Stepping Up for Kids 10.23.2026

Celebrating people who go *above and beyond* for children in foster and adoptive care.

Vision for CHILDREN at Risk

STLCANN
A Partnership that CARES for Families

ST. LOUIS COUNTY
CHILDREN'S SERVICE FUND
Investing in kids. Creating brighter futures.

Congratulations to the Stepping Up For Kids honorees!

Thank you for all you do for kids and families in St. Louis County.





FIND MENTAL HEALTH CARE NEAR YOU

Explore our Find-A-Service Tool, an interactive map of more than 100 mental health providers in the St. Louis region, to find the right service for your child.

STLCSF.org

keepingkidsfirst@stlouiscountymo.gov

314-615-5850

Stepping Up for Kids 2026 Program:

Prelude Music ..... Heal Center for the Arts

Call to Order and Welcome (12:00 PM) ..... Sanaria Sulaiman | Jennifer Humphrey
VCR President & CEO | STLCANN Co-Chair

Lunch

Recognition of Sponsors & Special Guests ..... Yolanda West
STLCANN Co-Chair

Musical Interlude ..... Heal Center for the Arts

Introduction of Guest Speaker ..... Yolanda West

Guest Speaker ..... Charles "Bizkitt" Smith
Founder/CEO of My Life in a Bag

Presentation of Stepping Up for Kids Awards ..... Jennifer Humphrey

Closing Comments ..... Yolanda West

Recessional Music ..... Heal Center for the Arts

Thank You To Our Sponsors:

PLATINUM SPONSORS

- **Children's Permanency Partnership**
- **St. Louis County Children's Service Fund**
- **Vision for Children at Risk**

BLUE RIBBON SPONSORS

- **Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition**
- **KVC Missouri**

LEADERSHIP SPONSORS

- **Foster Together**
- **Fostering Healthy Children Program at Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital**
- **The Hermann Center for Child and Family Development**
- **Home State Health**
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- **MBCH Children & Family Ministries**
- **Marygrove and Good Shepherd Children and Family Services**
- **My Life in a Bag**
- **Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services**
- **St. Louis Children's Advocacy Center**
- **St. Louis City Family Court**
- **St. Louis County Family Court**



CHILDREN'S PERMANENCY PARTNERSHIP

Building Brighter Futures for Children and Families

Children's Permanency Partnership (CPP) is dedicated to finding permanent, loving homes for children in foster care across St. Louis and nearby regions. *CPP is a partnership of Epworth Children & Family Services, FamilyFoward and TFI. Together we make a difference for children and families!*

Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC)

CPP's TFC Program has served our children and families since 2019. We are passionate about providing the extra supports and client-based services needed for our youth to be successful in community placements. Our TFC program supports children 6 to 21 years old with significant emotional, behavioral, medical or developmental needs, promoting well-being, family connections and community integrity.

Children's Permanency Partnership

Together we make a difference!
Epworth Children & Family Services
FamilyForward
TFI

Facebook:

Website:

ChildrensPermanencyPartnership.org

CPP.Info@cppmo.org • 314-733-5759

KEYNOTE SPEAKER



Charles “Bizkitt” Smith

My Life In A Bag Foundation
"Beyond the Bag Initiative" Agape Executive Protection
Founder & CEO

Charles "Bizkitt" Smith's overarching spiritual vision is bold: to establish a God-centered framework that brings together organizations and individuals dedicated to transforming communities. He seeks to ignite a movement of faith-driven collaboration, healing, and empowerment, where every person encounters the love of Christ through acts of service and protection. Through his work with My Life In A Bag Foundation, Bizkitt stands firm in his calling—to be a light, a guardian, and a servant-leader, reflecting God's heart for justice, mercy, and restoration in every sphere of influence.

My Life In A Bag
FOUNDATION

Improving the Lives of Kids in Foster Care

My Life In a Bag Foundation is a nonprofit organization that improves the lives of kids in foster care by providing them with luggage and essential items so they carry hope not trash bags as they move through the system

mylifeinabagfoundation.org

HONOREES

Rich Patton Champion for Children Award



Ramona Conrad-Cooper

Ramona Conrad-Cooper began her social work career 38 years ago in Louisville, Kentucky, working with high-school-age boys in state custody due to abuse and neglect. That early experience shaped her lifelong commitment to helping children and families facing difficult circumstances.

After earning her Master's in Social Work, Ramona moved to St. Louis in 1990 to join Missouri Baptist Children's Home (MBCH) as a case manager, working with children living in residential care. After a couple of years, she moved into management and helped to develop the agency's 30-day Crisis Care program. Ramona eventually served as Vice President of Client Services, providing leadership across the state-wide agency.

During her career, Ramona helped lead MBCH through a significant transition from residential services to community-based care. She was instrumental in developing foster and therapeutic foster homes, recruiting and supporting families, securing funding, and implementing trauma-informed practices. She also helped guide the agency in adopting the Trust-Based Relational Intervention system, emphasizing healing and responding to the underlying trauma needs of children and families. Throughout her management career, Ramona's passion was mentoring and supporting staff so they could provide the best possible services to clients while also growing and developing in their own careers.

Near retirement, Ramona helped develop Stronger Family Services, an MBCH self-funded program designed to bring together a team of professionals to support families, promote healing, and prevent out-of-home placements. After 38 years of service, Ramona retired with a career dedicated to strengthening children, families, and the systems designed to support them.



Scan to explore the Children's Data Center

Explore the Data. See the Story.

VCR is proud to release the 14th Edition of *Children of Metropolitan St. Louis: A Data Book for the Community* at this year's Stepping Up for Kids Awards Luncheon.

For more than 30 years, the CMSL has helped our community understand the conditions shaping child and family well-being. This newest edition expands to six counties and more than 40 indicators, bringing together data and insights to illuminate inequities, inform decisions, and identify opportunities for action.

We invite you to explore the data through the CMSL and our Children's Data Center—and use what you learn to spark conversation, strengthen collaboration, and build a better future for children and families.

HONOREES

Rich Patton Champion for Children Award



Trish Kohl, PhD, MSW

Patricia (Trish) Kohl, PhD, MSW is Professor at Washington University in St. Louis, where she holds a joint appointment as Professor of Social Work in the Brown School and as the Michelle K. Trulaske Chair and Research Director of the Hermann Center for Child and Family Development in the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. A clinical social worker turned researcher, she is nationally recognized for advancing early childhood mental health and child maltreatment prevention through research that spans families, communities, service systems, and policy.

Dr. Kohl's work focuses on developing, testing, and implementing interventions that strengthen parent–child relationships and improve child emotional and behavioral health, while also addressing the community and systemic conditions that shape families' access to support. A hallmark of her scholarship is deep engagement with parents, community organizations, providers, and cross-sector partners to ensure that research questions, interventions, and systems of care reflect the experiences and priorities of the families they are intended to serve. Her community-engaged research has examined how systems can move upstream from responding to problems toward creating conditions that support children and families earlier, including efforts to strengthen community prevention systems and address structural barriers to behavioral health services.

Her research has been supported by NIMH, NICHD, CDC, the Administration for Children and Families, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Systems for Action. Across this portfolio, she uses implementation science, mixed methods, and community-engaged approaches to bridge rigorous research with everyday practice and to translate findings into sustainable changes in programs and systems.

Before academia, Dr. Kohl was Clinical Director of a therapeutic childcare center for young children with severe emotional and behavioral challenges. She now teaches Social Work Practice in Early Childhood and Policies and Services for Children and Youth, preparing future social workers to think beyond individual services and consider how communities and systems can create lasting change for young children and families.

Vision for CHILDREN at Risk

Honorees, Thank you! **Your dedication makes a lasting difference.**

VCR promotes the well-being of children, youth, and their families, with a primary focus on those impacted by socioeconomic risk and racial inequity.

We do this by:

- **Informing** the community with data and research,
- Promoting **collaborative** action,
- **Engaging** and supporting families, and
- **Advocating** for child well-being through policy and community investment.

Program Spotlight: Family Support Services

Our Family Support Team provides peer support to help families navigate parenting and access resources. With lived experience and a deep understanding of life's complexities, they respect you as the expert on your family and walk alongside you every step of the way.

Connect with us

HONOREES

Resource Family



Adrienne Myles

Nominated by Mia Daugherty

Ms. Adrienne is truly an exceptional individual. As the owner of Myles Ahead Daycare, she has taken on the incredible responsibility of caring for four brothers who were removed from their home. The thought of them being split up broke her heart, prompting her to become their foster mother.

Ms. Adrienne goes above and beyond to ensure that the boys are not only loved and cared for but also receive more than just their basic needs. She actively involves them in her life, taking them to church regularly. During one of their church visits, the oldest boy asked Ms. Adrienne if she could buy him a Bible so he could follow along with the pastor. This moment speaks volumes about the nurturing environment she has created.

While she has faced challenges along the way, Ms. Adrienne remains resilient, finding strength in her faith. She understands her purpose is to pour love and guidance into these boys, planting seeds that will blossom as they grow. Her dedication and unwavering commitment to their well-being is nothing short of inspiring.
She recently purchased a vehicle big enough to transport her foster kids and family in. She wants to make sure the kids have the best of experience as possible without the limits of transportation.



Shanelle & Maurice Williams

Nominated by Rachel Mathews

Shanelle and Maurice took in two siblings that had behaviors or needs that required Level 2 Treatment Foster Care. They took the siblings in for a couple of months, but that time and commitment soon became more than three years plus an ongoing dedication to supporting them as they are finally moving towards their permanent placement home.

Even during these three years, Shanelle finished her BA in social work and is now working on her MA, that is exceptional! She is also a previous foster care child and plans to continue to stand in the gap for foster children. She plans to take on a more therapeutic role in the future to help foster children. Her and Maurice are an amazing example of what it takes to be a foster parent!

HONOREES

Front-Line Staff



Sam Blue

Nominated by Sanaria Sulaiman

Sam Blue is an extraordinary community leader whose impact on children and families has spanned more than 30 years. As a devoted father of nine children, he understands firsthand the challenges and opportunities families face, and he has dedicated his life to helping others thrive.

Mr. Blue is widely respected and deeply trusted throughout the community. People know that when they need support, guidance, or connections to critical services and resources, he is someone they can count on. His commitment to serving others goes far beyond his professional responsibilities, it is a lifelong calling rooted in compassion, generosity, and a genuine desire to strengthen families.

One of the most powerful examples of Sam's dedication occurred when he personally drove families in his bus to Parent Cafés to ensure they could participate, connect with others, and access valuable support. His efforts helped build parent leadership and engagement across the region. Through his persistence and advocacy, those early investments in parent voice and leadership contributed to the development of a statewide Parent Advisory Council that continues to elevate family perspectives today.

Mr. Blue's unwavering commitment has positively influenced countless children and families, advancing child and family well-being and creating stronger, more connected communities. His leadership, humility, and service make him truly exceptional and highly deserving of this recognition.



Sandy Frank

Nominated by Rachel Mathews

Sandy is an exceptionally kind and collaborative leader who defines her success by the stability and well-being of the children and families she serves. Her dedication goes far beyond the typical requirements of a supervisor; she has an innate ability to bring people together, fostering a spirit of teamwork even in the most high-pressure situations. Sandy is known for her authentic compassion and her unwavering belief that every child—no matter their history or challenges—deserves a safe, nurturing home environment. Her calm, supportive presence makes her a trusted anchor for her staff and the foster parents under her guidance.

Sandy's commitment is most evident in her proactive approach to child welfare and her willingness to tackle the most complex cases, securing difficult placements, providing active crisis support, through her fierce advocacy for children, and in the ways she empowers families.

Sandy Frank is a dedicated professional who works tirelessly behind the scenes to change the life trajectories of vulnerable children. She is the reason many children who have experienced significant trauma are now thriving in stable, loving homes. Sandy represents the heart of the foster care system—someone who believes that one dedicated adult can make a world of difference for a child. Her kindness and her collaborative spirit make her a true hero for families and a role model for anyone working in service of others.

HONOREES
Community Partners



Cara Christanell, CPNP
Nominated by Meghan Rice

Cara is the main provider for both SSM Health Cardinal Glennon's Fostering Healthy Children Program and our Sexual Abuse Management (SAM) Clinic. She recognizes that children in foster care often have very little control over what happens to them, and she gives them a voice whenever possible. Her patience and trauma-informed approach can make an intimidating medical experience feel safe and manageable.

She practices true trauma-informed care. She understands that many of the children she sees have experienced significant trauma and takes the time to build trust, make children feel safe, and meet them where they are. She is compassionate and respectful not only to children, but also to foster parents, treating them as valued partners in the child's care.

Cara consistently goes above and beyond to make sure children receive timely care. She never hesitates to accept an extra appointment or squeeze a child into an already busy schedule. She will work late or use time during her office hours to ensure children are seen within their required 30-day timeframe. She does whatever she can to prevent scheduling challenges from becoming barriers to care.

She is also an exceptional teammate—always willing to listen, help, and support others when they are overwhelmed. Cara represents everything we hope for in someone caring for vulnerable children. She does not simply provide medical care; she creates an environment where children feel safe, respected, heard, and valued.

What stands out most about Cara is that she never makes children feel like an inconvenience. Whether she is staying late, rearranging her schedule, squeezing in an urgent appointment, comforting a frightened child, or supporting a foster parent, she simply steps up.

Thank you for Stepping Up for Kids!

Good Shepherd Children & Family Services *and* **Marygrove**, *ministries of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, are proud to support the impactful work of* **Vision for Children at Risk,** *empowering families, lifting community voices, and building brighter futures for children.*



Thank you, for
going the extra mile
for children & families!

HONOREES
Community Partners



Erion “Prop Man” Johnson
Nominated by Katina Johnson

Mr. Johnson has reached more than 160 young people through Youth Builders STL – teaching them carpentry and construction while also giving them a safe and productive place to learn, grow, and belong. His work is intentional about violence prevention and crime reduction. He is putting tools into young people's hands and teaching them how to build rather than allowing the streets and violence to become their only examples of what is possible.

What stands out about Mr. Johnson is that he is not only teaching kids how to build—he is giving them an opportunity to learn skills they can carry with them long after they leave his program. Through carpentry and hands-on construction, he is helping young people learn responsibility, teamwork, patience, confidence, and the value of seeing something through from beginning to end.

His work with the Tiny Homes Project is especially meaningful. Following the devastating tornado in St. Louis, he found a way to bring young people into the rebuilding process. While helping families and the community recover, he also created an opportunity for kids to learn, serve others, and see firsthand that their own hands and talents can make a difference in someone else's life.

Mr. Johnson is stepping up for kids by giving them his time, sharing his knowledge with them, and helping young people see possibilities for themselves through skilled trades, mentorship, and service to their community.
Erion “Prop Man” Johnson is doing much more than teaching children how to build. He is intentionally creating opportunities for young people in under-resourced and underperforming areas of St. Louis, where many children are growing up in poverty and may not always have access to positive programs, mentors, or opportunities to learn a trade.

Mr. Johnson cannot make every decision for these children, but he is doing his part to make sure they know they have choices.

Congratulations

2026 Stepping Up for Kids Honorees!

Hermann Center
for Child and Family Development



Care.
Research.
Community.

At the *Hermann Center*

These are not separate pieces, we work together to improve services for young children and families **every single day.**







Building brighter futures *together.*

We CARE about every child and family.

We RESEARCH to better understand and improve outcomes.

We BUILD COMMUNITY partnerships that strengthen families and inspire change.

HermannCenter.wustl.edu



Fostering Healthy Children would like to congratulate Stepping Up for Kids honorees! We appreciate all you do to serve children and families.

cardinalglennon.com

SSMHealth
CardinalGlennon
Children's Hospital

ST. LOUIS
Children's Advocacy Center
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI–ST. LOUIS

Congratulations to this year's Stepping Up for Kids award recipients! We are proud to celebrate your commitment to improving the lives of children and families in our community.

SEAL OF THE MISSOURI CIRCUIT COURT TWENTY-SECOND JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
SUUM CUIQUE TRIBUERE
ST. LOUIS CITY

Congrats to all of the nominees!



Child Protection Department
Twenty-Second Judicial Circuit of Missouri
Family Court-Juvenile Division

mbch
CHILDREN & FAMILY MINISTRIES

Making a Difference, One Heart at a Time

Best wishes and deepest appreciation from your friends at MBCH Children & Family Ministries.

Congratulations Ramona!



800.264.6224
www.mbch.org

St. Louis County Family Court
21st Judicial Circuit of Missouri

Thank you honorees,
for all you do,
for children and families!



You could be exactly who a youth is waiting for.



Right now, a child or teen in the St. Louis area needs a safe, supportive home with someone who understands their unique needs.

Some youth in foster care need extra support due to behavioral, emotional, developmental or medical needs. As a **KVC Missouri Treatment Foster Parent**, you can provide the stability and individualized care they need to feel safe and thrive.

You don't have to be an expert. KVC provides specialized training, 24/7 support and a team by your side.

Take the next step in your foster care journey.

Scan the QR code to learn more about becoming a KVC Missouri Treatment Foster Parent. >>>>

KVC Missouri

330 North Gore Ave., St. Louis, MO | (844) 424-3577 | **kvcmo.org/treatmentfostercare**

Connect With Us! KVC Missouri | kvcmoacademy | @kvckids | KVC Health Systems | @kvckids

Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services℠



We envision a world where every child is safe, every family is strong, and hope outshines hardship.

pchas.org
800.888.1904
@pchasway

LfCS
Lutheran Family and Children's Services of Missouri

Lutheran Family and Children's Services proudly congratulates the 2026 Stepping Up for Kids honorees!



We celebrate your dedication, compassion, and commitment to making a positive difference in the lives of children and families. Thank you for all that you do!



home state health | Show Me Healthy Kids
MANAGED BY HOME STATE HEALTH

Proud to support the
2026 Stepping Up for Kids Luncheon

HomeStateHealth.com



FOSTER & ADOPTIVE CARE COALITION
FOR EVERY CHILD... A PLACE TO CALL HOME

For more than 35 years, the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition has collaborated with local child welfare agencies to service children impacted by the foster care system and their caregivers, increasing permanency and stability.



Programs & Services

- **Child-Specific Recruitment** Intensive family finding to serve youth at a variety of points during the case
- **Kinship Caregiver Support** Assisting relatives through the licensing process and providing ongoing support to promote stability
- **Foster Parent Recruitment** Developing non-relative foster families who meet the emotional health and cultural needs of our youth
- **In-Home Therapeutic Services** Family Works, rooted in Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy
- **Advocacy, Navigation, and Support** Coalition CareLine, Educational Advocacy, Comprehensive Systems Navigation, Regional Family Support, and Older Youth Readiness

For More Information

Visit foster-adopt.org or scan the QR code
(314) FOSTER-3
1220 N. Lindbergh Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63132

About the St. Louis Child Abuse & Neglect Network (STLCANN)

STLCANN
A Partnership that CARES for Families

We promote advocacy, education and networking to improve the lives of children and families who have been impacted by abuse or neglect & to strengthen families to prevent child abuse or neglect.

We are working to:

- Provide educational and networking opportunities for professionals and community organizations to improve the lives of children and families who are at risk of, or who have been impacted by abuse or neglect;
- Promote awareness of public, private, and community organizations that provide resources to families at risk of abuse/neglect; and
- Affirm and celebrate individuals who go the extra mile for children who have been abused or neglected.

THANK YOU!

To the Stepping Up for Kids 2026 Planning Committee:

- Melik Coffey
- Shelnise Ellis
- Tijen Gassiraro
- Jennifer Humphrey
- Rochelle Moore
- Jason Myers
- Craig Schmid
- Sanaria Sulaiman
- Yolanda West

Lead, Connect, & Make a difference

STLCANN brings professionals and community partners together to strengthen families and improve the lives of children impacted by abuse and neglect. We're looking for passionate leaders to join our board and help shape this important work.

Could you be our next board member?
Contact Shelnise Ellis to learn more at sellis@visionforchildren.org.

Thank You for Stepping Up.

For more than a decade, this event has honored the champions who go above and beyond to support and uplift children and families in our community. Year after year, we've celebrated the individuals, families, and organizations whose dedication, compassion, and commitment help make St. Louis a stronger place for children and families to grow and thrive.

Thank you for being part of this celebration. Your presence continues a tradition of recognizing the people who show up, speak up, and make a difference.

It reminds us of what's possible when we come together in support of every child and family.