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# ACE Studies: The Next 30 Years

STARs Day, Friday, May 22, 2026

**The global gathering advancing trauma recovery,  
prevention and survivor leadership - Honoring the science  
elevating the story - protecting the next generation**

Hosted by Star Network Foundation® - In partnership with  
survivor-led, prevention and recovery organizations worldwide

**“No survivor  
should have to  
walk the path  
to healing alone.”**



## **Program Notice**

The Scars to STARS Summit® 2026 agenda is designed as a dynamic, global experience. Session timing, speakers, and program elements are subject to change without notice to accommodate live program delivery, speaker availability, and ongoing enhancements.

## **Scars to STARS Summit® 2026 ACE Studies: The Next 30 Years Friday, May 22, 2026 STARS Day**

Held annually on the fourth Friday of May in honor of Mental Health Awareness Month.

A survivor-centered, globally accessible experience designed to move from awareness to action.

Scars to STARS Day® is an annual virtual global convening bringing together survivors, scientists, clinicians, policymakers, practitioners, educators, and community leaders to accelerate trauma-informed recovery and prevention worldwide.

Almost thirty years after the discovery of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study, this gathering will explore how science, lived experience, and systems innovation can break cycles of trauma and shape the next era of prevention and healing.

Designed for global participation, the program blends neuroscience, public health, survivor leadership, and real-world recovery. At its core, this is a survivor-centered gathering.

For millions, the journey through trauma can feel isolating—but no one is alone. No survivor should have to walk the path to healing alone.

# Chapter I - Understanding Trauma and Healing

**8:45 – 9:30 AM**

## **Registration & Global Prevention and Recovery Innovation Marketplace**

**Participants connect with organizations advancing:**

- Trauma-informed care
- Youth resilience initiatives
- Addiction recovery programs
- Survivor support communities
- Trauma-informed education
- Prevention innovation

The marketplace encourages collaboration between organizations working to transform trauma recovery and prevention worldwide. Participants can engage directly with organizations, explore resources, form partnerships in real time, and discover scalable solutions across sectors

**9:30 – 9:40 AM**

### **Opening Film**

#### **The Legacy of the ACE Study – and the Future It Made Possible**

Featuring

Vincent J. Felitti, MD, FACP

Co-Principal Investigator, Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

Recipient of the 2026 STAR NeuroLeadership Award (honored in a filmed presentation).

A short film honoring the discovery of the ACE Study and the science that helped the world better understand trauma.

**9:40 – 9:55 AM**

### **Trauma-Informed Opening Housekeeping Notes & Survivor-Centered Welcome**

#### **Jamie Huysman, PsyD, LCSW**

Founder & Executive Director  
STAR Network Foundation®

Participants are welcomed into a trauma-informed space that prioritizes dignity, safety, and personal choice.

Participants are reminded:

- You are free to step away at any time
- Take breaks when needed
- Regulate your nervous system in ways that work for you
- Listen only to what feels helpful today

This gathering is designed to support healing, learning, and connection.

Guiding Question:

Who helped you survive – and who might you help next?

## **Global Participation Day**

Today participants are joining this gathering from across the United States and around the world. This moment reminds us that while trauma may be universal, the capacity for healing is universal as well.

Throughout today, you will hear not just from experts—but from individuals who have transformed lived experience into leadership.

**9:55 – 10:10 AM**

### **Survivor Leadership Reflection**

#### **From Trauma to Transformation: Data to Dignity Survivor Leadership in a Global Movement**

Omer Golan  
Founder & CEO

MyWhatIf Foundation and STAR Network Foundation Partnership  
Exploring how lived experience can evolve into leadership that strengthens communities and inspires systemic change.

Guiding Question:

How can lived experience become a force for leadership, connection, and systemic change?

**10:10 – 10:30 AM**

### **Youth Resilience Spotlight**

Jennifer Libby, MSW, LCSW  
Psychotherapist, Founder, Speaker and Changemaker

PROMLY Youth Ambassador (TBC)

Representing PROMLY

Young leaders share how peer-driven resilience initiatives are helping transform youth mental-health awareness and prevention.

Guiding Question:

What does resilience look like when it is led by the next generation?

**10:30 – 10:55 AM**

### **Leading the Next 30 Years of Change**

The Honorable Patrick J. Kennedy II  
Co-Founder, The Kennedy Forum | Former U.S. Representative (D-RI)

A national leader advancing mental health parity and systems reform.

**10:55 – 11:00 AM**

**STAR Global Impact Award**

**Public Health Impact in Trauma Science**

2026 Honoree

Robert F. Anda, MD, MS

Former Senior Scientist

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Co-Principal Investigator, ACE Study and Founder, ACE Interface

Recognizing leadership that transformed childhood adversity into a global public-health priority.

Presented by

The Hon. Patrick J. Kennedy

Founder

The Kennedy Forum

Recipient of the 2025 STAR NeuroLeadership Award

Jamie Huysman, PsyD, LCSW

Founder & Executive Director

STAR Network Foundation

**11:00 – 11:10 AM**

**Regulate & Reset: Guided Pause for Integration**

**11:10 – 11:30 AM**

**What We Learned – and What Comes Next**

Diana H. Fishbein, PhD

Senior Scientist

Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Co-Founder & Co-Director, National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives

Thirty years after the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study reshaped our understanding of trauma, this session explores how the science has evolved—and what it now demands of us. Dr. Fishbein will examine how advances in prevention science, neurodevelopment, and public health are transforming our ability to identify risk, strengthen resilience, and intervene earlier across systems. This session serves as a critical bridge in the day—from insight to responsibility—challenging leaders across sectors to align science with systems and accelerate the next generation of trauma-informed prevention.

Guiding Question:

What has ACEs science revealed—and what responsibility does that place on us now as a society?

**11:30 - 12:00 PM**

## **From Awareness to Prevention: Rewriting the Conditions for Childhood in America**

Dr. Melissa T. Merrick  
President & CEO, Prevent Child Abuse America  
Former Lead Scientist, CDC ACE Study

This session reframes trauma not as an individual failure, but as a systems-level challenge—and a shared responsibility. Grounded in decades of research, this session demonstrates how policy, systems, and community conditions shape outcomes for children and families.

Guiding Question:

What would it take to build a society where childhood adversity is prevented—not just treated?

**12:00 – 1:00 PM**

## **Lunch & Global Prevention and Recovery Innovation Marketplace**

The marketplace encourages collaboration between organizations working to transform trauma recovery and prevention worldwide. Participants can engage directly with organizations and explore resources and partnerships in real time.

## **Chapter II - Voices of Recovery**

**1:00 – 1:40 PM**

### **Your Brain on ACEs: Why the Past Lives in the Present—and How to Change It**

Mercie Josina DiGangi, DO  
Regional Chair, Child Abuse Prevention Program  
Kaiser Permanente Southern California

Guiding Question:

If ACEs shape the brain's response to stress and relationships, how do we interrupt those patterns and reclaim agency in our lives?

**1:40 – 2:15 PM**

**From ACEs to PACEs: Defining the Next Era of Prevention**

Jennifer Hays-Grudo, PhD

Lab Co-Director

Regents Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Center for Health Sciences at Oklahoma State University.

Director and Principal Investigator of the Center for Integrative Research on Childhood Adversity (CIRCA)

Amanda Sheffield Morris, PhD

Lab Co-Director

George Kaiser Family Foundation Chair and Regents Professor in the Department of Psychology at Oklahoma State University

Building on three decades of ACEs science, this session introduces the science of Positive Childhood Experiences (PACEs), demonstrating how supportive relationships and environments can buffer adversity and fundamentally change life trajectories. Dr. Hays-Grudo and Dr. Morris explore how positive childhood experiences buffer adversity, strengthen neurodevelopment, and create scalable pathways for healing across families, schools, and communities worldwide.

Guiding Question:

What helps people not just survive adversity—but truly heal and thrive?

**2:15 – 3:00 PM**

**The Wholehearted Global Forum**

Beyond Awareness

Curated by

AJ King

Founder, Wholehearted

A curated hour featuring insights and practices from global trauma-recovery leaders and survivors exploring what healing requires beyond awareness.

Guiding Question:

What does healing require beyond awareness—and how do we create spaces where it can happen?

**3:00 – 3:10 PM**

**Regulate & Reset: Guided Pause for Integration**

**3:10 – 3:25 PM**

**Survivor Leadership Reflection**

When the System Failed Me – What I Chose to Build

Jesse Kohler

Founder and President, The Change Campaign

A reflection on transforming personal adversity into systemic change.

Guiding Question:

When systems fail us, what does it take to turn personal pain into purposeful change?

**3:25 – 4:00 PM**

**Addiction, ACEs & the Brain: From Trauma to Recovery**

Moderator

Doug Tieman

Behavioral Health Executive

Chairman of the Board of Directors

STAR Network Foundation®

Panelists:

John Curtiss

CEO, The Retreat

Doug Leech

Executive Leader, Ascension Recovery Services

Dr. Aaron Ramirez

Clinical Psychologist, Ashley Addiction Treatment

Jack Britton, LPC, LADC

Vice President of Clinical Services , Turnbridge

Dr. Maggie Tipton, PsyD

Senior Director of Psychological Services

Caron Treatment Centers

Guiding Question:

How does trauma shape addiction—and what does real recovery require?

**4:00 – 4:20 PM**

**Survivor Leadership Reflection**

**Psychological Freedom**

**Breaking Cycles of Coercive Control**

Richard Grannon

International Ambassador

STAR Network Foundation®

Educator on Narcissistic Abuse & Psychological Freedom

Guiding Question:

What does psychological freedom look like—and how do we reclaim it?

**4:20 – 4:30 PM**

**Regulate & Reset: Guided Pause for Integration**

**Chapter III - Building the Next 30 Years**

**4:30 – 4:45 PM**

**Greater than Gravity: From Personal Tragedy to Global Movement**

Michael Menard

Founder, United Against Childhood Trauma (UACT)

A powerful reflection on transforming personal tragedy into a global movement to protect children and confront the hidden epidemic of childhood trauma.

Guiding Question:

How do we transform personal tragedy into a movement that protects future generations?

**4:45 – 5:20 PM**

**When Systems Work: Building Care Survivors Can Trust**

Moderators:

Thomas G. Bognanno  
Founder, Alliance Practice LLC

Jamie Huysman, PsyD, LCSW  
Founder & Executive Director  
STAR Network Foundation®

Panelists:

Dr. Mya O. Price  
Executive Vice President & Chief Social Impact Officer  
Creating Healthier Communities

George Rapier III, MD  
Chairman & CEO, WellMed Medical Management

Michael J. Menard  
Founder, United Against Childhood Trauma (UACT)

Guiding Question:

What must change for systems to truly earn the trust of survivors?

5:20 – 5:25 PM

“The Empty Chair for the  
Children We Lost”

“The Children We  
Can Still Protect”

While we honor those we’ve lost,  
we also recognize the millions of  
children whose futures are still  
unwritten—and **within our  
power to protect.**

Participants observe a brief  
moment of silence.



**5:25 – 5:40 PM**

**Thirty years after the ACE Study changed our understanding of trauma, this declaration marks a shared commitment to the next generation of prevention, recovery, and resilience.**

The ACEs Next 30 Declaration: A Global Commitment to the Next Generation

This declaration represents a coordinated global commitment across sectors to transform trauma recovery, prevention, and resilience over the next three decades.

Participants are invited to affirm their commitment in real time.

Introduced by

Jamie Huysman, PsyD, LCSW  
Founder & Executive Director  
STAR Network Foundation®  
Declaration Participants

Guiding Question:

What commitments must we make today to protect the next generation?

**5:40 – 5:50 PM**

**Global Initiatives Launch Announcements**

**Advancing the Next 30 Years of Trauma Recovery and Prevention**

These initiatives represent the first wave of coordinated global action.

- ACEs Connection – a revitalized global community platform emerging from the PACEs Connection network
- STAR Network Global Trauma Consortium  
First convening announced for October 2026 – World Mental Health Day

## **The Call Forward**

Participants are invited to expand trauma-informed recovery and prevention through STAR Network Foundation and the ACEs Connection Chapters, a global community initiative advancing survivor leadership, strengthening families, and protecting the next generation.

Participants will be invited to take immediate next steps—joining fellowship, launching community initiatives, or partnering in global efforts.

Guiding Question:

How can each of us contribute to building a world where healing is accessible to all?

**6:00 – 6:30 PM**

## **Optional Global Networking & Partnership Marketplace (Immediately Following)**

Additional Note

This is a survivor-centered experience. Participants are encouraged to engage in ways that support their well-being, including taking breaks or stepping away at any time.

Program Notice

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# STAR NeuroLeadership Award Recipients

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Vincent J. Felitti, MD, FACP  
Co-Principal Investigator, ACE Study  
Recipient of the 2026 STAR  
NeuroLeadership Award



The Hon. Patrick J. Kennedy  
The Kennedy Forum  
Recipient of the 2025 STAR  
NeuroLeadership Award



Robert F. Anda, MD, MS  
ACE Interface  
Recipient of the 2026 STAR  
NeuroLeadership Award

# Speakers



Mercie Josina DiGangi, DO  
Kaiser Permanente S. California  
Regional Chair



Diana H. Fishbein, PhD  
NSPC  
Co-Founder & Co-Director



Omer Golan  
MyWhatIf Foundation  
Founder & CEO



Richard Grannon  
STAR Network Foundation  
International Ambassador



Jennifer Hays-Grudo, PhD  
CIRCA  
Developmental Psychologist, Researcher,  
and Regents Professor



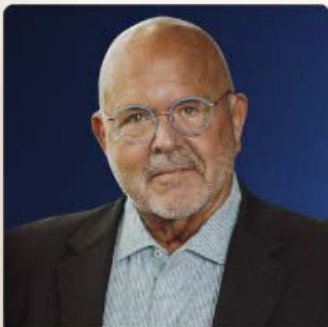
Jamie Huysman, PsyD, LCSW  
STAR Network Foundation  
Founder, Executive Director



Jesse Kohler  
The Change Campaign  
Founder & President



Jennifer Libby, MSW, LCSW  
Promly  
Psychotherapist, Founder, Speaker and  
Changemaker



Michael J. Menard  
United Against Childhood Trauma  
Founder



Dr. Melissa T. Merrick  
Prevent Child Abuse America  
President & CEO



Amanda Sheffield Morris, PhD  
George Kaiser Family Foundation  
Foundation Chair

# Panelists



Thomas Bognanno  
Alliance Practice, LLC  
Founder & Principal



Jack Britton, LPC, LADC  
Turnbridge  
Vice President of Clinical Services



John Curtiss  
The Retreat  
Co-Founder/CEO/President



Doug Leech  
Ascension Recovery Services  
Founder and CEO



Dr. Mya O. Price  
Creating Healthier Communities  
Executive Vice President & Chief Social Impact Officer



Aaron Ramirez, PsyD  
Ashley Addiction Treatment  
Clinical Psychologist



George M. Rapier III, M.D.  
WellMed Medical Management  
Founder, CEO



Doug Tieman  
STAR Network Foundation  
Chairman of the Board



Maggie Tipton, PsyD  
Caron Treatment Centers  
Senior Director of Psychological Services

## **THE STAR DECLARATION**

The Next 30 Years of ACEs & Resilience

We gather at a defining moment.

Thirty years ago, the ACEs research led by Vincent J. Felitti and Robert Anda changed how the world understands childhood adversity.

Today, we commit to what comes next.

We recognize that trauma impacts lives across generations and that healing is possible through connection, science, and community.

We believe:

- Prevention must become a global priority
- Trauma recovery must be accessible to all
- Lived experience must be elevated alongside science
- Children's wellbeing must be the foundation of our future

Together, we commit to advancing systems, policies, and communities that ensure every child has the opportunity to grow, heal, and thrive.

This declaration stands in alignment with the movement to establish a Decade of the Child — placing children at the center of our shared future.

**The next 30 years begin today.**



The Decade of the Child is led by Diana Fishbein, PhD (National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and Penn State University) and Christina Bethell, PhD (Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative, Johns Hopkins University)

Our core team includes: Anthony Biglan, PhD (Values to Action and Oregon Research Institute); Charles Bruner (Integrated Care for Kids/ InCK Marks Initiative and the Child Health Equity Leadership Team); Jesse Kohler (Change Campaign); Margaret Kuklinski, PhD (Social Development Research Group, University of Washington); Ronald Prinz, PhD (Research Center for Child Well-Being, University of South Carolina); John Roman, PhD (NORC University of Chicago); Zili Sloboda, ScD Applied Prevention Science International); Jessica Stavig, Executive Director (National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives); Leslie Walker, MD (Department of Pediatrics, Seattle Children's Hospital); William Wiecek, PhD (Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation).

For more information, contact us at:

**[decadeofthechild@gmail.com](mailto:decadeofthechild@gmail.com)**

Funding for this effort is provided by the NOVA Institute for Health



## Organizational Endorsements (updated January 2026)

1. Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE)
2. Applied Prevention Science International
3. Integrated Care for Kids/InCK Marks Network
4. HEDCO Institute for Evidence-Based Educational Practice
5. Association for Positive Behavior Support (APBS)
6. itotheN | Intergenerational Impact
7. Positive Childhood Alliance North Carolina
8. Institute for Research and Development "Utrip"
9. Partnership to End Addiction
10. Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development
11. Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy & Practice
12. Center for Whole Health Learning in K-12
13. Association For Behavior Analysis International
14. Nova Institute for Health
15. Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice
16. PACEs Connection
17. Society of Behavioral Medicine
18. Advancing Parenting
19. The Larry A. Green Center for the Advancement of Primary Health Care for the Public Good
20. Brain Insights
21. Educate Tomorrow's Parents
22. Achieve Greatness
23. Safe Kids Now National Network
24. Kros Learning Group
25. Research Institute for Key Indicators Data Lab
26. Communities for Youth
27. The Multidisciplinary Center on Childhood, Public Policy & Sustainable Society
28. Just Learning Systems
29. Association of Children's Museums
30. Wellbeing Action for Youth
31. RISE Institute
32. Prevention Research Center, Penn State University
33. Early Emotional Development Program Washington University School of Medicine
34. Social Development Research Group, School of Social Work, University of Washington
35. Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports
36. Society for Prevention Research
37. Family Centered Treatment Foundation
38. The Robin Foundation
39. Growth UP Education, LLC
40. The Faithful City
41. National Parenting Education Network
42. Southern Christian Services for Children and Youth, Inc.
43. Anago Consulting Inc
44. Trauma Informed Oregon
45. InsightFormation, Inc.
46. National Parenting Education Network (NPEN)
47. CHC: Creating Healthier Communities
48. Substance Abuse Prevention Team of Essex County, Inc NYS
49. Kindheart Center
50. New Hanover County Resiliency Task Force