

OUR STAFF



Jennifer Rodriguez

Executive Director, Youth Law Center

Jennifer Rodriguez, J.D., is Executive Director of the Youth Law Center (YLC) and a leading advocate for transforming foster care and juvenile justice systems across the country so youth can thrive. Jennifer spent many years of her childhood in foster care and juvenile justice facilities, and has spent most of her life advocating to ensure justice, compassion and opportunity for youth touched by these systems. Jennifer's advocacy has resulted in significant national policy, practice and culture changes. She joined the Youth Law Center as an attorney in 2007 after eight years working at the California Youth Connection, a nationally recognized foster youth advocacy organization. Jennifer was appointed by President Obama to the National Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities, which released a report promoting strengthening families parenting the most vulnerable children.



Jamie Grantham Averett

QPI Coordinator – State of Florida

Jamie Averett joined the QPI team in 2017 after working in child welfare in Northwest Georgia for 17 years. As an attorney, Jamie was involved with the implementation of the National Quality Improvement Center on the Representation of Children. In 2013, she was appointed as an Associate Judge for Bartow County (Georgia) Juvenile Court for both child welfare and juvenile justice cases. Judge Averett brings to QPI her passion and commitment to serving children and families in child welfare, and her sincere belief that every child and every parent is an individual who deserves the best we have to offer every day.



Darlene Bell

Community Voice Advocacy
Coordinator (CVAC)

Darlene Bell joined the Quality Parenting Initiative team in 2020 as a founding member of the Community Voice Advocacy Coordinator (CVAC) team. Driven by a desire to stand in the gap for children when their biological parents need support, Darlene and her husband, Curtis, have been fostering in Minnesota for 30 years. Darlene joined the QPI movement in 2017, when she served on the core planning team to launch QPI in Minnesota. She has worked in the nonprofit field for over 30 years, with particular expertise in engaging communities of color and valuing cultural influences in the Twin Cities area. Darlene and her husband Curtis, high school sweethearts who have been married for 36 years, have fostered more than 30 children and adopted five children since they began fostering 30 years ago. They have six children and 18 grandchildren.



Kathy Bonk

Strategic Communications
Consultant

Kathy Bonk is a leading expert in communications strategies for policy change and has been working to improve child welfare and juvenile justice systems over the past three decades. She is a founder and partner in the Georgetown University's Public Information Officers Learning Collaborative among managers in public social service agencies. Kathy is co-author of the Jossey-Bass book, *Strategic Communications for Nonprofits* and has facilitated hundreds of conferences, workshops, webinars and the development of communications plans for advocacy campaigns. She is a proud recipient of the 1996 Unsung Hero Award by the Youth Law Center and is working with QPI as it expands to more states and jurisdictions.



Victoria Camper

Community Voice Advocacy
Coordinator (CVAC)

Victoria Camper joined the Youth Law Center in 2020 as the fourth QPI Community Voice Advocacy Coordinator (CVAC). Victoria brings extensive experience as an advocate for birth parents. She has helped birth parents in Volusia County, Florida navigate the child welfare system as a Parent Partner for the last five years. She is the chairperson of a Birth Parent Advisory Board, supporting birth parents to become more involved in agency, program, and policy development. She also promotes partnerships among families by coordinating Community Cafes. She is a member of the Birth Parent National Network (BPNN), the Birth and Foster Parent Partnership (BFPP), and a Substance Exposed Newborn Task Force. Victoria has three children, ages 25, 12, and 7.



Carol Edwards

Training and Development
Coordinator

Carol Campbell Edwards joined the Youth Law Center as a consultant in 2016 after having been involved in Florida's QPI implementation. Her work with QPI focuses on training and professional development. Carol is a licensed clinical social worker and approved supervisor in the State of Florida with 27 years of direct and administrative service. She is a faculty member and the BSW Program Director at the Florida State University College of Social Work. Carol is a national delegate for the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and is the co-chair of the Florida NASW Race and Social Justice Task Force. She is a recipient of numerous teaching and professional service awards. Carol promotes the alignment of social work values and principles, with changing child welfare systems, to make life better for children and families with foster care experiences.



Celina Granato

National QPI Coordinator

Celina Granato joined the Youth Law Center in 2016 to serve as the QPI Coordinator. In this role she is involved with various aspects of development, supporting project planning and implementation for the national QPI sites. Previously, she worked as a Foster Parent Trainer and Licensing Specialist in Northwest Florida, where she became involved with QPI's efforts to improve the local system of care and ultimately pioneered the first Foster Parent Mentor program for Bay County, Florida. Previously, she served youth and families as a Dependency Case Manager, and she also coordinated services at a residential treatment program for teen girls involved in the juvenile justice system.



Terry Harrak

QPI Consultant

Terry Harrak has more than a decade of youth advocacy, curriculum development, training and community outreach experience. She currently works on the QPI and the Just Beginning Program (JB) at the Youth Law Center. Terry supports the QPI goals by ensuring young people have a voice in the process. She works directly with QPI sites training youth and developing strategies for youth involvement. Terry manages the Just Beginning program sites nationally. Prior to her work at Youth Law Center, she served as Project Manager for Child Welfare League of America and Director of Youth Engagement for Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.



Brandy Hudson
National Planning Director

Brandy Hudson works as a Strategic Initiatives Advisor for the Youth Law Center's Quality Parenting Initiative, Birth and Foster Parent Partnership, and the CHAMPS Campaign to transform foster care systems across the nation so every child and youth can thrive. Brandy previously worked as a technical assistance project manager for Casey Family Programs and spent five years at the District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency serving in various roles, including program supervisor and special assistant. Brandy draws on her own experience as a former foster and probation youth, child welfare involved parent and licensed kinship provider, working to elevate and center the voice and expertise of those most impacted by child welfare and juvenile justice systems as leaders and designers of system transformation.



Catherine Huerta
QPI Coordinator – State of California

Catherine Huerta joined Youth Law Center in 2015 to serve as the QPI Coordinator for the State of California, after having served as a consultant to the project for a number of years. Previously, Ms. Huerta spent over 37 years working to improve the lives of families and communities of Fresno County, retiring in 2011 as Director of the Fresno Department of Social Services. Prior to that, Ms. Huerta served as Director and Assistant Director of the Department of Children and Family Services for eight years.



Kirstie Jetland joined Youth Law Center in 2020 as QPI's Administrative Assistant. Prior to YLC, she spent three years with UnitedHealth Group's Payment Integrity division in both team management and project management roles. During this time, Kirstie was a mentor to staff, supported and led multiple projects, and wrote numerous policy and procedure guidelines. Kirstie brings these technical and functional skills to the QPI team to support its mission of advocacy and change.

Kirstie Jetland

QPI Administrative Assistant



Karissa Lemme joined the QPI team in 2020 as a Community Voice Advocacy Coordinator. She works to connect with caregivers across the nation and ensures their voices are being heard. She is an active member of the Birth and Foster Parent Partnership (BFPP) and she networks with birth parents and caregivers to brainstorm ways to improve these co-parenting relationships. Karissa has a unique perspective based on her real-life caregiving experiences as she encourages the importance of fostering close relationships with birth parents.

Karissa Lemme

Community Voice Advocacy
Coordinator (CVAC)



Will Radler
Operations & HR Manager

Will Radler joined Youth Law Center in 2019 as the Office Manager, serving as the first point of contact for all operational matters at YLC's San Francisco headquarters. As Operations Manager, Will also supports QPI's contract lifecycle management, billing, IT, hiring, and other administrative processes. Prior to YLC, Will spent five years at the Mental Health Association of San Francisco (MHASF), first as assistant manager of the statewide Peer-Run Warm Line and then as the agency's Operations Manager. Whether in public-facing or behind-the-scenes roles, Will is committed to supporting advocacy and service delivery models that center the voices of those most impacted by the systems we aim to transform.



Cecilia Rivas
National Implementation
Director

Cecilia Rivas joined QPI in 2020 as the National QPI Implementation Manager. Previously, she served as Director of Intervention & Resource Development at the Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS). At DHS, she rebuilt and led the Philadelphia Quality Parenting Initiative, bolstered resource parent recruitment and retention, and improved wellbeing services for children, particularly access to mental health care and the reduction of antipsychotic medication. Cecilia also has frontline child welfare experience as a case management supervisor. Prior to her work in Philadelphia, she provided trauma therapy to children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems in Chicago, Illinois.



Tracy Schiro joined QPI as Advocate in 2019 after retiring as the Assistant Director of Social Services for San Luis Obispo County. She worked in county service for 27 years. Her focus has been on serving the most vulnerable while striving to end abuse, neglect and poverty. Tracy has actively participated in statewide efforts to address the commercial sexual exploitation of children; homelessness of children, families and individuals; and a positive future through higher education for youth in the foster care and juvenile justice systems.

Tracy Schiro

QPI Advocate



Carole Shauffer became Youth Law Center's Senior Director, Strategic Initiatives in 2012 after serving as its Executive Director for 26 years and a staff attorney since 1981. Her experience in systems change and as a Zero to 3 fellow, led to the creation of the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI). Prior to working at the Youth Law Center she was a staff attorney at the Louisiana Center for the Public Interest and the ACLU of Louisiana

Carole Shauffer

Senior Director, Strategic Initiatives



Phyllis Stevens

Community Voice Advocacy
Coordinator (CVAC)

Phyllis Stevens joined the Youth Law Center in 2016 to serve as a Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) Coordinator and in 2020 moved into the role of Community Voice Advocacy Coordinator. In this role, she travels throughout the country to various sites and works with each site's foster care program to develop a cohesive, collaborative system. Phyllis supports sites at various stages of development and works closely with the foster families at each site. Phyllis is an adoptive mom, relative caregiver and former foster mom. She is founder and Executive Director of Together as Adoptive Parents Inc., an organization that provides support, resources and advocacy for adoptive, foster and kinship families, as well as the President of the Philadelphia Resource Parents Association Inc., an advocacy Association for foster parents. Phyllis has won many awards locally and nationally for her work with children.