

## **Pennsylvania Coalition *for* Inclusive Community**

The Arc of Pennsylvania | Disability Rights PA | Institute on Disabilities at Temple University | Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council | Vision for Equality

### **Presenter Bios**

**Sherri Landis**, Moderator, is the 13th Executive Director of The Arc of Pennsylvania. Her commitment to the rights of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families and their full inclusion in community has been proven throughout her history. Ms. Landis previously served as the Executive Director of the DREAM Partnership, a nonprofit organization dedicated to developing a selection of postsecondary educational opportunities, which lead to independent living and employment opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities in Pennsylvania. She was the first Executive Director of this new organization. In this position, she positioned the DREAM Partnership as the leader and voice of postsecondary education, secured grant funds, and led a coalition of stakeholders and state agencies to change internal policies affecting Medicaid waiver funds for postsecondary education.

**Hon. Kerry A. Benninghoff**, PA House of Representatives Majority Whip, represents the 171<sup>st</sup> District serving portions of Centre and Mifflin Counties. He has been a member of the PA House since 1997.

**Hon. F. Todd Polinchock**, is a member of the PA House of Representatives, representing the 144th district as part of Bucks County. Elected in 2018, he is a co-chair of the House Autism and Intellectual Disability Caucus.

**Gordon (Gordy) Bensing** is 62 years old and was born in Ephrata, PA. He lived with his family until the age of 5 when he moved to the Hamburg Center. He has cerebral palsy, caused by a birth injury. His hobbies include watching football and baseball, collecting Converse sneakers, music, and dancing. He is also passionate about advocacy work for people with special needs. He was very involved at Hamburg Center, participating in the meetings and planning for shutting the Center down. After the Center closed, Gordon played an active role in choosing where he and his roommate and friend from the Center, Peter, would live. Through Excentia Human Services, Gordon and Peter moved into their new home in 2018. He remains involved in advocacy, attending ARC Lancaster meetings whenever possible.

**Peter Demers** was born in Port Washington, NJ and is 54 years old. He moved to the Hamburg Center at age 13. Peter has cerebral palsy, caused by a birth injury. His hobbies include eating good food, watching football and old movies, and listening to music. Peter does not like to be the center of attention, so he supports his roommate Gordon's advocacy efforts from the sidelines.

**Sheila McLeod** is a mother to three adult daughters, two of whom have intellectual disabilities. Her daughters live at home and receive supports to assist them in accomplishing their life goals. Additionally, Sheila has been employed at Vision for Equality, Inc., for over 20 years, and supported individuals who moved from Embreeville State Center.

**Tom Carasiti** is the parent of a 28-year-old son with ID and autism. He is also an advocate with Vision for Equality for the developmentally disabled.

**Ned Whitehead** is an assistant project manager for the PA Waiting List Campaign. He is also a father to a son with cerebral palsy, and a cousin and friend of individuals with disabilities.

**Nicole Feaster** is an RN, disability legislative advocate, supports broker, and a social activities coordinator. Along with her husband Craig, they are owner/operators of SunPointe Mental Health, a large mental health practice in State College, PA. They are the proud parents of two daughters who have disabilities, Rena and Claire. They strive every day to ensure their daughters have the best lives possible and achieve all their dreams. Rena is 18 years old and lives with autism and significant disabilities. Eleven year-old Claire lives with Cerebral Palsy and other significant disabilities. Their family motto is: "We are resilient, and we persevere!"

**Sharon Janosick** Sharon Janosik is a mother and community advocate for autistic adults. She works and advocates with families in her areas to ensure all children are included in all settings and have access to participate in their community. Her passion for inclusion has made her a champion of community living and the benefits individuals with autism or intellectual disability receive from their participation in the rich fabric of life.