



Provincial Network on Developmental Services HR Forum

October 27th and 28th, 2026

FALLSVIEW CASINO (6390 Fallsview Blvd, Niagara Falls, ON)

Day One: October 27th, 2026

7:45-8:45 am	Breakfast
8:45-9:00 am	Welcome- Jennifer Gleva
9:00-9:45 am	Keynote Speaker- Dr. Laura <i>Healthy cultures don't happen by accident - they're grown with intention. In a world where stress is high, change is constant, and talent is harder to hold onto, developmental services organizations that flourish are the ones that invest in and nurture their people. In this energizing keynote, Dr. Laura shows how leaders at every level can become "culture gardeners," creating conditions where people feel valued, connected, and motivated to bring their best. Through stories, research, and practical tools, you'll discover how to grow a resilient workplace culture where individuals - and the whole organization - can thrive.</i>
8:00 am- 6:30 pm	Tradeshow
10:00-11:00 am	
Session 1	On the HR Horizon for DS: Emerging Labour and Employment Risks, Opportunities, and Trends. Speaker: Cheryl Wiles Pooran <i>The developmental services sector continues to face significant workforce challenges, from recruitment and retention pressures, pay equity, workplace accommodations, all amidst an increasingly complex labour relations backdrop. Drawing on recent legal developments, sector trends, and real-world experience, PooranLaw's Lead Labour and Employment Lawyer, Cheryl Wiles Pooran, will explore the key labour and employment issues shaping the developmental services sector today. This session is designed to provide HR professionals, executive leaders, and managers tangible strategies to manage risk, strengthen compliance, support a healthy workplace culture, and confidently navigate an increasingly complex employment landscape.</i>
Session 2	Relationships: The secret sauce in effective HR practices Speaker: Robert Hickey <i>Over the past 20 years, we have seen a transformation of human resource practices in the developmental services sector in Ontario. From the development and launch of core competencies, to coordinated and sophisticated marketing and recruitment campaigns, HR practices have transformed workforce strategies in the sector. As HR professionals leverage the potential of new technologies, such as AI, to enhance and streamline HR practices, we risk losing sight of what matters most to employees and the future workforce - relationships. This session explores nearly 20 years of survey research into HR practices and the DS workforce. We highlight the central role that relationships with</i>

	<i>co-workers, supervisors, and the people we support, play in the work experiences and job satisfaction of direct support professionals.</i>
Session 3	Critical Incidents: Supporting Staff in Community Living Settings. Speaker: Brian Bennett <i>Staff in Community Living organizations may encounter critical incidents such as medical emergencies, behavioural crises, workplace violence, serious injuries, and unexpected deaths, all of which can significantly impact staff well-being and team functioning. Drawing on more than 16 years of Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) experience, this session will provide practical, evidence-informed strategies for recognizing stress reactions, supporting colleagues, and responding effectively during and after critical incidents. Participants will learn actionable tools to strengthen resilience, promote staff well-being, and foster safer workplaces. The session will also feature lessons learned and insights from organizations that have recently implemented CISM and peer support programs.</i>
Session 4	CSBT Session
11:00-11:30 am	Break/Networking/Tradeshow
11:30 am-12:30 pm	
Session 5	Toxic Leadership Exposed: HR's Playbook for Protecting People. Speaker: Dr. Laura <i>To build a truly future-ready, human-centred organization, HR must address one of the greatest threats to culture and performance: toxic leadership. In this research-backed session, organizational psychologist Dr. Laura shares insights from her work across North American workplaces, helping participants identify early warning signs and understand the human and business impacts of toxic leadership. Through case studies, data, and practical tools, attendees will learn how to move beyond managing around toxic behaviours to addressing them directly. Participants will leave with actionable strategies to protect employees, strengthen culture, and create the conditions for long-term organizational success.</i>
Session 6	Abuse Investigations - Inside-Out[side]. Speakers: Katie Fox and Paul Nicholson <i>Abuse investigations are among the most challenging responsibilities faced by developmental services leaders. In this session, Katie Fox, Co-Executive Director of Community Living South Huron, and Paul Nicholson, Managing Director at Fermata Workplace Solutions, bring together the perspectives of both organizational leaders and external investigators to share practical guidance on managing abuse investigations. Participants will explore key decisions, including when to investigate internally or externally, how to support persons served and staff, navigating police involvement, and reaching credible findings. The session will also address leadership after an investigation, including rebuilding trust, communicating outcomes, meeting compliance requirements, and turning findings into meaningful organizational improvement.</i>
Session 7	Protecting the Plan: Using Third-Party Expertise to Stabilize STD Costs. Speakers: Brigitte O'Neill and Melissa Silverthorn <i>Short-term disability (STD) is a critical part of a healthy, stable workplace—supporting employees when life happens while helping employers manage risk, productivity, and costs. In this session, we'll share a real-world case study of a plan facing year-over-year</i>

	cost increases of \$50,000. By leveraging third-party “advice to pay” expertise to strengthen adjudication, clarify eligibility, and ensure payments aligned with the plan design, the organization reversed the cost trend—protecting the plan, improving consistency, and supporting employees with a clearer, more sustainable process.
Session 8	Bring Core Competencies to Life Speakers: Mark Benner, Elizabeth Foreman and Brenda Van Houtven <i>By ensuring everyone understands how Core Competencies shape support, we strengthen partnerships, empower self-advocacy, and improve service quality. This presentation represents an important step toward making Core Competencies meaningful not only to professionals, but to everyone. People receiving services are directly impacted by how Core Competencies are applied in their daily support. Without an accessible explanation of core competencies, we do not know what good support looks like and what to expect from staff. In this presentation we will be sharing the new easy to use reference guide for the Core Competencies and showing 4 videos that clearly reflect the growth levels in action.</i>
12:30-1:30 pm	Lunch
1:30-2:00 pm	Greetings from the Provincial Network on Developmental Services and MCCSS
2:00-3:00 pm	
Session 9	Labour Relations Update. Speakers: Charles Hofley and Jessica Toldo <i>A legal update for the developmental services sector including new legislative changes, status of the Worth Fighting For Campaign, and case law developments.</i>
Session 10	Power Up Your Workforce: Unlocking the DSW Apprenticeship Toolkit Speakers: Tasha Scheerhoorn, Mark Benner and Traci Timony <i>Looking to grow talent, strengthen your team, and invest in the future of developmental services—all while your employees keep working? The DSW Apprenticeship Program makes it possible, combining hands-on learning with post-secondary education tailored to the sector. Join us to explore the new DSW Apprenticeship Toolkit—your one-stop resource for launching and supporting apprentices in your organization. Learn how to navigate the program, access practical tools, and open doors to growth for both employers and employees.</i>
Session 11	Responding to Identity-Based Harm: Practical Tools for DS Workplaces & Lessons Learned. Speakers: Kevin Guay and Mimi Mahmud <i>Staff and leaders in the developmental services sector are increasingly called upon to respond to identity-based harm in real time. This interactive session, based on Extend-A-Family Waterloo Region’s Identity-Based Harm training, provides practical tools for addressing harmful comments, facilitating follow-up conversations, and aligning responses with organizational policies and values. Participants will also learn implementation-informed strategies and lessons learned from delivering the training. The session is designed to help HR professionals, leaders, and program staff respond confidently, consistently, and in ways that support inclusive workplace cultures.</i>
Session 12	Operational Leader Community of Practice - Strengthen Teams Speakers: Holly Duff, Toni Grillo and Jamie Russell

	<i>Teams don't just happen, they grow, wobble, clash, and eventually thrive. In this interactive and energizing session, we'll explore the classic stages of team development. Participants will uncover the key characteristics of each stage, learn how to spot where their team is right now, and discuss practical ways leaders can motivate, support, and guide their teams forward, even when things feel messy. Expect lighthearted examples, group discussions, and aha! moments as we normalize conflict, celebrate growth, and build confidence in leading teams through change.</i>
3:00-3:30 pm	Break/Networking/Tradeshow
3:30-4:30 pm	
Session 13	Beyond Choice: Connecting Belonging, Rights, and Workforce Realities in Developmental Services. Speakers: Nicole Flynn and Christopher Jordan-Stevens <i>As Ontario's Journey to Belonging reshapes developmental services, this interactive session explores how choice and individualized funding can support meaningful belonging while acknowledging the workforce realities that influence outcomes. Drawing on lived experience, the Capabilities Approach, and Ontario's Passport Program, participants will examine realistic scenarios to better understand inclusion in practice. The session will explore key system pressures, including staffing shortages, burnout, administrative complexity, and financial constraints, and their impact on quality of life and service delivery. Attendees will leave with practical strategies to strengthen workforce stability, promote belonging, and improve outcomes for both employees and the people they support.</i>
Session 14	From Insight to Impact: Leveraging workforce analytics and learning strategy to build a future-ready workforce. Speaker: Aneliya Arnaudova <i>Explore how CLTO is transforming workforce planning and development through the integration of its Talent Dashboard, workforce analytics, and centralized Learning & Capability model. By connecting talent intelligence with strategic learning, capability-building initiatives, and the thoughtful application of AI-enabled tools, CLTO is enabling proactive decision-making, strengthening workforce readiness, optimizing resources, and enhancing employee experience. Attendees will gain insight into how data-driven workforce planning and targeted development strategies can work together to build a high-performing, future-ready organization.</i>
Session 15	Tips and Tricks for a Successful HRIS implementation Speakers: Indu Radhakrishnan and Nancy Lau <i>Implementing a new Human Resources Information System (HRIS) is a complex undertaking that requires careful planning and execution to maximize your return-on-investment. A successful implementation requires strong planning, testing as well as a change management plan. Done right, a digital transformation can free up the time spent on administrative tasks and allow your organization to focus on strategic initiatives and realize efficiencies. This session will offer practical tips and lessons learned throughout each stage of the project life cycle including needs assessment, vendor selection, implementation and sustainment. Participants will learn how to identify and avoid common pitfalls and how to design a system that works for your organization for years to come.</i>
Session 16	ONTRAC Update

5:30-6:30 pm	Networking Reception
6:30-7:45 pm	Dinner
7:45-8:15 pm	Awards and Door Prizes
8:15-10:00 pm	Entertainment: Always On Friday Band

Day Two: October 28th , 2026

8:00-9:00 am	Breakfast
8:00 am- 1:30 pm	Tradeshow
9:00-10:00 am	
Session 17	But We Did Everything Right!...Right?, Why Workplace Investigations Still Fail. Speaker: Dean Benard <i>Organizations often measure investigation success by compliance with policies and procedures, but employees judge investigations based on trust, fairness, and credibility. In this engaging session, workplace investigator Dean Benard explores how investigations can undermine confidence and damage trust, even when they appear well-executed. Participants will examine common pitfalls that affect investigative integrity and learn how to move beyond a compliance-focused approach. Attendees will leave with practical strategies to enhance fairness, reduce bias, strengthen credibility, and build trust in workplace investigation processes.</i>
Session 18	Think Better, Solve Better: Critical and Creative Thinking for Complex Workplace Challenges. Speakers: Janeen Halliwell and Dan Bigonesse <i>Supporting people, leading teams, and navigating organizational challenges all require one essential skill: the ability to think well in complex situations. In this interactive session, participants will explore practical tools for critical thinking and creative problem solving that can be applied across all levels of an organization. Whether you're supporting an individual, supervising a team, or leading strategic initiatives, these approaches will help you challenge assumptions, ask better questions, and uncover opportunities that might otherwise be missed. Drawing on proven critical thinking and Creative Problem Solving methods, participants will engage in hands-on activities and real-world scenarios designed to strengthen decision-making and generate fresh solutions. Attendees will leave with practical strategies they can immediately apply to improve outcomes for both the people they support and the organizations they serve.</i>
Session 19	Cultivating Community Wellness: Fostering Psychological Safety and Flexibility in Developmental Services. Speaker: Katelyn Soucie-Vukmanich <i>This presentation explores two complementary approaches to supporting DSP wellbeing: psychological safety, which fosters a respectful and supportive workplace, and psychological flexibility, which helps employees navigate challenges while</i>

	staying aligned with their values. Attendees will learn the differences between these approaches, how they contribute to wellbeing and workplace effectiveness, and practical strategies for implementation in developmental service agencies. Research-informed examples and resources will provide actionable tools to support healthier, more resilient workplaces.
10:00-10:30 am	Break/Networking/Tradeshow
10:30 am-11:30 am	
Session 20	TBD
Session 21	From Paperwork to Peoplework: Redesigning Performance Appraisals as a Growth Journey. Speakers: Sarina Osborne & Alyssa Pinn <i>Performance appraisals are often seen as administrative and disconnected from employee growth and day-to-day performance. This session shares a practical approach to redesigning performance management using a values- and competency-based framework that aligns appraisals with onboarding, learning, and professional development. Participants will explore strategies for creating consistent, growth-focused performance conversations that support both employee and leadership success. Attendees will leave with tools to strengthen engagement, clarify expectations, and build a more cohesive employee development journey.</i>
Session 22	A Three-Stream Approach to Capacity Building: Enhancing the Skillset of DS Professionals to Support Persons who are Dual Diagnosis/Alternate Level of Care Speakers: Courtney Hutson and Marnie McDermott <i>The Specialized Clinical DS Network (SCDSN) is leading a provincial capacity-building initiative to strengthen the developmental services workforce and enhance support for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, dual diagnosis, and Alternate Level of Care (ALC) needs returning to the community. Using a multidisciplinary, three-stream approach, the initiative includes expert-developed education modules, Communities of Practice, and a referral-based DD/ALC Collaborative Clinic. This session will highlight key learning content, available resources, and practical tools designed to build workforce skills and support effective service delivery. Participants will gain access to resources that can be applied across a variety of developmental services settings.</i>
11:30 am- 12:00 pm	Closing Remarks
12:00 pm-1:30 pm	Lunch
1:30 pm	Tradeshow Ends