

SESQUICENTENNIAL

AAIDD 150TH ANNUAL MEETING

AWARD PROGRAM



1876



CHICAGO



2026

JUNE 22 – 24, 2026

150 YEARS OF PROGRESS



American Association
on Intellectual and
Developmental Disabilities

2026 Honors

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Susan Palmer, PhD, FAAIDD

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Mark Salzer, PhD

Reimagining Spirituality Leadership Award

Joohi Tahir

Fellows

Julie Bershadsky, PhD

Katherine Brendli Brown, PhD

Lauren Clark, PhD

Holly Hohmeister, MS

Colleen Kidney, PhD

Chung Eun Lee, PhD

Yvonne Miller Nixon

Kelly Nye-Lengerman, PhD

Sheida K. Raley, PhD

Angela John Thurman, PhD

Kathy Varner

Awards Breakfast

Wednesday, June 24, 2026 | 8:00 – 9:00 am

2026 Awards of the AAIDD

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Karrie A. Shogren, PhD, FAAIDD

Full Community Inclusion Award

Our Place of New Trier

Historic Preservation Award

Laurel Daen, PhD

Humanitarian Award

Sharon Gomez, FAAIDD

International Award

Mayumi Hagiwara, PhD

Leadership Award

Erik Carter, PhD, FAAIDD

Media Award

Natty [Short Film]

Policy Award

Thomas J. Willis, PhD & Gary W. LaVigna, PhD

Research Award

Giulia Balboni, PhD, FAAIDD

Service to the Association Award

Jean Phelps, MSW, FAAIDD

Service to the Field Award

Katie Arnold, PhD, FAAIDD

Special Award

Piyush Mishra, MTech

Student Award

Christopher R. J. Worth, MEd

About AAIDD Awards

AAIDD honors selected individuals or groups who have made outstanding contributions to the field. A call for award nominations is issued in the fall of each year. Areas in which awards for outstanding contributions or special achievement may be given are:

- **Early Career Award**—Awarded for contribution to or achievement in the field of IDD by an individual in the early stages of their career.
- **Education**—Awarded for significant contributions to dissemination of knowledge in the field of IDD.
- **Full Community Inclusion**—Awarded to culturally responsive programs that have succeeded in full community inclusion and participation.
- **Historic Preservation**—Awarded for contributions to historic preservation of the archives of the field of IDD and/or the Association.
- **Humanitarian Award**—Awarded for promotion of human welfare and social reform.
- **International**—Awarded for outstanding contributions in research, education, service, or advocacy that has had an impact on people with IDD within a particular country or across national lines.
- **Leadership**—Awarded for courage and dedication resulting in an outstanding contribution to the field of IDD.
- **Media**—Awarded for significant contributions in depicting Americans with disabilities in a positive light.
- **Policy**—Awarded for significant contributions to public policy that has advanced the field and resulted in positive outcomes for people with IDD.
- **Research**—Awarded for formulations and investigations that have contributed significantly to the body of scientific knowledge in the field of IDD.
- **Service to the Association**—Awarded for significant leadership contributions to a Chapter, Region, Interest Network, or the national organization.
- **Service to the Field**—Awarded for contributions to the impact of the interdependent professions that work for and with people with IDD in alignment with AAIDD's mission.
- **Special**—Awarded for an unusual or significant contribution or achievement not covered by other award categories.
- **Student**—Recognizes student contributions in service, leadership, or scholarship to the field of IDD.



Presidential Award

Elisa Velardo, MMHS, FAAIDD

Elisa Velardo, MMHS, FAAIDD, is the Deputy Commissioner for the Connecticut Department of Developmental Services (DDS). She began her career as a direct support professional while pursuing an undergraduate degree in psychology and later earned a master's in management of human services from the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University with a concentration in intellectual and developmental disabilities.



Prior to joining the Connecticut DDS in 2015, Ms. Velardo held executive leadership positions in the private sector in both Massachusetts and Connecticut for over 25 years. She has worked to expand the array of support options through the development of policies and services that promote and provide self-direction, enabling technology, employment, and supportive housing. Since 2022, she has hosted a monthly virtual series for individuals, family members, providers, and staff to learn about best practices in service delivery entitled “4th Tuesday Forums on Innovative Options”. Ms. Velardo’s efforts in support of a strong, valued workforce can be found in her AAIDD Presidential Address, national presentations, and her peer-reviewed articles on workforce development. Since 2022,

Ms. Velardo has served on numerous AAIDD committees, including the joint Position Statement Committee of the AAIDD and The Arc of the U.S., has served as a President of AAIDD Board of Directors at the national, regional, and local levels, and was preferred to Fellow of the AAIDD in 2014.



Distinguished Career Recognition

Susan Palmer, PhD, FAAIDD

Susan Palmer, PhD, FAAIDD is Research Professor Emerita at the Beach Center on Disability, Schiefelbusch Lifespan Institute at the University of Kansas (KU). She began her career working with young children with disabilities and their families as Early Childhood Specialist at the Warren Center in Texas and became Project Director and an Early Childhood Specialist at The Arc of the U. S. before continuing this research at KU.



Dr. Palmer's research interests focus on effective strategies for inclusive education for children with moderate-to-severe disabilities and self-directed learning for people with IDD across the lifespan. She has served as Principal Investigator, Co-Investigator, and Project Director on numerous research projects with goals of improving Preschool–Grade12 educational instruction and student success and of promoting self-determined learning and career planning for adolescents and young adults. Dr. Palmer has authored or co-authored numerous books, book chapters, issue briefs, position statements, and peer-reviewed articles addressing inclusion in schools and early childhood programs, facilitation of self-directed learning and career planning, supporting families of people with IDD, and self-determination for people of all ages with IDD.

A Fellow of AAIDD and past President of its board of directors (2015–2016), Dr. Palmer also served as associate editor of *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*. Over her career she was recognized with the AAIDD Region V Research Award, the Kansas Division of Early Childhood Award of Excellence, the KU Steven F. Warren Achievement Award to recognize excellence in research and scholarly contributions, and a National Honoree of the 2020 National Historic Recognition Project.



Early Career Award

Lauren Bruno, PhD

Lauren P. Bruno, PhD, is an Assistant Research Professor at the Kansas University Center on Disabilities KUCD and currently serves as the editorial coordinator for the AAIDD journal *Inclusion*. Her work centers on advancing research and practice that promotes self-determination, inclusion, and positive post-school outcomes for youth and young adults with disabilities. She is committed to centering the lived experiences of people with disabilities to co-create knowledge that is meaningful, actionable, and grounded in real-world contexts.



Dr. Bruno's scholarship focuses on improving transition and post-secondary outcomes for youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Her work emphasizes the implementation of evidence-based transition practices and universally designed approaches that support people to set goals, make choices, and direct their own lives. Throughout her career as a teacher, researcher, and faculty member, she has supported inclusive postsecondary education initiatives and system-level efforts to strengthen pathways to education, employment, and community participation.

Dr. Bruno has authored or co-authored more than 30 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters and has contributed to over 80 national and international conference presentations, invited talks, and trainings. Through these efforts, she has provided crucial information to educators, state agencies, and community organizations across the United States and internationally to support the implementation of evidence-based transition and self-determination practices. Prior to her academic career, Dr. Bruno worked as a special education teacher supporting students with significant support needs, an experience that continues to shape her commitment to inclusive practices and partnership with people with disabilities and their families.



Education Award

Karrie A. Shogren, PhD, FAAIDD

Karrie A. Shogren, PhD, FAAIDD, is Director of the Kansas University Center on Disabilities (which houses the University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities for the state of Kansas), Senior Scientist at the Schiefelbusch Life Span Institute, and Ross and Marianna Beach Distinguished Professor in the Department of Special Education all at the University of Kansas.



Dr. Shogren is an internationally recognized expert in self-determination and building strengths-based systems of supports for people with disabilities, and is the developer of Causal Agency Theory, a framework that explains how people become self-determined by acting as “causal agents” in their own lives to achieve goals. She advances inclusive practices, including inclusive research practices to drive community-engaged work. Her research focuses on self-determination and supported decision making for people with disabilities, and her research findings are used around the globe to advance self-determination outcomes for people with disabilities.

Dr. Shogren has led multiple projects, including assessment validation and efficacy trials of self-determination interventions in school and community contexts, with grant support from the Institute of Education Sciences and the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, among others. She is the lead author of the *Self-Determination Inventory*, a validated assessment of self-determination, and has authored or co-authored over 250 articles in peer-reviewed journals and 25 books. Dr. Shogren is a Fellow of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and the American Psychological Association.



Full Community Inclusion Award

Our Place of New Trier

Our Place of New Trier was founded in 2008 on the belief that adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities are valuable members of their communities. Based in Wilmette, Illinois, the organization supports people with disabilities lead meaningful, productive, socially connected lives through a person-centered approach and deep community partnerships.



OUR PLACE

Our Place offers community engaged programs that provides meaningful day experiences that build life skills, fosters friendships, and strengthen belonging. More than 40 activities in the local area, such as volunteering side-by-side with peers without disabilities at food pantries and animal shelters, exploring arts and recreation, and pursuing lifelong learning are available for participants to choose from; the organization's commitment to self-determination ensures that each participant guides their schedule, goals, and experiences.

Our Place is accredited by the Council on Quality and Leadership. Its programs are designed collaboratively with participants, families, and community partners to reflect individual and community values. Dedicated staff members listen, adapt, and respond to the unique needs of each participant, ensuring meaningful inclusion and person-centered services.

Our Place partners with schools, nonprofits, and local organizations to expand opportunities, promote equity, and strengthen community connections. Under the leadership of Executive Director Katie Arnold, the national influence of Our Place has grown by sharing its model of inclusion on platforms such as *Forbes EQ BrandVoice*.

Our Place exemplifies full community inclusion. By fostering belonging and opportunity every day, the organization is a model that proves that when people with disabilities are fully included, everyone benefits.



Historic Preservation Award

Laurel Daen, PhD

Laurel Daen, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of American Studies at the University of Notre Dame (Indiana), where she holds concurrent appointments in Gender Studies; History and Philosophy of Science; and Health, Humanities, and Society. Before joining Notre Dame, she held two National Endowment for the Humanities fellowships at the Massachusetts Historical Society and the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture.



Dr. Daen's research focuses on disability, medicine, and health in America around the time of the American Revolution, with a particular emphasis on recovering histories of activism and resistance. She is interested in revealing how people with physical and mental disabilities challenged restrictions and advocated for greater rights, resources, and opportunities. Her research has been supported by grants from National Institutes of Health, among others.

Dr. Daen has authored or co-authored 15 scholarly journal articles and chapters. Her first book, *Disability Activism in the Early United States*, expected to be published by the University of North Carolina Press in early 2027, documents how people with disabilities contested various legal, political, and social exclusions from voting, marriage, and property ownership using the language of liberty, equality, rights, and citizenship. She has been recognized for her work with the Disability History Association's Outstanding Article and Book Chapter Award in both 2018 and 2025,

In addition to her teaching and scholarship, Dr. Daen is active in the Disability History Association and organizes scholarly conferences and K-12 teacher workshops.



Humanitarian Award

Sharon Gomez, FAAIDD

Sharon Gomez, FAAIDD, is the Chief Compliance and Privacy Officer for Evergreen Life Services, a community provider services organization in Louisiana. Her past roles at this organization include Vice President of Operations for the Central Region, Quality Enhancement Officer, and Director of Southwest Louisiana Division. In addition, Ms. Gomez's career also included service as Court Monitor for the District Court of Louisiana in the matter of Gary W. et al vs. the State of Louisiana and a Quality Enhancement Specialist for The Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL).



Ms. Gomez was instrumental in introducing the concept of Person-Centered Planning to Evergreen. Ms. Gomez was a member of the Committees for the 10th and 11th Editions of the Association's *Manuals* and has authored or co-authored two peer-reviewed journal articles, two book chapters, and one magazine article.

Ms. Gomez has engaged the Association at every level, having served as a President of AAIDD boards at the state, regional, and national levels. In her role as President of national board (2011–2012), Ms. Gomez spearheaded the launch of the journal *Inclusion* in 2013. She was preferred to Fellow of the AAIDD in 2000, and has been recognized on the state, regional and national levels for making significant contributions toward enhancing the quality of life for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She is an active member of the Enterprise Boulevard Church of Christ in Lake Charles, Louisiana and is a member of Gamma Phi Beta Sorority Alumnae Association.



International Award

Mayumi Hagiwara, PhD

Mayumi Hagiwara, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Special Education at San Francisco State University (SFSU). In this role, she teaches pre- and in-service special education teachers who work with students with extensive support needs and she directs the Inclusion Pilot Project, an inclusive postsecondary education program. At SFSU, she collaborates with schools and districts throughout the Bay Area to enhance the quality of education for students with extensive support needs and to expand inclusive opportunities.



Dr. Hagiwara is a sibling of a sister with intellectual disability, a parent of a multicultural child, and a daughter of aging parents. Originally from Japan, she came to the United States to specifically to pursue a career in special education because of her younger sister, Mikie, who was born with Rubinstein–Taybi Syndrome. Mikie laid the foundation for Dr. Hagiwara’s efforts in inclusion and self-determination for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Dr. Hagiwara has also coordinated international translation work for the Kansas University Center on Disabilities (KUCD) since 2018. In this role, she supports international scholars to elevate the voices of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and advance self-determination globally. At KUCD, Dr. Hagiwara also provides translation and contextualization of self-determination assessments and interventions and has led translation in Japan and training for scholars and educators on the importance of self-determination for everyone, with and without disabilities.



Leadership Award

Erik Carter, PhD, FAAIDD

Erik Carter, PhD, FAAIDD, is the Luther Sweet Endowed Chair in Disabilities and Executive Director of the Center for Disability and Flourishing at Baylor University. Prior to joining the Baylor faculty in 2023, he held an appointment at Vanderbilt University.



Dr. Carter's research and writing focus on principle-driven and research-based strategies for promoting full participation, meaningful relationships, and valued roles for children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

One strand of his research and writing addresses the intersections of faith and disability: concerning the spiritual lives and flourishing of people with IDD and their families, the practices and postures of inclusive congregations, and faith-based partnerships with disability service systems. A second strand explores the pathways to inclusion and belonging for individuals with IDD. He is particularly focused on capturing the reciprocal and lasting benefits that come through friendships and lives lived together. His leadership centers on calling and equipping schools, workplaces, and congregations to become communities where people with IDD are invited, known, needed, and loved.

Dr. Carter is deeply committed to ensuring that the best of what we know works is what permeates everyday practices. He has co-authored seven books and more than 300 journal articles, chapters, and other publications. He is a long-time member of AAIDD who has served within the Education and Religion & Spirituality Interest Networks, as well as on each of AAIDD's journals.



Media Award

Natty

Natty is a short documentary film that examines the sexual abuse of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities through the experience of Natalie (known as “Natty”) and her family. Through a deeply personal storytelling, the film reveals and contrasts the profound emotional and psychological impact of abuse with missed warning signs, breakdowns in mandatory reporting, and persistent barriers to accountability. Centering survivor dignity and family advocacy, *Natty* confronts the urgent need for reform within systems entrusted to protect people with disabilities.



In early 2012, Natalie—who is nonspeaking and communicates through body mannerisms and vocalizations—began exhibiting drastic behavioral changes that were repeatedly misdiagnosed. Only when she was diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection, it became clear that she had been sexually assaulted. Natalie left the program and returned to her mother’s full-time care. Despite a legal requirement to do so, no mandatory report was filed, and her facility was never investigated. Although law enforcement opened an investigation, the case remains unresolved.

Natalie’s sister, Julie Payne-Neward, has brought Natalie’s story to national audiences through *Natty*, directed by David F. Fortune and produced by The Natalie Project in collaboration with neurodiverse filmmakers from Options For All Film & Media Studio.

The film culminates with Natalie’s milestone birthday celebration—a moment of joy, resilience, and hope that serves as both a personal triumph and a call to action, to champion healing, education, and systemic change for people with disabilities and their families who have been impacted by sexual abuse.

More information and the trailer can be found at www.thenatalieproject.org.



Policy Award

Thomas J. Willis, PhD & Gary W. LaVigna, PhD

Thomas J. Willis, PhD, and Gary W. LaVigna, PhD, co-founded the Institute for Applied Behavior Analysis (IABA) in 1982. For more than four decades, they served as principal architects of IABA's work to advance humane, person-centered practices globally and replace aversive procedures with positive and scientifically grounded interventions.



Dr. Willis's early career bridged research, clinical innovation, and large-scale training. His work included federally funded research, consultation to medical and educational systems, and direct service with individuals with complex behavioral, developmental, and mental health needs across home, school, hospital, and community settings. He served as an adjunct professor at Pepperdine University and as a lecturer at multiple University of California campuses, training educators, psychologists, and allied professionals in evidence-based behavior support long before such approaches were embedded in formal policy or professional standards. He earned bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in psychology from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Dr. LaVigna's early career included positions as staff psychologist and coordinator of clinical research at Camarillo State Hospital and Executive Director of the Jay Nolan Center for Autism. He served on the board of the Autism Society of America (1977–2022), authored books and chapters, including *Alternatives to Punishment: Solving Behavior Problems With Non-Aversive Strategies*, and numerous articles published in peer-reviewed journals on positive behavioral supports. In 2023, he became a founding board member of the IABA Research and Education Foundation. He earned a bachelor's degree at New York University and a doctorate in psychology from the University of Chicago.



Research Award

Giulia Balboni, PhD, FAAIDD

Giulia Balboni, PhD, FAAIDD, is an Associate Professor of Psychometrics at the University of Bologna (Italy) and earned her PhD from the University of Padua. She is a psychometrician interested in the potential of advanced methodologies and data-analytic strategies to strengthen research in developmental disabilities with the ultimate goal of improving quality of life.



Dr. Balboni's research focuses on the measurement of adaptive and challenging behaviors, cognitive functioning, self-determination, and quality of life in individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders, as well as on personal and environmental factors associated with these constructs. She has recently initiated a cross-cultural study to identify factors that may enhance access to health services for adults with disabilities.

Dr. Balboni frequently collaborates with researchers across the United States, Canada, South America, and Europe. She has led the introduction of the measurement of adaptive behavior in clinical practice in Italy. Dr. Balboni developed the Italian versions of the Vineland scales and co-authored the *Diagnostic Adaptive Behavior Scale (DABS)* and led its Italian adaptation. In addition, she currently serves as Associate Editor of *Research in Developmental Disabilities* and on the editorial boards of several other scientific journals.

Dr. Balboni is a Fellow of AAIDD, recipient of the AAIDD 2018 International Award, and served on the Advisory Committee for the 12th edition of AAIDD's *Intellectual Disability: Definition, Diagnosis, Classification, and Systems of Supports*.



Service to the Association Award

Jean Phelps, MSW, FAAIDD

Jean Phelps, MSW, FAAIDD, is the Chief Executive Officer of Incompass Human Services. In 2019, she oversaw merger of LifeLinks, Inc. and CLASS, Inc., that united two highly respected organizations into a single, mission-driven agency, resulting in the launch of Incompass Human Services in 2020.



Ms. Phelps is a Fellow of the AAIDD, has presented at AAIDD national conferences, and has served on the AAIDD Region X Board for over 20 years. She also served the AAIDD Massachusetts Chapter in multiple roles, serving terms as President (2011–2012), Vice President (2002–2004, 2009–2010), and Secretary (2001–2004).

Ms. Phelps served several terms on the joint AAIDD/The Arc Policy Committee, and in addition serves as a board member of The Arc of the United States, The Arc of Massachusetts, and as the current Chair of the National Council of Executives of The Arc.

Ms. Phelps was recognized by the AAIDD Community Interest Network with its inaugural Community Award in 2024 for visionary leadership in promoting community for all.



Service to the Field Award

Katie Arnold, PhD, FAAIDD

Katie Arnold, PhD, FAAIDD, is Executive Director of Our Place of New Trier, an organization that provides community-based services that support adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities to live meaningful, productive, and socially connected lives. She is also currently an Adjunct Research Assistant Professor in the Department of Disability and Human Development at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), where she previously held several different positions.



Dr. Arnold's previous work at UIC's Institute on Disability and Human Development (UCEDD) included multiple leadership roles, including Director of Stakeholder Engagement, which focused on ensuring that research was informed by lived experience and that community voices shaped policy and systems change. She also played a key role in the National Resource Center on Family Support, advancing evidence-based family support and elevating family perspectives.

Dr. Arnold was the Founding Executive Director of the Sibling Leadership Network (SLN), a national nonprofit she led for ten years. Under her leadership, SLN became the first national organization dedicated to supporting siblings of people with disabilities, growing a network of chapters across 27 states, hosting national conferences, producing influential resources, and integrating sibling perspectives into research, policy, and advocacy efforts across the field. Through her leadership, the International Sibling Collaborative was established, which connects sibling organizations to advance inclusion globally.

Dr. Arnold's experiences inform her approach to belonging, dignity, and community inclusion. She grew up with a sister with intellectual disability, lived in L'Arche communities, is married to an advocate with lived experience of disability, and is the adoptive parent of a son with disabilities.



Special Award

Piyush Mishra, MTech

Piyush Mishra, MTech, is a doctoral candidate in Disability Studies at the University of Illinois Chicago, Department of Disability and Human Development (IDHD). As a research assistant at IDHD, he co-developed an accessible digital learning curriculum, *Virtual Future is Now (VFİN)*, to equip adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), families, and service providers with practical tools for future planning. He also co-developed MindWalk, a mindfulness-based walking intervention for aging South Asian caregivers, and he has expanded into disability arts as a teaching artist, facilitating experimental poetry and storytelling workshops in collaboration with Bodies of Work, UIC, and Access Living in Chicago.



Mr. Mishra's body of work reimagines disability futures by bridging research, community practice, and creative expression. Informed by his experience as a sibling of a young adult with intellectual and developmental disabilities, his work centers on future planning, housing, sibling support, and the creation of infrastructures of care for adults with IDD and their families across global contexts. He works for communities first, building platforms, tools, and spaces grounded in lived realities, while drawing on academic methods to strengthen, document, and sustain this effort.

Mr. Mishra co-founded *Saarthi*, India's first sibling support network in 2020 for siblings to connect and amplify their voices as stakeholders in disability support systems. His doctoral research project examines out-of-home housing resources for adults with IDD in India through environmental scans, site visits and interviews with housing leaders, and focus group discussions with parents and adult siblings to understand their needs, preparedness, and experiences with future planning.



Student Award

Christopher R. J. Worth, MEd

Christopher R. J. Worth, MEd, is a doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri St. Louis. As a researcher and community organizer with cerebral palsy and a learning disability, his experiences inform how he approaches research and he uses participatory methods that center the voices of people with disabilities.



Mr. Worth's research explores how disability culture positively shapes identity development, focusing on creativity and risk taking among emerging adults with disabilities. A person with a disability, his published and in-press work on the dignity of risk informs his local and national education and consulting efforts.

Mr. Worth has co-led two National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research-funded projects: *My Risk for Opportunity, Autonomy, and Dignity (My ROAD)*, a project to evaluate and expand dignity of risk for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) on college campuses and *Dignity of Work*, a project to evaluate and expand dignity of risk for people with IDD in supported employment settings.



Community Award

Presented by the AAIDD Community Interest Network

Dan Middleton, MBA

Dan Middleton, MBA, wears a number of hats. As a Senior Leader at Catalight, he has been instrumental in designing innovative, self-paced career tools like the Compass Work Tool, which empowers people with disabilities to navigate their professional journeys with confidence. He is also a Strategic Advisor for the Disability Employment Technical Assistance Center (DETAC) and volunteer coach for Autism Aspergers Spectrum Coalition for Education Networking and Development (AASCEND).



Mr. Middleton's career has included senior leadership roles at Fortune 500 companies and the successful launch of two entrepreneurial ventures. He holds certifications from the International Coaching Federation and BetterUp coaching communities and has coached hundreds of people through complex transitions since 2005.

Mr. Middleton is dedicated to transforming employment outcomes for the disability community. His efforts to build scalable, inclusive systems that help everyone find and thrive in a lifelong career are reflected in his presentations at the Disability Employment Conference and the Job Action Meetings that he hosts.



Wolf Wolfensberger Award

Presented by the AAIDD Psychology Interest Network

Mark Salzer, PhD

Mark Salzer, PhD, is a licensed psychologist and Professor of Social and Behavioral Sciences in Temple University's Barnett College of Public Health. He also serves as the Director and Principal Investigator of the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILIRR)-funded Temple University Collaborative on Community Inclusion of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities Rehabilitation Research and Training Center since 2003.



Dr. Salzer's research has been shaped by the work of Wolf Wolfensberger and others who emphasize the importance of valued social roles—such as employment, education, relationships, leisure, faith, and volunteerism—for people with intellectual, developmental, and other disabilities. His work has expanded understanding of the aspirations and engagement of individuals in these roles, the factors that impact their participation, and the links between community participation and health outcomes.

Dr. Salzer has developed and evaluated interventions designed to increase meaningful participation. He recently collaborated with colleagues at multiple universities to study the effectiveness of peer support interventions delivered by people with autism, with a focus on enhancing community participation and mobility.

Dr. Salzer earned a bachelor's degree with distinction in sociology and psychology from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, followed by both master's and doctoral degrees in clinical-community psychology from the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign.



Reimagining Spirituality Leadership Award

*Presented by the AAIDD Religion
& Spirituality Interest Network*

Joohi Tahir

Joohi Tahir is the Executive Director and co-founder of Muslims Understanding & Helping Special Education Needs (MUHSEN), a nonprofit organization advancing inclusion and accessibility for people with disabilities within Muslim communities. With a background in business and over 20 years of professional experience, she has led the development of programs and services that support participation and belonging across North America. Her commitment to this work has been shaped in part by her own family's experiences with disability and needs for inclusion.



Under her leadership, MUHSEN has established a widely recognized Masjid (places of worship) certification program, supporting Mosques in becoming more accessible and inclusive, and has expanded its reach to hundreds of communities in the United States, Canada, and beyond. She has also led initiatives in support of accessible religious education, community advocacy, and participation in spiritual journeys for worship, including Umrah pilgrimages for people with disabilities and their families.

Joohi serves on the board of the Faith Inclusion Network and supports interfaith collaboration through her speaking, writing, and training activities. Her sustained commitment to strengthening inclusion, deepening understanding, and reimagining participation in spiritual and community life reflects the values of this award.



AAIDD Milestone Members

5-year members

Michael Abel, PhD
 Lindsay Athamanah, PhD
 Matthew Bogenschutz, PhD
 Lisa Burck MS, MPA
 Sue Chang, MS
 Kyle Corbin, MPA
 Teri Curtis
 Stephen Davis, PhD
 Michelle Del Carmen
 Robert Dinerstein, JD, FAAIDD
 Parthenia Dinora, PhD
 Hope Dittmeier
 William DuSold
 Jermaine East, MA
 Jenifer Eaton, MEd
 James Ellis, JD, FAAIDD
 Marisa Fisher, PhD
 Jillian Fisher-Bouchelle, MSW
 Marie Gilberti
 Cory Gilden, PhD
 Kenneth Haines
 Koichi Haishi, PhD
 Lisa Hovermale, MD
 Greg Joiner, PhD
 Amanda Koch
 Julie Kramme, PhD
 Karen Lee
 Cathy Lerza
 Esther Lindstrom, PhD
 Christine Linehan, PhD, MPH, MA
 Susan Loveall, PhD
 John McGonigle, PhD
 Sarah McKenney, DMin, MDiv
 Amanda Miller, PhD
 Kouji Miyaguchi

Joanna Mussey, PhD
 Jessica Neely
 Jonathan Neidorf, MA
 Seung Hee Park, PhD
 Stanford Perry, MS
 Elizabeth Pfeiffer, PhD
 Marcus Poppen, PhD
 Kristina Rios, PhD
 Diane Ryndak, PhD
 Doreen Samelson, EdD
 Sofia Santos, PhD
 Ariel Schwartz, PhD
 Deana Shaeffer
 Tamara Shetron, PhD
 Stephen Smith
 Krystal Sutherland, MS
 Audrey Thurm, PhD
 Rebecca Townsend, MME
 Kevin Twomey
 Luchara Wallace, PhD
 Alex Wheatley, EdS
 Mary Wood, PhD
 Amy Pei-Lung Yu

10-year members

Koichi Aizaki, MD
 Sarah Barton, ThD, MS,
 Kathryn Burke, PhD, FAAIDD
 Jennifer Buss, MSW
 Sarah Carlson, PhD
 Zenobia Corley, MBA
 James Davidson, PhD
 Susanne Deiter
 Richard Kalcznski
 Leena Landmark, PhD, FAAIDD
 Chung Eun Lee, PhD, FAAIDD
 Ann Marie Licata, PhD



AAIDD Milestone Members

Scott Peter
Sheida K. Raley, PhD, FAAIDD
LaRon Scott, EdD, FAAIDD
Andrew Sewnauth
Robin Shaffert, JD
George Spencer, MDiv, MA
Hatice Uyanik, PhD
Lieke van Heumen, PhD, FAAIDD

15-year members

Lauren Clark, PhD, FAAIDD
Kent Craft
Maria Cecilia de F. C. Buckley, PhD
Maryalice Jacquinet
Yoshi Kardell, MSW
Rebecca Lienhard
Gary Martin, PhD
Rich Nakanishi, MA
Thoyd Warren

20-year members

Shelly Christensen, MA, FAAIDD
Judith M. Gross, PhD, FAAIDD
Joyce S. Loudon, PhD, FAAIDD
Elizabeth Luper
Scot D. Simmons
Marian Smith
Emily Shea Tanis, PhD, FAAIDD

25-year members

Elaine Brown, PhD, FAAIDD
Joseph Caldwell, PhD
Erik Carter, PhD, FAAIDD
Louis Chiofalo
Daniel Davies, MA
Deborah Fidler, PhD, MS, FAAIDD
Angela Martin
Keith McVilly, PhD

Cynthia Potter, DPT, FAAIDD
Jayne Press, MA
Karrie Shogren, PhD, FAAIDD
Terry Snow
Harvey Switzky, PhD, FAAIDD
Christel Thaxton

30-Year members

Maria A. Alfaro
Louise Kent-Udolf, PhD, FAAIDD
Richard Rader, FAAIDD

35-year members

Mary Bruder
Cynthia Dulaney, PhD
John Gajda, MA, FAAIDD
Patrick Hopkins
Diane Morin, PhD, FAAIDD
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