#### BELLINGHAM TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Early Childhood & Family Studies: 360.752.8353 | www.btc.edu

# ECCUS on Children 2026



## AGENDA

We are looking forward to learning with our local early childhood educators at the 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Focus on Children Conference!

Saturday, February 7, 2026 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Whatcom Community College, Syre Center, Bellingham, WA

#### **Registration NOW OPEN**

Register on or before January 19 for discounted early bird pricing!

#### Early Bird: Register on or before January 19 to save!

Limited scholarships available

- Reflect on your practices
- Gain new resources & strategies
- Connect & share information
- Contemplate culture, diversity & early childhood education issues
- Earn 6 STARS hours or 6 Clock Hours

Breakfast & lunch provided!

#### **Special Thanks to Our Sponsors:**









Pacific Northwest Chapter
Washington Association for the
Education of Young Children

Dr. Chao-ying & Sue Wu Early Learning Scholarship Fund









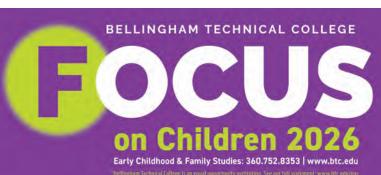
#### **Little Bodies, Big Hearts**

Whatcom County Library System Youth Services Manager Thom Barthelmess will talk with attendees about emotional literacy. We'll look at ways we can support young children as they develop and sustain healthy relationships with their emotions, and center books and stories as invaluable resources for exploration, affirmation, and connection.



#### **Thom Barthelmess**

Thom Barthelmess is the Youth Services Manager at the Whatcom County Library System and has been bringing children and books together for over 30 years. He is a Past-President of the Association for Library Service to Children, the nation's largest organization for children's librarians. He has served as Chair of the Newbery Award Committee, the world's oldest and most prestigious literary award for children, as well as the Chair of the Boston Globe Horn Book Award Jury and the Washington State Book Award for Young People's Literature. He taught at the Graduate School for Library and Information Science at Dominican University where he was the inaugural Curator of the Butler Children's Literature Center. He has lectured internationally about the role of books and stories in rich, full, curious lives.





Dr. Jennifer Karshna

Carolina Olza-Kelsh

Deb Walrath

8-8:30 a.m. Check-In & light breakfast

Stitching Success: Building Our ECE Program Together

8:30-8:40 a.m. Welcome

8:40-9:40 a.m. Keynote

Time

Little Bodies, Big Hearts

Play and Children's Development: Exploration of the Teacher's Role in Supporting Children's Play

🎫 Cómo promover el desarrollo y aprendizaje a través del juego: herramientas prácticas y efectivas

**Activity/Workshop** 

9:45-10 a.m. Break

Thom Barthelmess

Morning Worksnops (2 nours): 10 a.m12 p.m.	
Beyond the Walls: Building Relationships Through Intentional Classroom Design	Jeanne Holdal & Julie Wasilewski
The Adult That Plays	Michael Haycock
Teaching Independence Through Practical Life Activities	Ian Becker & Jack Eiford
The Importance of the Caregiver-Child Relationship for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health	Kimberlee Shoecraft
Playful Learning with Everyday Materials	Allie Bishop
Designing Your Classroom So It Reflects Your Community and the Land	Kim Bogren Owen

#### Lunch: 12-1 p.m.

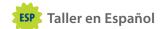
	fternoon Workshops (3 hours): 1-4 p.m.
Flip lt (Abridged)	Urvasi Graham & Jamie Ashton

Early Afternoon Workshops (1.5 hours): 1-2:30 p.m.		
Using Music to Enhance Learning in Early Childhood	Audrey Schwind	
Social & Emotional Learning: The Role of Books and Stories	Thom Barthelmess	
Playful Learning in Action	Allie Bishop, Mary Melloh, Ashley Reynoso, Ryleigh Stover	
The Science of Interoception: Supporting Self-Regulation and	Ira Glovinsky, PhD &	
Emotional Well-Being in Early Learning Environments	Frances Poteet, PhD	
Honoring the Culture: Cultures' Influence on Development	Kim Bogren Owen	
Beyond Words: Strategies for Supporting Linguistically Diverse Families	Elsie De La Rosa & Jacque Rafferty	
Tendiendo Puentes: Estrategias de apovo a las familias lingüísticamente diversas	Elsie De La Rosa & Jacaue Rafferty	

Late Afternoon Workshops (1.5 hours): 2:45-4:15 p.m.		
The Science of Interoception: Supporting Self-Regulation and Emotional Well-Being in Early Learning Environments	Ira Glovinsky, PhD & Frances Poteet, PhD	
Using Music to Enhance Learning in Early Childhood	Audrey Schwind	
Fear No Number: Overcoming Teacher Math Trauma	Catherine Conway, Samantha Dolan, Annie Garrett, Carol Jack, Matt McKenzie	
Family Engagement Strategies to Strengthen	Michelle Malone	
School-Home Relationships and Support Social-Emotional Learning		
Infant Brain Development	Darcie Donegan	
La Familia Latina y Acceso a Servicios Sociales	Monica Blaine	

Sign-out: 4-4:30 p.m.





## **Focus on Children 2026 Workshop Sessions**

#### Morning Workshops (2 hours): 10 a.m.-12 p.m.

#### Beyond the Walls: Building Relationships Through Intentional Classroom Design

Jeanne Holdal & Julie Wasilewski

A well-designed classroom environment is more than just a physical space; it's an active partner in children's learning and relationship building. This interactive workshop explores how early learning environments can be intentionally structured to promote positive peer interactions, collaboration, and a sense of belonging. Participants will examine how room layout, materials, routines, and teacher practices influence social-emotional development and community building. Through reflection, discussion, and hands-on activities, educators will learn strategies to create inclusive, engaging spaces that support children in developing empathy, communication skills, and meaningful connections with others. *Core Competency: Curriculum & Learning Environment* 

#### **The Adult That Plays**

Michael Haycock

The Adult That Plays is an interactive workshop that invites educators to rediscover the power of play. Through improv-inspired activities, participants explore skills that enhance their ability to play and bring out playfulness in their students. By the end, you will leave energized, inspired, and equipped to bring more playfulness and presence into your work and life. *Core Competency: Interactions* 

#### **Teaching Independence Through Practical Life Activities**

Ian Becker & Jack Eiford

In this workshop, we will discuss the importance of helping children develop independence through learning practical life skills. Engaging in practical life activities such as putting on clothes, cleaning tables, folding laundry, and preparing food can build self-efficacy for children and facilitate classroom order. We incorporate concepts from Montessori pedagogy, where independence in these skills is intertwined with academics. We will begin with a brief overview of the topic, then turn to a group discussion where we will use independence as a lens to problem-solve challenges in your own classrooms. Core Competency: Child Growth & Development

#### The Importance of the Caregiver-Child Relationship for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

Kimberlee Shoecraft

We will discover how relationships between children and caregivers can provide the necessary ingredients for healthy growth and development. Relationships with adult caregivers who are attuned and responsive to the child's need for security enable a child to reach their potential. Participants will have the opportunity to learn how to link baby-toddler communication with what the child feels inside their body and how that feeling leads to certain behaviors. Once caregivers understand the meaning behind non-verbal communications their options for responding become more attuned with the child's underlying emotional need, which results in improved caregiver-child interaction and wellbeing. *Core Competency: Child Growth & Development* 

#### **Playful Learning with Everyday Materials**

Allie Bishop

Young children learn through hands-on play! In this workshop we'll explore how we can promote children's playful learning with open-ended materials. Participants will think about how we create spaces and curate materials to give children choice and voice in their playful learning. Participants will engage in play and planning activities to learn actionable ways to support all areas of development, leaving with new ideas to implement in their early learning setting. Core Competency: Curriculum & Learning Environment

#### Designing Your Classroom So It Reflects Your Community and the Land

Kim Bogren Owen

In this workshop, we will examine how you can create a place-based environment. Attendees will learn what place-based education is, how they can implement it in their classrooms and programs, and will leave with materials and a plan to implement place-based education. *Core Competency: Curriculum & Learning Environment* 

#### Play and Children's Development: Exploration of the Teacher's Role in Supporting Children's Play

Dr. Jennifer Karshna

In this workshop participants will explore play as it relates to children's learning and development. Through discussion and playful engagement participants will consider types of play and challenges some children face during play. Discussion will include the teacher's role in and strategies for supporting play and learning, including consideration of behavior and social/emotional development. *Core Competency: Curriculum & Learning Environment* 

## ESP

## Cómo promover el desarrollo y aprendizaje a través del juego: herramientas prácticas y efectivas Carolina Olza-Kelsh

Los asistentes adquirirán herramientas prácticas para promover el desarrollo y el aprendizaje infantil a través del juego. La sesión se llevará a cabo en un salón de clases preescolar, donde los participantes tendrán una experiencia táctil y práctica, con dinámicas que podrán implementarse fácilmente en entornos educativos y familiares para fortalecer el aprendizaje. Exploraremos diversos tipos de juegos y actividades que estimulan habilidades cognitivas, emocionales y sociales, adaptables a diferentes edades, habilidades y contextos. *Core Competency: Child Growth & Development* 

#### Afternoon Workshops (3 hours): 1-4 p.m.

#### Flip It (Abridged)

Urvasi Graham & Jamie Ashton

FLIP IT® is a strategy that offers a simple, kind, strength-based, commonsense and effective four-step process for day-to-day challenges and challenging moments with children. This abridged training teaches participants the four supportive steps of FLIP IT that are designed to help young children (ages 3-8) learn about their feelings, gain self-control, and reduce challenging behavior. The purpose of this training is to enhance our understanding of the factors that contribute to children's use of challenging behavior and review this evidence-based and practical strategy for reducing instances of challenging behavior. *Core Competency: Interactions* 

#### **Stitching Success: Building Our ECE Program Together**

Deb Walrath

This workshop uses quilting as a creative metaphor to explore and strengthen any Early Childhood Program. Through interactive exercises, participants will collaborate, reflect, and develop a shared understanding of program priorities. Content considers program essentials, including the learning environment, interactions, curriculum, and materials; external expectations from licensing, agency policies, core competencies, families, and community; and our individual influence. *Core Competency: Professional Development Leadership* 

#### Early Afternoon Workshops (1.5 hours): 1-2:30 p.m.

#### **Using Music to Enhance Learning in Early Childhood**

**Audrey Schwind** 

Music can be a powerful and joyful tool to support young children's learning and development. In this interactive session, educators will explore how to use music to ease transitions, support classroom management, and enrich daily routines. Participants will gain practical tools and experience songs and chants they can immediately bring into their classrooms to create a musically rich, positive learning environment — no musical "talent" required! The session also includes ideas for engaging parents and caregivers in musical play at home, helping strengthen the home-school connection and extend learning beyond the classroom. Join us for a joyful, playful experience! *Core Competency: Curriculum & Learning Environment* 

#### Social & Emotional Learning: The Role of Books and Stories

Thom Barthelmess

Children with healthy social and emotional development are happier people and better citizens. Learn about the principles of social and emotional learning, how to evaluate books with social and emotional content, and how to employ books and stories to support social and emotional growth. *Core Competency: Child Growth & Development* 

#### **Playful Learning in Action**

Allie Bishop, Mary Melloh, Ashley Reynoso, Ryleigh Stover

In this 90-minute session, participants will explore playful learning invitations in a preschool classroom setting. Playing together in the Whatcom Family Cooperative Preschool classroom on the WCC campus, participants get to move playful learning theory into action. Participants will play, dialogue, and connect over how we create welcoming and playful spaces that truly engage children in playful learning! This session will expand on the morning session, Playful Learning with Everyday Materials, moving the "why" into the "how." Participants are not required to attend both sessions. Core Competency: Curriculum & Learning Environment

## The Science of Interoception: Supporting Self-Regulation and Emotional Well-Being in Early Learning Environments

Ira Glovinsky, PhD & Frances Poteet, PhD

During this interactive presentation, we will explore the research behind interoceptive awareness — our ability to recognize and interpret internal body signals — and examine how early life experiences with touch influence educators' own interoceptive development. Participants will engage in reflective discussions about the children in their care, the challenges they face in early learning settings, and how interoception plays a key role in emotional regulation and overall well-being. Through guided exercises, attendees will learn practical tools for tuning into their own bodily signals to enhance self-regulation, create calmer classroom environments, and promote positive mental health. The session will also provide strategies to help young children develop awareness of their own internal cues and understand how to respond to them in healthy ways. *Core Competency: Interactions* 

#### Honoring the Culture: Cultures' Influence on Development

Kim Bogren Owen

In this workshop, we examine how culture impacts child development and learning. We will examine cultural differences in development and explore strategies for working with families from diverse backgrounds in a manner that respects and honors the diverse approaches to supporting young children's development and learning. *Core Competency: Child Growth & Development* 

#### **Beyond Words: Strategies for Supporting Linguistically Diverse Families**

Elsie De La Rosa & Jacque Rafferty

This workshop provides practical tools and strategies for supporting multilingual children and families. Participants will explore effective ways to strengthen family engagement, classroom-ready strategies, and valuable resources to support growth and success in linguistically diverse communities. *Core Competency: Family & Community Partnerships* 



#### FCD Tendiendo Puentes: Estrategias de apoyo a las familias lingüísticamente diversas

Elsie De La Rosa & Jacque Rafferty

Esta sesión ofrece herramientas y estrategias prácticas para apoyar niños y familias multilingües. Los participantes explorarán maneras efectivas de fortalecer la participación familiar, promover estrategias en la clase y acceder a recursos valiosos que favorezcan el crecimiento y el éxito en comunidades lingüísticamente diversas. *Core Competency: Family & Community Partnerships* 

#### Late Afternoon Workshops (1.5 hours): 2:45-4:15 p.m.

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#### **Fear No Number: Overcoming Teacher Math Trauma**

Catherine Conway, Samantha Dolan, Annie Garrett, Carol Jack, Matt McKenzie

Did you know that math is the top academic barrier to completion of associate degrees nationwide? Math anxiety/
trauma has prevented too many early childhood educators from achieving their personal and professional goals.

When teachers lack a strong math identity, this is reflected in their teaching practice, indirectly impacting early
learners. In this session, we will raise awareness around teacher math identity, the indirect impact on early learners,
and strategies teachers can use to grow their confidence and skills. Core Competency: Interactions

## Family Engagement Strategies to Strengthen School-Home Relationships and Support Social-Emotional Learning

Michelle Malone

This session will empower early childhood educators to cultivate strong school-home relationships that foster social-emotional learning (SEL) for students and families. We will explore actionable strategies for building trust with families, moving beyond traditional communication to genuine partnership. The session will guide participants in clarifying their school's SEL goals and strategies, tailoring them to the unique strengths and needs of their early learning community. Educators will learn effective communication techniques to share these strategies with families, ensuring consistent support for children's social-emotional development and well-being at school and home. Participants will also have the opportunity to share successful family engagement practices from their own centers and schools. *Core Competency: Family & Community Partnerships* 

#### **Infant Brain Development**

Darcie Donegan

This workshop will explore how the brain develops during infancy and toddlerhood, and what this means for caregivers. We will explore Zero to Three's Brain Map, play the brain architecture game, and share brain-building tips. This session is appropriate for those new to infant care as well as more experienced caregivers. *Core Competency: Child Growth & Development* 

#### La Familia Latina y Acceso a Servicios Sociales

Monica Blaine

Esta presentación se centra en fortalecer la competencia cultural en la prestación de servicios a la comunidad. Los participantes comprenderán como los valores culturales y los factores de estrés social influyen en el acceso a la información y apoyo. La presentación describe enfoques prácticos basados en fortalezas y técnicas estratégicas de comunicación para conectar con las familias y facilitar su acceso a servicios. *Core Competency: Family & Community Partnerships* 

#### **Special Thanks to Our Sponsors:**



The Imagine Institute's mission is to create community relationships and innovative early learning programs that empower people, caring every day for every generation.



With its main campus located on the Lummi Indian Reservation in Washington State, 20 miles south of the Canadian border, Northwest Indian College is the only accredited tribal college serving the states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho.





The Opportunity Council is a private, non—profit human service organization that acts as a catalyst for positive change, both in the community and in the lives of the people it serves.



Pacific Northwest Chapter of WAEYC acts on behalf of the needs and rights of all young children and their families and provides opportunities to improve professional practice in early childhood education.

#### Dr. Chao-ying & Sue Wu Early Learning Scholarship Fund



The mission of the BTC Foundation is to change lives by expanding access to quality education for the students of Bellingham Technical College.



Whatcom Community College contributes to the vitality of its communities by providing quality education in academic transfer, professional-technical, and lifelong learning, preparing students for active citizenship in a global society.



Bellingham Technical College provides student-centered, high-quality professional technical education for today's needs and tomorrow's opportunities.

Questions: Registration: 360.752.8444 registration@btc.edu

For more details, scholarship forms, and to register visit: **www.btc.edu/focus** 

Jamie Ashton: Before joining Child Care Aware of Northwest Washington at Opportunity Council in the Spring of 2014, Jamie spent more than 20 years as a teacher and administrator in early learning programs and schools in Whatcom County, leading one program through NAEYC Accreditation. She is passionate about supporting teachers and administrators to be reflective learners and is committed to furthering the early childhood education field. As a coach and state-approved trainer, Jamie focuses much of her work on supporting programs to implement effective social-emotional learning strategies in classrooms.

**Thom Barthelmess:** Thom Barthelmess is the Youth Services Manager at the Whatcom County Library System and has been bringing children and books together for over 30 years. He is a Past-President of the Association for Library Service to Children, the nation's largest organization for children's librarians. He has served as Chair of the Newbery Award Committee, the world's oldest and most prestigious literary award for children, as well as the Chair of the Boston Globe Horn Book Award Jury and the Washington State Book Award for Young People's Literature. He taught at the Graduate School for Library and Information Science at Dominican University where he was the inaugural Curator of the Butler Children's Literature Center. He has lectured internationally about the role of books and stories in rich, full, curious, lives.

lan Becker: Dr. Ian Becker received his Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from the University of Virginia. He is currently teaching in a Montessori early childhood mixed-age classroom, where he has been for the past three years, as well as teaching as an adjunct in the Montessori Ed.D. program at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls. Becker has specialized his work and research in Montessori early childhood education, with deep knowledge of this unique educational philosophy and the ways in which it relates to child development.

Allie Bishop: Allie Bishop is the Professional Development Coordinator for Child Care Aware of NW Washington (Opportunity Council) and Parenting Education Adjunct Faculty at Whatcom Community College. She has spent her career in early childhood promoting playful caregiving in a variety of settings, supporting children, teachers, and parents.

Monica Blaine: Monica Blaine es originaria de Chile, ha vivido en Estados Unidos por 22 años. Obtuvo su grado de B.A. en Psicología y Consejería de Morningside College - Iowa. Posteriormente continuó sus estudios en la escuela de graduados, obteniendo su Maestría en Trabajo Social de Boston University - Massachusetts. Ha trabajado en centros de adicciones, mayormente con clientes de la comunidad hispana, además de proveer servicios de terapia (menores de edad, adultos y familias), ha sido manejadora de casos, instructora en Pacific University (Oregon) por dos años académicos enseñando Latino Families and Culture a estudiantes de la carrera de maestría en trabajo social, además de supervisora de estudiantes practicantes. En la actualidad se desempeña como coordinadora bilingüe de cuidado comunitario en Opportunity Council. Su trabajo ha estado siempre enfocado en trabajar con su comunidad desde un punto de vista bicultural y buscar recursos y soluciones que puedan facilitar el acceso a servicios.

**Kim Bogren Owen:** Kim Bogren Owen holds a BA in Cultural Anthropology and an MA in Early Childhood Education. She currently works at Northwest Indian College and is a part-time ECE instructor. She brings her knowledge and experience to the training she offers. In her spare time, she enjoys beachcombing, hiking, and spending time with her family.

Catherine Conway: Catherine Conway is a part-time math faculty at North Seattle College and an associate math faculty/Math Center Coordinator at Edmonds College. She was a member of the Curriculum Committee at North and a former scholarship reviewer for both NSC and EDC. Catherine's dedication to education goes beyond just math; it extends to fostering a love for math and alleviating anxiety in her students. She began her career as a high school math teacher in Baltimore County before pursuing a career in higher ed. She earned her AA from Wenatchee Valley College, BA of Mathematics and Secondary Education from SUNY Potsdam and her MS in Mathematics Education from Towson University. Beyond her love for math, she cherishes her family and enjoys crocheting and volunteering in her community.

Elsie De La Rosa: Elsie tiene más de 10 años de experiencia como maestra y cuidadora de niños particularmente con las edades 0-5 años en guardería en casa, centros, y como niñera. Ha ganado su licenciatura en los estudios de aprendizaje temprano y familias en la Universidad de Washington. Le encanta trabajar con niños, familias, y otras proveedoras de cuidado de niños. Es su trabajo como enlace comunitario de Early Achievers por 3 años, ha trabajado uno a uno con educadores y proveedores de aprendizaje temprano. ¡Espero verlos en la sesión para aprender más sobre estrategias prácticas para apoyar niños y familias multilingües!

Samantha Dolan: Samantha Dolan is interim Associate Dean of Education and Human Services at North Seattle College and a liaison for early learning for the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC). She has served as full-time faculty and the Director of Early Childhood Initiatives prior to this role. She earned her Ph.D. in Early Childhood Special Education at the University of Washington.

**Darcie Donegan:** Darcie Donegan has been teaching ECE/ED at Whatcom Community College for 30 years and has an MA in Human Development/ ECE/Adult Ed from Pacific Oaks College. She has been a teacher of infants through kindergarteners, center director, consultant, parent educator, and international trainer. Darcie is also on the WCEL Board and teaches preschool at the local synagogue. Infants and brain development are her passion.

Jack Eiford: Jack Eiford received his master's from Loyola University and his Montessori Early Childhood teaching credential from Montessori Northwest. He has taught in a Montessori early childhood mixed-age classroom for five years and it is now his third year teaching in mixed-age lower elementary classrooms serving 1st-3rd grade students. Eiford has worked on integrating Montessori tenets with a variety of different topics, such as theater and digital technologies, and in different settings, such as summer camps.

Annie Garrett: Annie Garrett is an educational leadership professional with over fifteen years of experience in university, community college, and nonprofit settings. She currently serves as a manager and adjunct faculty member in Early Childhood Education at North Seattle College. She is also a freelance writer and presenter with a focus on parent education, early childhood education, and advocacy. She holds a master's in Educational Leadership from the University of Washington.

Ira Glovinsky: Ira Glovinsky is a fully licensed psychologist practicing in West Bloomfield, Michigan. He is a mental health practitioner who educates and trains F.I.R.S.T. Clinic parent allies about interoception. He graduated from the University of Michigan in 1977 with a Ph.D. in Special Education and taught for five years in the New York City school system working with emotionally impaired children and then for five years in a children's psychiatric hospital helping develop a clinical program for preschoolers with emotional difficulties. He then coordinated an NICU follow-up program for high-risk infants at Sinai Hospital in Detroit. Since 2007 he has been part of the Interdisciplinary Council for Developmental and Learning Disorders, co-leading the program when it merged with Fielding Graduate University. He has written two books on pediatric mood disorders with Dr. Stanley Greenspan. He also is currently an adjunct faculty member at Brooklyn College and at Fielding Graduate University.

**Urvasi Graham:** Urvasi Graham earned a BA in BioSocioCultural Anthropology focusing on the evolution of parenting and child rearing across time and space, and an MS in ECE focusing on ITMH, as well as an IMH-E (II). She is an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant (Holding Hope) and an instructor of ECE at Skagit Valley College and Western Washington University, teaching foundations in ECE, infant and toddler care, health, nutrition, and safety in ECE, exceptional child, and more. She completed the Train the Trainer Flip It with the author and has run 3 Flip It sessions. She is a STARs approved Trainer.

**Michael Haycock:** Michael Haycock has a master's degree in Early Childhood Special Education and has been working as an early learning instructor for over a decade. He is the Artistic Director at the Upfront Theater and is a professional improv comedian. He loves to share his passion of play with others!

Jeanne Holdal: Jeanne has worked as an Early Learning Coach and STARS Trainer for CCA Northwest from 2021-2025. Before this, she worked with families and children ages 0-14 for over 30 years holding many positions in a variety of early learning and public-school settings, including Head Start and ECEAP. Jeanne holds a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from the University of Hawai'i Hilo and a Master of Education in Adult and Higher Ed from Western Washington University. She has continued her learning throughout her career, adding courses in child development and family services through Skagit Valley College and Edmonds Community College, and teaches part time in the ECE department at Skagit Valley College. Jeanne finds peace in the natural environment and loves bringing it into her classrooms to enhance learning, exploration and relationships. Jeanne enjoys gardening, building outdoor art and sitting outside by the fire throughout the year.

**Carol Jack:** Carol Jack became a valued member of the Child Care Aware of WA team in November 2022, assuming the role of Scholarships Program Manager. Her dedication lies in harnessing the power of team collaboration to ensure equitable support for students on their journey towards higher education. Holding a Master of Science degree in Organizational Management from Capella University, Carol brings a wealth of academic and professional experience to her position.

Jennifer Karshna: Dr. Jennifer Karshna currently works at Tacoma Community College as Early Childhood Education Program Chair and Professor. Past work experiences include teaching young children at a variety of early learning programs including full day childcare, Head Start, preschool, and the childcare center at an in-patient drug/alcohol treatment center. Jennifer has also done on-site coaching and training at early learning programs. Her doctorate dissertation topic was early childhood education teacher experience and knowledge regarding children's outdoor learning experiences.

Michelle Malone: Michelle Malone is a Parenting Education instructor at Whatcom Community College and Bellingham Technical College. She loves working with families and teachers in cooperative preschools and facilitating parent/child classes for toddlers and their families. She believes that building trusting relationships between schools and families helps children thrive and looks forward to sharing ideas with and learning from participants in this collaborative session.

Matt McKenzie: Matt McKenzie is an experienced educator, administrator, and teacher trainer – supporting the growth and development of both young children and adult learners. He is the Director of PRLC Preschool in the Greenwood neighborhood of North Seattle. As a graduate of the Bachelor of Applied Science in Early Childhood Education program at North Seattle College, Matt also supports the program in several ways, including as an advisory board member and consultant. Matt is passionate about creating systems to ensure every child gets the best start in life and is equipped with the skills and tools they need to thrive.

Mary Melloh: Mary Melloh is the lead teacher in the Whatcom Family Cooperative Preschool WCC Classroom. She completed her Early Childhood teaching certification at the Montessori Institute of the Pacific Northwest and spent 10 years teaching in a Montessori Early Childhood classroom. She has facilitated toddler programs for the Whatcom Center for Early Learning and has three children of her own.

Carolina Olza-Kelsh: Carolina Olza-Kelsh ejerce desde 2008 en Whatcom Community College, donde imparte educación para padres y coordina salones prescolares cooperativos. Es profesora asociada en el programa de Educación Temprana en Skagit Valley College. Carolina cuenta con una maestría en Estudios de la Primera Infancia. Carolina Olza-Kelsh has been an instructor in parenting education and facilitator of cooperative preschools at Whatcom Community College since 2008. She serves as an associate faculty member in the Early Childhood Education program at Skagit Valley College. Carolina holds a master's degree in Early Childhood Studies.

Frances Poteet: Frances Poteet, Ph.D., CCC-SLP is a post-doctoral fellow at the UMass Chan School of Medicine. She obtained her Ph.D. in Infant & Early Childhood Development, with an emphasis on Infant Mental Health & Developmental Disorders, at Fielding Graduate University, her M.A. at West Chester University, M.S.S. (Social Services) at Bryn Mawr College, and B.S. at Chestnut Hill College. Frances has lectured on trauma, development, and interoception at Eastern Michigan University, Douglas College (BC), and University of Pretoria (SA). She has expertise providing bilingual/bicultural clinical services in therapeutic schools and outpatient clinics for children ages birth-21 years old. She works on NIH-funded research studying infant and maternal mental health, perinatal psychiatry and autism.

Jacque Rafferty: Jacque began working in the field of Early Childhood Education in 2006. She has worked with a variety of ages, from infants to school-age children and in a variety of settings. She has a B.A. in Elementary Education and an M.Ed. in Early Childhood Education. Serving as a Community Liaison for Early Achievers for over 10 years has allowed her to build relationships with numerous members of our ECE community. She has been a foster parent and currently has 3 children at home that keep her very busy!

**Ashley Reynoso:** Ashley Reynoso is the assistant teacher in the Whatcom Family Cooperative Preschool WCC Classroom. She has taught in the US and abroad. She enjoys inspiring students to follow their curiosities, creativity, and to foster a love of learning.

Audrey Schwind: Audrey Schwind is passionate about sharing the joy of music with children and families. A skilled Music Together® teacher, early childhood educator, and lifelong vocalist, Audrey holds a dual degree in Elementary Education and Spanish from Western Washington University and a Master of Science in Kinesiology from Boise State University. She completed her Music Together teacher training in 2020 and founded Music Together North End in Boise, Idaho, a thriving center known for its quality and community engagement. After moving to Bellingham in 2024, she launched Music Together Fairhaven, which was voted Cascade's Best Preschool Program in its first year and featured in Southside Living magazine. Today, Music Together Fairhaven serves more than 80 families each week. Audrey brings warmth, energy, and expertise to her work, inspiring families to make joyful music together.

**Kimberlee Shoecraft:** Kimberlee Shoecraft has a master's degree in social work and is a certified infant and toddler mental health clinical mentor. She has been working in the field of infant mental health for over 20 years.

**Ryleigh Stover:** Ryleigh Stover is the lead teacher in the Whatcom Family Cooperative Preschool classroom at Wade King Elementary school. She studied psychology with an ECE certificate. She believes in creating a supportive and engaging environment where children feel safe to explore, learn, and grow at their own pace.

**Deb Walrath:** Deb Walrath is a lifelong learner with over 40 years of experience in early childhood programs. She has taught in primary public schools, directed private preschools, provided in-home care, and managed ECEAP programs. She has also provided coaching for Early Achievers and is now enjoying a change of pace as an assistant teacher in a local cooperative preschool. Deb finds joy in quilting, trying a variety of other crafts, and singing in her car.

Julie Wasilewski: Julie has worked at Child Care Aware of NW Washington, a program of the Opportunity Council, for the past 19 years and has been an EA Coach, Lead, Professional Development Manager, and currently the Family, Friends and Neighbors Manager and Trainer for the NW Region. Julie also is an adjunct ECE instructor at Whatcom Community College and Skagit Valley College. Julie has her master's in early childhood education.

Questions: **360.752.8444** 

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