



POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

CONFERENCE APRIL 21 & 22 | SIOUX FALLS

Time	Session & Topic	Speaker & Organization
DAY 1 APRIL 21, 2026		
12:30-1:00 pm	Registration	
1:00-1:10 pm	Welcome and Conference Logistics	
1:10 - 2:10 pm	Opening Speaker: <i>Sustaining Your Spark: Building Resilience, Joy, and Hope in Youth-Serving Work</i>	Helen Elmers, Success Coach
2:10 - 2:30 pm	Afternoon Break: Snacks/Booths/Networking	
2:30 - 3:50 pm	Session 1: <i>In Her Shoes: Teens and Dating Violence</i>	Coleen Hoffman, Safe Place of Eastern South Dakota
3:50 - 5:00 pm	Session 2: <i>Young Voices Youth Panel</i>	Young Voices
DAY 2 APRIL 22, 2026		
8:00 - 8:30 am	Registration	
8:30 - 9:20 am	Session 3: <i>Talk Saves Lives: Youth Suicide Prevention</i>	Samantha Christopherson, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
9:20 - 10:10 am	Session 4: <i>Teens and the Law: What You Need to Know</i>	Dan Miller South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation
10:10 - 10:30 am	Morning Break: Snacks/Booths/Networking	
10:30 - 11:10 am	Session 5: <i>Connecting With Our Youth</i>	Keaton Widow, Great Plains Tribal Health
11:10 am - 12:00 pm	Session 6: <i>Supporting Brain Health In Our Community</i>	Michelle Kutner & Grace Gill, Alzheimer's Association
12:00 - 1:15 pm	Lunch on your own	
1:15 - 2:45 pm	Closing Speaker: <i>Transforming Trauma into Resilience</i>	Ashley Bendiksen
2:45 - 3:00 pm	Exit Survey	



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OPENING SESSION

Sustaining Your Spark: Building Resilience, Joy, and Hope in Youth-Serving Work

SPEAKER: Helen Eimers, *Success Coach*



Helen Eimers is a Success Coach, speaker, and Conscious Heart Hypnotherapy practitioner who helps mission-driven professionals restore energy, resilience, and clarity so they can continue showing up fully in their work. With a background in nursing, wellness coaching, and program development, she has spent more than a decade supporting teams across healthcare, education, and community settings. Helen is the creator of Amplify Academy, HypnoBIZ, and Activate, and is known for her warm, practical approach to preventing burnout and reconnecting to purpose. She lives in Chamberlain with her husband and three children.

SESSION #1

In Her Shoes: Teen and Dating Violence

SPEAKER: Coleen Hoffman, *Executive Director, Safe Place of Eastern South Dakota*



Coleen Hoffman earned her B.A. in Behavioral Sciences from Dakota Wesleyan University and has served Safe Place of Eastern South Dakota for more than 25 years in a variety of roles. She is currently the Executive Director in Mitchell and serves on several multidisciplinary teams and advisory boards. Coleen is a graduate of Leadership Mitchell, Leadership Acceleration at Dakota Wesleyan University, and the South Dakota Network Advanced Academy. She has received multiple honors for her dedication to violence prevention and believes that working together can break the silence and empower lives.

SESSION #2

Young Voices Youth Panel

SPEAKERS: Young Voices



Young Voices is a youth-led advocacy group made up of youth and young adults with lived experience in the foster care system. Members provide VOICES (Vision, Opportunities, Ideas, Creativity, Enthusiasm, and Support) to young people who have experienced out-of-home placement. Young Voices is committed to creating positive change and improving outcomes for youth across South Dakota by sharing their perspectives and lived experience.

SESSION #3

Talk Saves Lives: Youth Suicide Prevention

SPEAKER: Samantha Christopherson, *Executive Director of the North Dakota and South Dakota American Foundation for Suicide Prevention*



Samantha Christopherson is the Dakotas Executive Director of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP). AFSP is a voluntary health organization with a mission to save lives and bring hope to those affected by suicide. AFSP is the number one private funder of mental health research. On the local level, the South Dakota Chapter is active in prevention education, advocacy, and support for suicide loss survivors.

SESSION #4

Teens and the Law: What You Need to Know

SPEAKER: Dan Miller, *ICAC Task Force Agent, South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation*



Dan Miller has served in law enforcement in South Dakota for 5 years. After a short stint as a Sioux Falls police officer, he has served as a Special Agent with the South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation assigned to the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force. He is certified as a Forensic Computer Examiner by the International Association of Computer Investigative Specialists (IACIS).

SESSION #5

Connecting With Our Youth

SPEAKER: Keaton Widow, *Program Manager, Great Plains Tribal Health*



Keaton Widow, BSW, is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and serves as Program Manager for Teca Kici Okijupi - Connecting With Our Youth (CWOY), a suicide prevention model under Great Plains Tribal Health and housed at Oyate Health Center in Rapid City. CWOY serves Native American youth in the He Sapa (Black Hills) region through early intervention, Support Navigator care coordination, and strong community partnerships.

With over 12 years of experience in behavioral and mental health, Keaton leads program implementation, referral systems, partner training, and continuity of care for youth experiencing suicidal ideation, attempts, or behavioral health crises. His work spans prevention, intervention, systems coordination, and culturally grounded support for youth and families.

SESSION #6

Supporting Brain Health In Our Community

SPEAKER: Michelle Kutner, *State Program Director, Alzheimer's Association*



Michelle Kutner is a licensed social worker and State Program Director for the South Dakota Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association. With a career in long-term care, she has supported families and trained staff to strengthen dementia care. In her current role, Michelle provides education and resources statewide and recruits, trains, and partners with volunteers who lead support groups and community programs. She also serves on the South Dakota Healthy Brain Coalition.

SPEAKER: Grace Gill, *Director of Public Policy, Alzheimer's Association*



Grace Gill serves as the Director of Public Policy for the South Dakota Alzheimer's Association, advocating for policies that support the more than 16,500 South Dakotans impacted by Alzheimer's disease. Her work focuses on advancing state and federal solutions that improve access to care, increase research funding, and reduce stigma. Grace has a background in nonprofit advocacy and also serves on the South Dakota Healthy Brain Coalition.

CLOSING SPEAKER

Transforming Trauma into Resilience

SPEAKER: Ashley Bendiksen



Ashley Bendiksen is a teen trauma survivor turned national speaker, award-winning activist, and expert in domestic violence and sexual assault prevention, resilience, and early intervention for at-risk youth. She travels full-time across the U.S., speaking to students, educators, advocates, and professionals on prevention and youth-centered response. Ashley holds a B.A. in Administration of Justice and brings 17 years of professional experience across education, nonprofit, legal, and government sectors. She is also the founder of the Blue Hearts Project, a global storytelling platform for survivors, and co-founder of Island Youth Coaching, supporting teens and young adults through life coaching and college consulting.