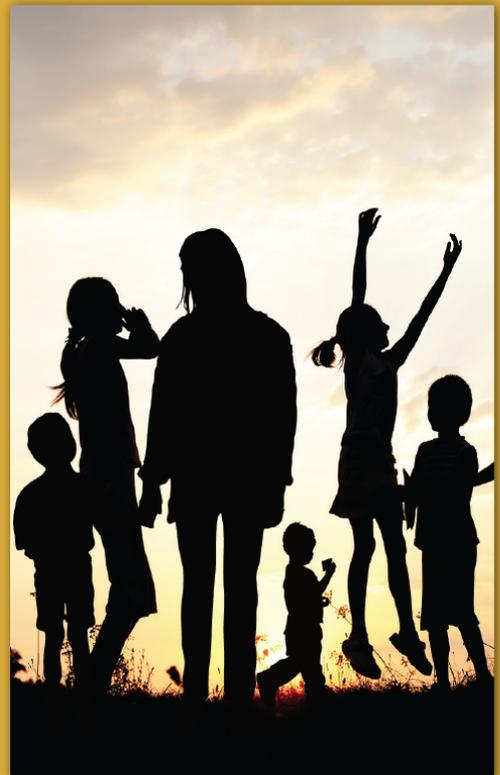
We deeply appreciate your tireless work on behalf of children in foster care.



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## HONOREES: CASEWORK STAFF

### Valerie Njiiri

Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition  
Nominated by Claire Sabourin

*“Valerie is intelligent, driven, passionate, resourceful, and overall an incredible advocate for children and youth in foster care.”*

Transitioning from a residential treatment setting to a home setting can be a terrific challenge. Valerie Njiiri never backs down from that challenge. As director of the SOAR program, she works tirelessly to meet each child’s unique needs. Valerie builds strong relationships with youth, some of whom have never had a successful experience in a foster home. Whether it is assuring that a child has needed medication and a psychi-

atric appointment, or caring for a child when the caregiver has an emergency, she is there to do whatever it takes. Valerie understands the importance of good communication and assures that miscommunication doesn’t get in the way of a child’s stability and success. She strives to provide youth not just what they need, but also what they want. She creatively finds funding so that youth in foster care have an opportunity to be just “regular” kids. Valerie is intelligent, driven, passionate, resourceful, and overall an incredible advocate for children and youth in foster care.



### Meaghan Westhus

Good Shepherd Family and Children’s Services  
Nominated by Amanda Carriker and Kim Gisburne

*“Meaghan is invaluable to our agency, and shows calm and grace in what is often a thankless job.”*

This is the word on Meaghan Westhus. She is always willing to take on what needs to be done rather than pass the challenge to someone else. As a home finder, Meaghan faces the special challenge of finding homes for teens with behavior issues, large sibling groups, and emergency disruptions, as well as the “normal” challenge of finding homes for children as they come

into care. Because she establishes cooperative relationships with home finders and licensing staff at other agencies, they often share resources. Her memory is AMAZING. She can recall specific strengths of particular homes to assure a good fit for children. When timeliness requires going the extra mile to run background checks and do home walk-throughs to license relatives, it is no problem. Meaghan is invaluable to our agency, and shows calm and grace in what is often a thankless job. All with a smile on her face!



### Mockia “Nikki” Shelton

Missouri Children’s Division  
Nominated by Dr. Lanette Madison

*“I have no doubt that Nikki’s genuine unconditional support of both the young woman and her relatives was the spark that enabled positive change.”*

Nikki is a compassionate and dedicated change agent. She exemplifies the truest form of leadership. Nikki cares for clients she serves, and has a strong internal code of ethics that respects the worth and value of children, youth, parents, co-workers and fellow colleagues. Nikki possesses incredible empathy, is outgoing, positive, and leads by example. Her tremendous heart for children is demonstrated through her work and

her volunteer service. A recent example of Nikki’s outstanding work is a youth in care who was also a parent. The young woman was devastated by her circumstances, but Nikki was there for her. She provided intensive support to her and her relative care providers, linking the young woman to community resources, empathizing while also requiring accountability. There is no doubt that Nikki’s genuine unconditional support of both the young woman and her relatives was the spark that enabled positive change. Nikki Shelton steps up for kids!



### Jennifer Thomas

Missouri Children’s Division  
Nominated by Christian Tate

*“Jennifer is a compassionate, creative and generous leader.”*

Jennifer is exceptional because she always steps in when needed. One of the most selfless people imaginable, she supports her workers when they are overwhelmed, even when she has a lot on her own plate professionally and personally. Jennifer has a way of making one look at things from a positive perspective. She allows her workers to vent, while still holding them accountable for their responsibilities. Jennifer definitely has a way with words. Stressful situations are less stressful

because of her personality and her skills. She is sensitive to workers’ needs, and to those of the children. Jennifer offers encouragement and comfort that help children cope. She goes the extra mile for families, visiting food pantries and grocery stores when food or other essentials are needed. Jennifer brings in clothing, diapers, diaper wipes and toys for children. The “play room” is homey because Jennifer brought in paint and decorated it as a warm place for children to play. Jennifer is a compassionate, creative and generous leader.





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# HONOREES: PARENTS AND FAMILIES

## Maria Holmes

Resource Family  
Nominated by Amanda Carriker

*“Kids always come first for Maria.”*

Maria is a treatment foster parent and played a key role in developing the program at Good Shepherd. She mentors new resource families to ensure successful, strength-based parenting. She does an amazing job working with biological families in an inclusive and positive manner. Maria often goes way beyond the expected by arranging more frequent sibling visits than is required. She is sensitive to the needs of biological

family members and recently helped a grandmother balance visits when the grandmother’s health was declining. And of course, she cares deeply for the children in her care. Children in her home experience a safe and nurturing environment where true healing takes place. When Maria recently lost her home due to a fire, her first concern was maintaining safety and security for the children in her care. Kids always come first for Maria.



## Wanda Noel

Resource Family  
Nominated by Cassie Holt and Lorna Thomlinson

*“There is nothing Wanda would not do for someone in need, especially children she fostered.”*

For Wanda Noel, there is no limit on caring. Children placed with her are treated as her own children. And when they leave her home, she continues to be there for them when they need assistance. A touching example is a pregnant teen who placed with Wanda a year before becoming pregnant. The homeless teen turned to Wanda, who connected her to a program (more than an hour’s drive from Wanda’s home) that provided a

place to live, assistance in finishing high school and finding a job. When young people “age out” of foster care, Wanda continues to provide support. She is creative in helping youth find jobs when they are in her home, as well as when they transition to greater independence. She sets up a bank account for older children who have a job and matches the deposits they make. Holidays routinely find a mix of children’s biological relatives in Wanda’s home. Wanda not only recruits resource families at her church, but also shares resources with case managers.



## Shirley and Jimmie Walker

Resource Family  
Nominated by Ruthanne Willeke

*“I praise my kids when they do well. I also hug my kids and tell them I love them, and that I care about what happens to them.” – Shirley Walker*

The children placed with Jimmie and Shirley are not just placed in a house. They are in a loving extended family – a home where love reigns, even when days are difficult. One example is the three siblings they recently fostered for more than eight years. These were sometimes challenging years, and the Walkers spent countless hours at school solving problematic behaviors and sought guidance from a therapist. They were active advocates for the children in their care: participat-

ing in family support teams, being present at court hearings, and willingly sharing their experiences with other resource families in trauma training. Jimmie and Shirley actively supported the children’s biological mom by supporting her, encouraging phone calls with the children, and inviting her to share holidays in their home. The Walkers encouraged the children to participate in Girl Scouts, the Good News Club, sports and other community events. The children have transitioned to another home, but continue to visit the Walkers weekly and continue to receive their warm love and support.



# CONGRATULATIONS TO THIS YEAR’S RECIPIENTS





*Congratulations to honoree and Treatment Foster Parent, Maria Holmes! We are so thankful for your hard work and dedication.*

To learn more about becoming a Treatment Foster Parent, visit [goodshepherdstl.org/treatment-foster-care](http://goodshepherdstl.org/treatment-foster-care)

1340 Partridge Avenue  
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314-854-5700



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**Congratulations to the  
2018 award winners!**

St. Louis Children's Hospital  
thanks you for stepping  
up for children in  
our community.

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**BJC** HealthCare



*Congratulations to honoree Meaghan Westhus, Homefinding Specialist!*

*Thank you to our foster parents for their hard work and dedication!*

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## About the St. Louis Child Abused & Neglect Network

The St. Louis Child Abuse & Neglect Network (STLCANN) promotes advocacy, education and networking to improve the lives of children and families who have been impacted by abuse or neglect and to strengthen families to prevent child abuse or neglect. Programs include.

- **Training Workshops and Events:** Quarterly CEU-credit seminars offer training to help Improve your professional skills in working with children and families.
- The annual **Stepping Up for Kids Awards Luncheon** recognizes outstanding service to children in foster and adoptive care.
- Each April, **Child Abuse Prevention Month** activities include a family resource fair as well as a yard sign display and social media campaign.
- STLCANN participates in **coordinated statewide legislative advocacy** on behalf of children and families.



**Learn more about STLCANN**  
[www.visionforchildren.org/stlcann/](http://www.visionforchildren.org/stlcann/)  
**(314) 534-6015**



**Congratulations to all the honorees!**  
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As a community-based organization, we are delighted to be here to celebrate so many individuals who give of their time and talents for the well-being of the children of St. Louis.

## Congratulations Stepping Up for Kids Honorees

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## Point of View Jazz Ensemble HEAL Center for the Arts

Music for Stepping Up for Kids is provided by the Point of View Jazz Ensemble from HEAL Center for the Arts. Founded by Harvey Lockhart, HEAL operates in partnership with local school districts to provide a safe and supportive space where students of urban communities have access to high quality mentoring, tutoring, and arts education. HEAL is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization located in Grand Center.



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**We are proud to be part of  
a community dedicated to  
“Stepping UP for Kids!”**

Places for People’s mission is to provide caring, effective services to help those with the greatest challenges recover from mental illness, substance use disorders, and associated chronic illnesses.



### Next STLCANN Training Program

**“Mindfulness and Self Care for Professionals”**

**Friday, December 14, 2018 9:00–11:00 a.m.**

**Information & Registration: [www.visionforchildren.org/stlcann/](http://www.visionforchildren.org/stlcann/)**



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[cardinalglennon.com](http://cardinalglennon.com)

## Recognizing and Celebrating

this year's honorees and all those in our community  
who work endlessly to provide safe, loving,  
and supportive homes for children.



# Stepping UP For Kids

## 2018 Planning Committee

Kate Beermann  
Deva Blackman  
Jim Braibish  
Ruth Ehresman  
Michael Fitzgerald  
Shanté Lampley, DM

Brenda Maly  
Jason Myers  
Colleen Polak  
Craig Schmid  
Yolanda West

**Thanks for your hard work!**



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**Congratulations to this year's honorees:  
You are truly making a difference for kids!**

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**STEPPING UP**  
*for kids!*



*Congratulations to this year's  
Stepping Up for Kids  
honorees and to all of the agencies  
that provide safe, loving and  
permanent homes for children.*

Congratulations  
Stepping Up for Kids Honorees!  
We appreciate all that you do to  
serve children and families.



*“Because Every Child Deserves a Chance”*

Congratulations  
Stepping Up for Kids  
Honorees



Missouri Coalition of Children’s Agencies

[www.e-mcca.org](http://www.e-mcca.org)



Congratulations Stepping Up for Kids Honorees

*From the Vision for Children at Risk Board of Directors*

**Stepping Up for Kids Previous Honorees**

2017

**Resource Families**

Janice Smith

Robyne Wilson-Cima

**Casework Staff**

Stephanie Littlejohn

Kelly Sullivan

Bridget Viridure

Kenya Willis

2016

**Resource Families**

Adella Coleman

Jennifer and Shane Tripp

Jan and Paul Wilkin

**Casework Staff**

Karen Jones

Denise Kelley

Gail Knipshild

2015

**Resource Families**

Ramona Brooks

Tiffany and Robert Slouffmann

**Casework Staff**

Abigail Bell

Edna Green

Jennifer LaVelle

Edward Vazquez

Lynn Zollicofer

2014

**Resource Families**

Barbara Bocklage

Sara Glasscock

Evelyn Holder

Yvonne Peoples

**Casework Staff**

Hisako O'Rourke

Bev Schaefer

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