

THE VOICE OF THE CHILD

CONFERENCE SPEAKER BIOS



CONFERENCE MEMBERS

KARLYS SIMONE

JORDAN IGNATIUS

KEITH MAKIN

PROFESSOR CARLENE FIRMIN MBE

RH YOUTH BOARD

JOE RICH

REBECCA SMITH

VICTORIA EBUN

AISLING BARKER

OLLIE FRITTON

CHARLOTTE CONWAY

SARAH MCLAGGAN

TYRELL MARCUS

WARREN ANDREWS

STUART COLLINS

CROYDON YOUTH CONSORTIUM

ELLIE SANDOVER

ANGELA PARKES

WAYNE LINDSAY

SHAUN POLLEY

ZACH WILLIAMS

JOHN BLACKMAN

CROYDON COUNCIL YOUTH AMBASSADORS

JAVELLE

DELEISHA

NAHUM



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KARLYS SIMONE

HEAD OF CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING REACHING HIGHER

Karlys is a dynamic youth worker with a background in therapeutic intervention. She is trained as an Integrative Counsellor and Psychotherapist and is a member of the BACP. Karlys has worked therapeutically with adults through agency work and in both primary and secondary mainstream schools.

Prior to working at Reaching Higher, she was a Mental Health Lead at 2 alternative provisions in Bromley working long and short term with the students and offering clinical spaces to the staff. She was previously Lead Counsellor at a South London college, overseeing the work of trainee counsellors and started at Reaching Higher as Senior Therapeutic Practitioner supporting frontline youth workers with Clinical supervision and training; believing that those who pour out also need to be poured back into intentionally.

Karlys is the Head of Contextual Safeguarding at Reaching Higher and is trained to deliver AMBIT through the Anna Freud Centre and serves as the charity's Designated Safeguarding Lead.

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JORDAN IGNATIUS

**MANAGING DIRECTOR
REACHING HIGHER**

I'm an experienced Early Years and Youth Work professional, entrepreneur, community leader, and positive disruptor with over 15 years' experience across these sectors.

I'm passionate about improving the lives of children and young people, with a track record in leading strategy, building value-driven teams, developing homegrown leaders, and fostering meaningful community relationships.

As Managing Director of Reaching Higher, I lead initiatives that champion and empower young people.

I'm the founder of Sowing & Growing Nursery and Preschool, a business committed to high-quality early years education.

I am an Acumen Academy Fellow & Global Foundry Member, a global leadership Alumni for social change-makers.

I serve as a Trustee at Crystal Palace Park Trust, focusing on commercial development and community engagement.

Outside of work, I cherish time with loved ones, enjoy discovering new food spots, going on long walks, and keeping up with sport.

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KEITH MAKIN

INDEPENDENT SCRUTINEER FOR CROYDON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP

Keith Makin currently acts as the Independent Scrutineer for two London Boroughs and has been in that role and Chair of safeguarding boards in several other London Boroughs and places outside London.

Keith is a qualified social worker and has held the position of Director of Social Services, Chief Executive of a Government improvement agency and Chief Executive of an independent childcare organisation.

He is also the author of the recent report into serious failings in safeguarding in the Church of England.

Keith is passionate about making sure that we all hear the voices of children in everything we plan and do and that is what keeps driving him on!

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PROFESSOR CARLENE FIRMIN MBE

**DIRECTOR OF THE GLOBAL CENTRE FOR
CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING**

I am a Professor of Social Work and Director of the Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding at Durham University.

I am also Co-Editor in Chief of the British Journal of Social Work, co-convenor of a special interest group on Social Work and Adolescents for the European Social Work Research Association, a Global Ashoka Fellow, a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, a member of the Churchill Fellowship Advisory Council, and an Associate of Strathclyde University's Children and Young People's Centre for Justice.

I have researched young people's experiences of community and group-based violence since 2008 and advocate for comprehensive approaches that keep them safe in public places, schools, and peer groups.

I coined the term 'Contextual Safeguarding' in 2015 to describe a vision for improving safeguarding responses to young people at risk of harm beyond their family homes, and since then have overseen a research programme to convert this vision into a conceptual and practice framework, in order to reform safeguarding responses and policy frameworks concerned with extra-familial harm, including child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation and peer-abuse, in the UK and internationally.

I am widely published in the area of child welfare including through four books and over 50 peer-reviewed papers, book chapters and reports.

My book Contextual Safeguarding and Child Protection: Rewriting the Rules won the Routledge Prize for a Sociology Monograph in 2020.

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YOUTH BOARD

REACHING HIGHER

Reaching Higher's Youth Board is made up of young people between the ages of 13-19.

The Youth Board assist to identify outcomes that are relevant to young people's needs, enhance existing youth engagement initiatives, and give young people the opportunity to directly support programmes, procedures and outcomes.

The RH Youth Board are also first in line for opportunities to represent in local and central government, along with being involved in research and group activities. They also have fun along the way!

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JOE RICH

HEAD OF YOUTH VOICE THE NATIONAL LOTTERY COMMUNITY FUND

Joe Rich is Head of Youth Voice at The National Lottery community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK.

Joe is responsible for developing how the Fund embeds youth voice across the organisation and the funding it provides to our communities, through developing a variety of models of involvement.

She brings nearly 20 years' experience of working with young people and building youth engagement strategies across local authorities, national charities, housing associations and now funding.

Joe always brings a passion for youth voice due to seeing the power of its impact in her work every day, so feels privileged to be a part of this conference.

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REBECCA SMITH

**DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR AMBIT
ANNA FREUD CENTRE**

Rebecca is joint Deputy Director for the AMBIT programme at Anna Freud.

Her journey into AMBIT started in 2014 whilst working for Wandsworth Local Authority, where her roles included work as a team manager in the Evolve Team (who support young people and young adults impacted by gangs, youth violence and exploitation), and as a Youth Offending Team Practitioner.

She came to Wandsworth having qualified as a Probation Officer in 2003, with experience of working with adults in the criminal justice system, particularly those convicted of violent offences.

She has also run a social enterprise supporting young adults impacted by the justice and social care systems, and worked as a freelance trainer.

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JAVELLE

YOUTH AMBASSADOR
CROYDON CHILDREN CARE COUNCIL

I'm Javelle, I'm 21 and I've lived in Croydon my whole life.

I'm really proud to be from here it's shaped who I am and inspired me to give back through my work as an ambassador and co-chair on the Corporate Parenting Board. In these roles, I've had the chance to speak up for young people, share ideas, and help create opportunities that actually make a difference in our community.

I love working with other young people we bounce off each other's energy and come up with creative ways to make things happen. Whether it's in meetings, planning events, or supporting someone to find their voice, I always try to bring positivity and make sure everyone feels heard.

Outside of that, I'm big on sports and dancing, it keeps me active and a space where I feel confident and I've got a real love for music too. I've always had a good ear for it, it's part of how I express myself.

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DELEISHA

YOUTH AMBASSADOR
CROYDON CHILDREN CARE COUNCIL

Hello my name is Deleisha, I am 24 years of age and a care leaver.

I enjoy creative outlets such as writing and expressing myself through my attire. I believe in being kind to one another and in the spirit of duality I also enjoy checking disrespect.

I have been described as wise and am always willing to help (within reason). I enjoy being an ambassador because my experiences and knowledge help shape a better future for others whom come after me.

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NAHUM

**YOUTH AMBASSADOR
CROYDON CHILDREN CARE COUNCIL**

My name is Nahum, I'm 19 years old, a care leaver from Croydon, and a professional DJ and sound engineer. Music has always been a big part of my life — it's how I express myself, connect with others, and create positive energy in my community.

Growing up in care has shaped who I am today. It's taught me resilience, independence, and the importance of having people who listen and believe in you. That's why I'm passionate about making sure care-experienced young people have a real voice in the decisions that affect their lives.

At the Croydon Safeguarding Partnership Conference, I want to share my experiences and perspective on what effective support and safeguarding look like from a young person's point of view. I believe that real change happens when professionals and young people work together when it's not just about us, but with us. For me, that's what "Nothing about you, without you" truly means.

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ELLIE SANDOVER

**YOUTH ENGAGEMENT LEAD
LEGACY YOUTH ZONE CROYDON**

Ellie is a youth engagement and policy professional with a background in applied theatre and law.

As Legacy's Youth Engagement intern, she currently leads on youth participation, and she has established a Youth Forum of 10 core members and organised inclusion events for over 300 participants.

She has also worked as a parliamentary intern for Sarah Jones MP, supporting policy research on youth violence and women's safety, and as a legal caseworker with Bail for Immigration Detainees and the SOAS Detention Clinic.

Ellie has delivered empowerment workshops abroad in rehabilitation centres and co-led UK Youth's 'Dream It Real' programme, helping young people develop leadership skills and design microgrant projects.

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ANGELA PARKES

**HEAD OF YOUTH WORK DELIVERY &
PARTNERSHIPS
LEGACY YOUTH ZONE CROYDON**

Angela has over 20 year's experience in the Charity sector, working with young people across mental health, community development, literacy, women and girls' education, and youth work programme development.

As Head of Youth Work at Legacy Youth Zone, she is leading on shaping youth work delivery that has a positive impact on young people that access the Zone, that empowers them lead healthier more positive lives.

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WAYNE LINDSAY

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
PROJECT 4 YOUTH EMPOWERMENT**

Wayne Lindsay, the CEO and co-founder of P4YE, holds a First-Class Honours degree in Criminology & Psychology.

With his experience supporting young people in detached youth work, education, and criminal justice settings, he is committed to creating positive change for young people, families and the wider community.

Wayne works on a Department for Education AP Taskforce, contributing his expertise to improving alternative provisions. Passionate about youth support and justice, he plays a key role in shaping P4YE's strategy, driving its growth and long-term impact.

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SHAUN POLLEY

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
CROYDON DROP IN**

Shaun Polley is the Chief Executive of Croydon Drop In. For two decades he has worked across the voluntary and statutory sectors with young people in education, disability, mental health and safeguarding. Shaun's career highlights include piloting charity-led responses within police missing investigations, launching a nationally available support service for young people at risk of criminal exploitation, and delivering training internationally to law enforcement, social care and NGOs.

Today, Shaun's work is focused on transforming mental health services for children and young people and shaping national policy on Youth Hubs. He is committed to youth voice in both individual care and system design, championing radical yet practical solutions that remove barriers and help young people achieve the best possible outcomes. Colleagues know him for a collaborative style, clear thinking under pressure, and a consistent focus on what works for young people.

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ZACH WILLIAMS

**YOUTH INTERVENTION LEADER
& PROJECT CO-ORDINATOR
BE INSPIRED**

Zachary Williams is a Youth Intervention Leader and Project Coordinator at BE Inspired, with over four years' experience working with young people.

His role involves providing mentoring and tailored support to help young people overcome barriers and engage positively with their community, families and wider networks.

He also helps to co-ordinate BE Inspired's community-based projects that provide diversionary activity for young people who are at risk to serious youth violence and exploitation.

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JOHN BLACKMAN

**SERIOUS VIOLENCE AND EXPLOITATION
SPECIALIST
BE INSPIRED**

John Blackman is a purpose-driven youth leader and Serious Violence and Exploitation Specialist who has worked with young people since 2017.

Beginning his journey with the Department for Work and Pensions as a Community Engagement Officer, he later joined BeInspired UK, progressing from mentor to specialist. His work focuses on addressing serious violence, grooming, exploitation, exclusion, and wider contextual safeguarding concerns through a person-centred, trauma-informed practice.

As the lead on outreach, John steps into environments and conditions from the young person's lens, building trust, disrupting risk, and diverting towards safety and growth.

He also leads on employability programmes within BeInspired UK and supports Sutton Council's Post-16 NEET Team, helping young people secure education, training, and employment through consistent relational support and empowerment.

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VICTORIA EBUN

**PROGRAMME MANAGER (TRUSTED
YOUTH ALLIES)
LONDON YOUTH**

London Youth is currently delivering Trusted Youth Allies—a new programme commissioned by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC). This initiative is designed to equip trusted adults with the confidence, knowledge, and tools to support young victims of crime (aged 7–25) in a trauma-informed and empathetic way.

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AISLING BARKER

VAWG WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
MANAGER
ISLINGTON COUNCIL

Aisling Barker is the VAWG workforce development manager for Islington council.

She is a qualified social worker with 15 years' experience in child protection, now working to improve domestic abuse practice across disciplines.

Aisling's team has worked for 5 years on how professionals recognise and respond to teenage relationship abuse.

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OLLIE FITTON

PRE-BIRTH SENIOR PRACTITIONER FOR CROYDON FAMILY ASSESSMENT TEAM

Hello! My name is Ollie Fitton and I work as a Senior Practitioner in the Family Assessment Service at Croydon Children's services. I work exclusively with Unborn children which means I work with expectant mother's where there has been safeguarding concerns raised for their children ahead of their birth. I undertake work with the expectant mothers, fathers and wider family to work out what support is needed ahead and after birth, to ensure that when the baby arrives the baby will be safe, with all their needs met.

I obtained my Social Work Qualification from University of Salford in 2016 and have worked exclusively in child protection social work since, as a social worker, senior practitioner, and team manager. My interest for pre-birth social work has spanned that time and have always been passionate about ensuring that Unborn children's voices are heard and their needs considered in children's services assessments.

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CHARLOTTE CONWAY

**PAEDIATRIC NEURODISABILITY MATRON
THE TULIP NURSING TEAM**

Charlotte Conway is the Paediatric Neurodisability Matron for the Tulip Nursing Team, bringing over 18 years of dedicated experience in nursing care for children and young people with disabilities. Throughout her career, Charlotte has championed high-quality, compassionate, and specialist healthcare for some of the most complex and vulnerable patients.

In her current role, Charlotte oversees the delivery of neurodisability and complex care services across Croydon, supporting children and young people from birth to 25 years old. She leads the Tulip Nursing Team with a strong focus on clinical excellence, family-centred practice, safety, and multidisciplinary collaboration.

Charlotte works closely with families, community teams, and partner agencies to ensure seamless, personalised, and responsive care across home, school, and clinical settings.

Charlotte is committed to improving service standards, strengthening community provision, and driving innovation within children's health services. Her leadership is rooted in advocacy, inclusivity, and ensuring that every child and young person receives the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

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SARAH MCLAGGAN

**HEAD OF NURSING FOR
CROYDON CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

My name is Sarah Mclaggan I am the Head of Nursing for Children's Services at Croydon. My role covers both the acute and community services to children and young people provided by Croydon Health Services.

I have worked in the Trust for 23 years and have been involved in the integrated pathways developed between the acute and community services for children and young people.

My background is in emergency care for children and young people working in tertiary centres in London and I started my journey in Croydon by redeveloping the ED to provide a separate area for children and young people to be seen.

During my time in Croydon I have been involved in the redevelopment of the Emergency department to provide updated services to children and helped redesign the inpatient services for children resulting in the opening of the Rainbow Children's Unit three years ago.

Outside of the Trust I am involved with the GIRFT accreditation programme for paediatric surgery.

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WARREN ANDREWS

**HEAD OF CONTEXTUAL YOUTH WORK
(SCHOOLS)
REACHING HIGHER**

Warren Andrews has a strong background in community building through sport and is dedicated to empowering young people to navigate, challenge, and overcome the structural inequalities that shape their lives.

His passion for supporting young people was strengthened through his long-standing commitment to non-league football coaching at Tooting & Mitcham FC. There, he guides young people on and off the pitch, using football to build resilience, discipline and a sense of belonging. As a coach and mentor, he prioritised holistic development - embedding life skills, emotional intelligence, and positive decision-making alongside athletic performance.

His experience deepened his awareness of the wider social pressures facing young people, including community violence and educational barriers.

This has shaped his contextual approach to youth work, recognising that environments and relationships significantly influence a young person's trajectory. Warren continues to champion early intervention, relational practice and culturally responsive support, ensuring young people's voices remain central.

Today, Warren collaborates with educators, safeguarding partners, and community networks to create safe, aspirational environments where young people can thrive. Warren is currently studying a Professional Doctorate in Social and Criminal Justice. His professional endeavours reflect a commitment to systemic change - transforming practice to better serve young people and their communities.

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TYRELL MARCUS DAVIS-DOUGLIN

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
MR PROSPECT C.I.C

I am a Self Appointed Ambassador For The Youth Of The United Kingdom and I tirelessly speak Truth to 'The Powers Above' in HOPE of bringing about a fairer and more progressive future for Upcoming Generations of Young People.

I currently work alongside the Mayor's City Hall and the Greater London Authority as a Youth Consultant as part of their newly established 'Crime Reduction Unit'. Eager to diversify the opinions heard and accepted by authoritative figures and policy makers, the VRU has launched a Youth Action Group made up of 12 young Londoners from different demographics and backgrounds in hope of bringing new perspectives to the table.

I believe that Young People operate at Maximum Efficiency when they feel Acknowledged, Proud and Empowered.

The name 'Mr. Prospect' came alongside the development of my community interested company 'Mr. Prospect C.I.C' \ 'Prospect Living' which targets financially excluded young people and aims to provide them with both employability skills via workshops and opportunities via our network to find employment in the working sector most relevant to their passions. 'Prospect' defined is 'the apparent probability of success, profit and advancement'. The ideology behind 'Mr. Prospect' is that I wish to be regarded as an individual that creates/produces things that are likely to succeed...

And that is exactly what I do.

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STUART COLLINS

**CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN,
YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION
CROYDON COUNCIL**

Stuart is passionate about leading children's services to improve the life chances for children and young people, working as a listening ear for social workers, schools, partners and local families.

Stuart Collins has been appointed as the new corporate director of children, young people and education at Croydon Council.

This role incorporates the statutory director of children's services, is central to the council's work to protect and support the borough's children and young people. Stuart joined Croydon from Devon County Council, bringing with him 30 years of experience in local authority children's services. He has a strong track record of improving services, such as SEND and children's social care – creating positive outcomes for children.

During his career, he has worked in several London boroughs, including Kingston, Camden, Barnet and Waltham Forest. Most recently he has been a director at Kent County Council before working at Devon.

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