

Spring Convention Speaker Biographies

Drew Houston



Colorado Springs native Drew Houston brings enthusiasm and passion for the work of Citizen’s Project. Prior to accepting the role of Executive Director at Citizen’s Project, she held many volunteer roles, and worked as Community Organizer for a health equity organization. An action-oriented leader, Drew is drawn to the verbs in the Citizen’s Project Mission, and upon earning her Master’s degree in Leadership in 2020, feels most excited about leading Citizen’s Project as it continues to engage, empower, and challenge our community.

Kimberly Churches

Kim Churches is the chief executive officer of AAUW. Prior to joining AAUW, Kim was the managing director of the Brookings Institution, an internationally recognized public policy think tank. In that capacity, she strategically guided Brookings, providing vision and problem-solving skills while focusing on expansive partnerships, external relations and advancement. Kim also served as associate vice chancellor at the University of Denver, a director of development at the University of North Florida, and a division director at the American Heart Association. Kim is widely recognized for her success at working collaboratively in education, as well as for capacity-building for grassroots and national and international nonprofits.



Melissa Ingram

Melissa has been part of the AAUW Inclusion and Equity Committee since 2019. She became the Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit SubCommittee chair in 2020. Outside of AAUW, Melissa worked within various universities to educate faculty on inclusive practices for students and staff. Currently, Melissa works to design and develop online curricula for post-graduate professionals.



Jesse Ohrenberger

Jesse has been part of the AAUW Inclusion and Equity Committee since 2019 working on the Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Jesse also worked with the Boston area AAUW to deliver Work Smart and Start Smart salary negotiation workshops around the city and local universities. Professionally, Jesse works in career services helping students with their career pursuits.



Dr. Kay Brocato

Dr. Kay Brocato, Ph.D., is a proud mother of three delightful children. She is a *wife, a sister, an aunt, a daughter, and a friend*. As an Associate Professor of Education Foundations, she has enjoyed teaching, research, and service about many aspects of classrooms, schools, and communities. Currently, she serves as President of AAUW Mississippi. Celebrations of the beauty in diversity and justice are at the center of all her work.



Dr. Linda Carpenter

Dr. Linda Carpenter, Ph.D., is a retired university professor with research and teaching background in communication sciences and disorders. Currently, she co-chairs the Lake/Sumter (FL) AAUW branch Diversity and Inclusion Committee and is a nominee for Branch co-president elect. She and her husband have two adult children, one grandson, and two grandcats.



Cyndi Shanahan



Cyndi Shanahan is currently serving her second year as the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Chair of AAUW Virginia. Prior to this role she served as the Membership VP for Virginia AAUW, as well as Co-president and Program Chair. She is currently retired and spends her time consulting and volunteering with several nonprofits to empower women in the Northern Virginia area. She is thrilled to be able to spend a good deal of time with her grandchildren.

Suzanne Young-Mercer

Suzanne Young-Mercer is a retired Director of Admin. Services for the Dept. of Emergency Service at Mount Sinai Hospital, NYC. She earned her BA at Baruch College and MBA at University of Phoenix. She is the current President of the Rockland County, NY Branch of AAUW and Diversity and Cultural Director at AAUW-NYS. She is past President of the Jamaican Civic and Cultural Assoc. of Rockland; served on the board of the local NAACP; and served two terms as a School Board Trustee. Suzanne and her husband have four children and are the proud grandparents of 6 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren.



Dr. Laurie Weiss



After over 40 years practicing psychotherapy, Dr. Laurie Weiss had no intention of starting a new phase of her career. Then a colleague helped her resolve a persistent, stressful problem using an amazing new technique taking just a few minutes and using only words. As an internationally known Psychotherapist, Coach and Consultant, she has helped over 60,000 people reclaim life energy and find joy in life. She has taught professionals in thirteen countries and authored thirteen books. Her Rapid Relief with Logosynthesis ® series reflects her expertise in the rapid anxiety and stress relief process discussed above.