2017 RETHINKING AUTISM CONFERENCE SPEAKERS



Matt Hayes is an advocate in the Facilitated Communication Training (FCT) movement. FCT uses physical and verbal support to bring communication to individuals who suffer from speechlessness. Autistic from birth, Matt began communicating at the age of five through Facilitated Communication Training, an alternative and augmentative form of communication. At age 6, he wrote his first poem, "Trapped in Silence". A member of the Saint Louis Poetry Society since the age of 15, he is an active participant in their writers' workshops. Currently the subject of a PBS documentary on autism which will be featured at the 2017 Rethinking Autism Conference, Matt is eager to build bridges between autists and neurotypical individuals everywhere. His primary writing focus is poetry. Reading the works of poets eager to expand the boundaries of their craft is both his inspiration and challenge. Matt has spoken at Yale University, presented his works as the featured guest poet at the Telluride Talking Gourds Poetry Society, been interviewed on KOTO radio, was selected as a featured emerging poet on a Daniel Ladinsky CD of poetry, presented at various autism conferences and communication workshops, and regularly contributes critiques to various published poets. He currently collaborates on a forthcoming book of friendship tentatively titled The Possibility of Joy. After years of dedicated practice, Matt is now nearly independent in his typing and is able to speak what he types. A sunshine and water fan, Matt splits his time between a tiny Lake Erie island and his native Saint Louis, Missouri. (Matt Hayes Headshot © Alex Kendall Photography)



Tracy Thresher is an advocate for people with disabilities. He lives and works in Barre, Vermont. In 1990, Tracy was one of the first individuals with autism at his service agency, Washington County Mental Health Services (WCMHS), to be introduced to typing as a means to communicate. He presents at local, statewide, and national workshops and conferences. Tracy also consults with local schools, is a member of the Vermont Statewide Communication Task Force, and does ongoing work with Green Mountain Self-Advocates of Montpelier, Vermont. Now an employee of WCMHS as an advocate and educator, Tracy mentors teenagers and adults and leads trainings on communication. In 2013, Tracy was recognized as a Master Trainer by the Institute on Communication and Inclusion at Syracuse University. He is one of the stars, along with Larry Bissonnette, in the documentary film Wretches and Jabberers directed by Gerardine Wurzburg.



Christine King, COTA/L has worked in the field of Occupational Therapy for over 2o years. She has experience in both public school setting as well as private clinics. She has spent the past 12 years at Project CHILLD, a pediatric sensory integration clinic in Beverly, MA, where she has worked with children with autism spectrum disorder and other sensory motor challenges as an OT as well as the coordinator of integrated listening therapies. Christine is and FCT Trainer and believes the least dangerous assumption is to presume competence in clients with sensory motor and communication difficulties, in order to appropriately support them to reach their full potential.



Casey DePriest, MT-BC, is a Certified Neurologic Music Therapist, FCT Trainer, and Founder of Optimal Rhythms, Inc. / ACCESS Academy, a non-profit organization committed to educating the community on the latest autism research related to movement differences in autism. ACCESS Academy is a therapeutic day school and alternative placement that utilizes a neurologic approach with autistic students with complex communication challenges who have struggled to make adequate academic progress in their previous educational placement. Casey has over 20 years of clinical experience and has presented at state, regional, and national conferences and is the Indiana Music Therapy Advocacy Task Force Chair.

Your conference committee is excited to welcome these esteemed self-advocates and professional, as well as others who will participate in our Conference Education Panel, Roundtable Discussions and Self-advocacy Spotlights.