



2026 Chromosome 18 Conference

Speaker Bios



Neale Parker, Chromosome 18 CEO

Welcome and Research Update, July 13, 9:00-10:30 am

Neale Parker, CEO has been with the Chromosome 18 Registry & Research Society for over 10 years . With over 20 years of experience with working with Not For Profits (NFP) in the varied capacity of staff, board chair, and volunteer, he brings a unique experience to running this wide reaching organization. He currently resides in San Antonio, TX along with his wife, Cynthia, who volunteers at many Chromosome 18 events throughout the year.



Dave Aldrup, Chromosome 18 President

Welcome and Research Update, July 13, 9:00-10:30 am

Dave Aldrup has been involved with Chromosome 18 for many years and took over the position of President on January 1st, 2023. He retired from a career in industrial automation and control that included jobs across the United States and projects in multiple countries. He currently resides in Loudon, TN with his wife Tam and self-advocate son, David Jr.



Jannine Cody, PhD, Chromosome 18 Founder

Welcome and Research Update, July 13, 9:00-10:30 am

Jannine DeMars Cody, Ph.D., is a Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at UT Health San Antonio where she serves as Director of the Chromosome 18 Clinical Research Center. In 1990, Jannine founded the Chromosome 18 Registry and Research Society as a way to bring affected families together and to learn from each other. While pursuing her Ph.D. in human genetics, she developed the multidisciplinary Chromosome 18 Clinical Research Center.



Jon Gelfond, PhD

Research Updates and Biostatistics, July 13, 10:45-11:45 am

Jon is from Towson, Maryland near Baltimore, where his parents were psychiatry residents. When 6 months old, his family moved to San Antonio, Texas where practiced psychiatry after his father left the army. He is the middle of 5 children with 2 sisters. As a child he wanted to be an architect but spent most of his time programming BASIC on computers. He attended UT Austin majoring in physics and philosophy. Then he went to UT Health San Antonio Medical School and if that wasn't enough, he completed his PhD in biostatistics at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. His professional interests and expertise lie in clinical trials, aging, genomics, and the chromosome 18 conditions. He is married to Cheryl, a pharmacist and professor at Incarnate Word University Feik School of Pharmacy. They have two children, Alexandra age 10 & Isaac age 14. In his spare time, he likes to read, run, and argue about who makes the best pizza.



Therapy Animals of San Antonio (TASA)

Therapy Animals Visit, July 13, 10:45 - 11:45 am

TASA is an all volunteer, 501c3 non-profit and our mission is "Bringing People & Animals Together for Healing". Our organization trains, tests, registers and supports therapy animal teams (human & animal) so they can go out into the community and visit hospitals, nursing homes, rehab facilities and numerous other types of facilities to fulfill our mission.



Beverly Oakes and Therapy Cat, Zane Grey (TASA)

Therapy Animals Visit, July 13, 10:45 - 11:45 am

Beverly has been a registered therapy team with both cats and dogs for 26 years. She has been with TASA for 22 Years.



Michelle Dunn and Therapy Dog, Bentley (TASA)

Therapy Animals Visit, July 13, 10:45 - 11:45 am

Michelle and Bentley have been a therapy team for about 4 years.



Barbara Shirley and Therapy Dog, Janie (TASA)

Therapy Animals Visit, July 13, 10:45 - 11:45 am

Barbara has been a therapy team for about 7 years – 3 years with her current dog, Janie.



Deb Spears and Therapy Dog, Lucy (TASA)

Therapy Animals Visit, July 13, 10:45 - 11:45 am

Deb and Lucy are a new therapy team that started with Therapy Animals of San Antonio in October 2025.



Magik Theatre

Interactive Performance, July 13, 1:00 - 2:30 pm

Magik Theatre has been providing San Antonio's children and their families with professional, accessible, literature-based theatre and education since 1994. Magik Theatre's mission is to create theatrical experiences that ignite imagination, spark curiosity, inspire empathy, and foster a lifetime love of learning in young people.



Michelle Parish, SLPD, CCC-SLP

Augmentative and Alternative Communication, July 13, 1:00 pm - 2:00 pm

Michelle Parish, SLPD, CCC-SLP is the Clinical Coordinator and an Assistant Professor for the Speech-Language Pathology program in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders. She received her BS in Deaf education from Texas Tech University, her MS in speech-language pathology from Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, and her clinical doctorate from Northwestern University. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Health Sciences at UT Health San Antonio. She has over 26 years of clinical experience in the field and has worked in the adult and pediatric populations. However, most of her career has been spent in the pediatric population in various settings with complex communicators. Her areas of research interest include Augmentative and Alternative Communication, caregiver training, and scholarship of teaching and learning.



Meredith Nahm Zozus, PhD

CRC Projects, July 13, 1:00 - 2:00 pm

Dr. Meredith Zozus is the Director for Clinical Research Informatics and the Clinical Informatics Research Division Chief at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSCSA). Prior to joining UTHSCSA, Zozus was associate professor of Biomedical Informatics at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS). At UAMS she led a very active research program in Clinical Research Informatics. Zozus joined UAMS after an 18-year career at Duke University where she served as the director for the data center at the Duke Clinical Research Institute and the associate director for Clinical Research Informatics. In addition to multiple published articles, she has led the development of eight national/international data standards, serves as the Chief Editor for the Good Clinical Data Management Practices international practice standard for clinical research data management and recently published *The Data Book*, covering fundamental principles behind the collection and management of research data.



Donna M. Lehman, PhD

Dysmyelination Project, July 13th, 1:00 - 2:00 pm

Dr. Lehman is a Professor of Human Genomics in the Department of Health and Biomedical Sciences at Texas A&M University–San Antonio. Dr. Lehman's academic area of expertise is in human genomics. With dual training in bench and computational approaches, her research program addresses the health challenges of both common and rare disorders through a long-standing translational program utilizing state-of-the-art stem-cell and multi-omics methods to identify and characterize the genetic basis for these conditions. A major focus of her lab is the modeling of brain development to understand genetic influence on metabolic disorders such as obesity, behavioral disorders such as autism, and structural disorders such as leukodystrophies. Building on her early doctoral research with mouse models of hypomyelination, she is excited to return to this significant health issue using new, cutting-edge methodologies to facilitate new therapeutic discoveries.

Kameel Karkar, MD

Neurology, July 13, 3:30 - 4:30 pm



Dr. Kameel Karkar is a professor of Neurology at the University of Texas Health San Antonio. He graduated from the University of Chicago School of Medicine and subsequently completed residency training in Neurology (at Washington University) and in epilepsy (at UC San Francisco). Since joining UT Health San Antonio in 2009, Dr. Karkar has served patients through clinical work and community service with the Epilepsy Foundation. At the national level, Dr. Karkar has been active with the American Epilepsy Society (AES), serving on multiple committees. Dr. Karkar's current epilepsy research has focused on the brain's recovery from postictal suppression after focal to bilateral tonic-clonic seizures. Dr. Karkar has served as the medical director of the Chromosome 18 Clinical Research Center since 2024. At the CRC, Dr. Karkar has participated in leadership meetings, engaged with participating families, and contributed to research projects including the seizure survey and video screening for FSHD2.

Michele Pullen Sorrell, M.S., BCBA, LBA

Behavior 101, July 13, 3:30 - 4:30 pm



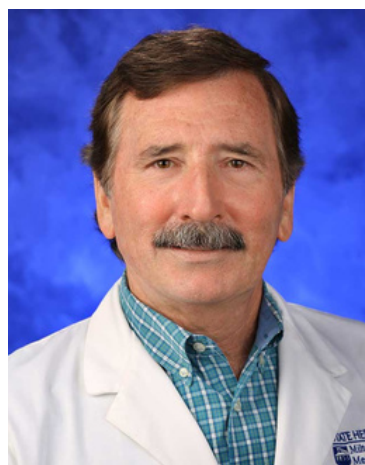
Michele Pullen Sorrell is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) in San Antonio, TX and works with individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). She has over 5 years of working directly with individuals with special needs and has been working in the field of Applied Behavior Analysis since 2022. Her expertise is in supporting clinical teams and families of autistic individuals in gaining adaptive and communication skills and reducing challenging behaviors in order to increase quality of life for that individual. In addition to clinical practice, Michele has knowledge and experience in safety skill instruction, with an emphasis in water safety. She has published research where she taught 3 autistic boys multiple pool-side safety skills, and has another study in the publishing process where she and the team taught 3 autistic children to make a request to enter a pool and tolerate waiting for access. Michele is passionate about the quality of life, safety, and well-being of vulnerable populations.



Kevin Cooley, Founder of Drumming Around

Interactive Drumming Performance, July 13, 3:30 - 4:30 pm

With over 40 years of professional performance and 17 years of facilitation experience, Kevin Cooley helps groups find their collective pulse. As the founder of Drumming Around, Kevin is dedicated to a mission of helping people Connect, Grow, and Thrive. His diverse background includes work in corporate team-building, mental health facilities, schools, libraries, and retirement communities. Kevin is a trained HealthRHYTHMS® and Rhythm2Recovery facilitator who uses rhythm as a functional tool for stress reduction and community well-being. Whether leading a session for a clinical group or a large public event, Kevin ensures that every participant leaves with a renewed sense of connection and energy.



Dr. Daniel E. Hale

Endocrinology Q&A, July 13, 4:30 - 5:30 pm

Daniel E. Hale, M.D., is a tenured Professor of Pediatrics at Penn State University in Hershey, PA and is the Chief of Pediatric Endocrinology and Diabetes. Dr. Hale was formerly at UTHealth San Antonio (1994–2016). He is the Medical Director for the Chromosome 18 Research Center and a member of the Medical Advisory Board for the Chromosome 18 Registry and Research Society.



Leslie Bellieu

What's Next? Preparing for Independence, July 13, 4:30 - 5:30pm

Leslie has spent more than 25 years serving adults with learning differences, but her work has always been rooted in something deeper than care—it's been a response to the heart of God. As CEO & Co-Founder of Southwind Fields, she is building a place where people are not defined by limitations, but invited into lives of dignity, purpose, and belonging. What started as a calling has grown into a movement: creating environments that reflect the Kingdom of God, where every person is seen, valued, and given the opportunity to flourish.

Her background spans executive leadership, clinical care, and advocacy, but what has shaped her most is the belief that every life carries God-given worth.

Leslie also serves in ministry at Life Point Church and remains active in advocacy through Autism Lifeline Links and Matthew 4:16 Ministries.



Charles Morris

What's Next? Preparing for Independence, July 13, 4:30 - 5:30pm

Charles brings over 35 years of experience serving individuals with learning differences, shaped not only by his leadership in the field, but by his own lived experience within the Usher's Syndrome/RP community. As Chief Program Officer & Co-Founder of Southwind Fields, he carries a deep conviction that people are built for connection, relationships, and bringing their unique gifts to the table of their own community. His background spans roles in education, training, and program leadership, including Providence Place, Hill Country MHDD Center, and years of advocacy for client rights. But what defines Charles most is his ability to truly understand and champion those Southwind serves. He is especially passionate about empowering individuals with vision and hearing loss to live fully engaged, purpose-driven lives.



Angie Moss, RD, MPH

Healthy Eating & Portion Control, July 13, 10:45 - 11:45 am

Angie Moss, RD, MPH, is a registered dietitian, public health professional, and passionate advocate for people with developmental disabilities. She currently works with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment as part of the State team overseeing the WIC Program, where she partners with communities across Colorado and works with the USDA on nutrition policy and risk guidance. Angie's professional expertise is deeply rooted in personal experience. As the mother of four adult children, including her son, Zachary, she understands both the joys and challenges families experience. A former Chair of the Colorado Developmental Disabilities Council, her journey with Zachary has made her a fierce advocate for inclusion and the belief that every person deserves to live a full life as a valued member of their community and not on the sidelines. Angie is committed to helping individuals discover practical ways to improve their health and well-being. She believes that food is more than fuel. Food is the foundation for health, energy, well-being, and living life to the fullest. Rather than taking favorite foods away, Angie teaches realistic, sustainable strategies that help people enjoy the foods they love while creating healthy habits that support lifelong wellness.



Bluebonnet Scottish Country Dancers

Scottish Country Dancing Practice, July 13, 5:30 - 6:30 pm

We are members of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society, an international group of people who love to dance to Scottish music. We first emphasize enjoying the dance and then teach the skills to perfect the dance.



Gordon Hartman

Keynote, July 14, 9:00 - 10:30 am

Gordon Hartman is a San Antonio-based philanthropist, former homebuilder, and the visionary founder of Morgan's Wonderland—the world's first Ultra-Accessible™, fully inclusive theme park. Inspired by his daughter Morgan, who was born with Tatton-Brown-Rahman Syndrome (TBRS), Gordon has dedicated his life to creating spaces where people of all abilities can thrive. Gordon serves as Founder and Board Chair of Morgan's, the nonprofit organization behind a growing portfolio of Ultra-Accessible™ ventures, including Morgan's Wonderland, Morgan's Inspiration Island, Morgan's Sports, Morgan's Camp, Morgan's MAC, and the Morgan's Inclusion Institute. Together, these initiatives have welcomed millions of guests and redefined global standards for accessibility and inclusion. Through the Gordon Hartman Family Foundation and Morgan's, Gordon has contributed over \$303 million to inclusive causes. A signatory of the Giving Pledge, he has committed to donating 95% of his wealth. His leadership has earned him numerous accolades, including the Governor's Trophy, induction into the Texas Business Hall of Fame, San Antonio Sports Hall of Fame and the IAAPA Hall of Fame. He also holds an honorary doctorate in social work from Our Lady of the Lake University.



Rick Guidotti

Positive Exposure, July 14, 10:45 am - 12:00 pm

Rick Guidotti, an award-winning photographer, has spent the past twenty-five years collaborating internationally with nonprofit organizations, hospitals, medical schools, educational institutions, museums, galleries, advocacy groups, and communities to affect a change in societal attitudes towards individuals living with genetic, physical, behavioral or intellectual differences; his work has been published in newspapers, magazines, and journals as diverse as Elle, GQ, People, the American Journal of Medical Genetics, the Lancet, Spirituality and Health, the Washington Post, Atlantic Monthly and LIFE Magazine.



Lindsey McGehee, MA, LPC

Emotions, July 14, 2:30 - 3:45pm

Lindsey McGehee, MA, LPC is a psychotherapist in their hometown of San Antonio, Texas, and doctoral student in Psychology at Meridian University. Lindsey is the founder of San Antonio Family Therapist, specializing in neurodiversity-affirming care for individuals of all ages, couples, and families, including those navigating grief, trauma, complex family systems, and disabilities. Lindsey is Autistic and brings lived experience as a homeschooler, educator, mom, and grandma to her clinical work. At this conference, they will speak on using the power of play and imagination for coping with big feelings and difficult experiences.



Dr. Nancy Cheak-Zamora

Healthcare Self-Advocacy, July 15, 11:45 am - 12:45 pm

Dr. Cheak-Zamora earned her Ph.D. in Public Health with an emphasis in health policy and management from St. Louis University. She has 20 years of experience working with autistic children and youth both clinically, as an Applied Behavioral Therapist, and in research settings. Additionally, she has experience as a health services researcher in areas of health care transition service, health care quality, and measurement development and examination of health status, health care transition service delivery and quality of care of children and youth with disabilities. She serves as the Chair-Elect for the Maternal and Child Health Section of the American Public Health Association and is on the executive committee for the International Health Care Transition Research Consortium.



David & Jennifer Knox

MakeGood Mobility Trainer Makers, Tabling July 12

David and Jennifer are a husband-and-wife team from Gallatin, Tennessee, who partner with MakeGood Inc. to build custom 3D-printed mobility trainers for children with mobility challenges, completely free of charge to families. Since joining the program, they've completed and delivered their first mobility trainers and are excited to continue helping more children gain independence and explore their world. Stop by their table to learn more about the Mobility Trainer program, see a scaled model of the trainer, ask questions about the build process, and learn how families can get connected with a maker.