

Speaker Bios:

Each panelist brings a unique perspective shaped by their personal or professional experiences with autism. These stories represent diverse approaches to advocacy, caregiving, and empowerment. Panelists will be introduced closer to the event.

Speakers: Featuring a diverse panel of local, Lewis County parents, professionals, advocates, and individuals with lived experience who will share in a focused, interactive session designed to empower and inspire attendees. These speakers include: Shawna Haller, Kristal Vega, Cassandra Whitaker, Victoria Romero, Cody Wells, & Sarah Young!

Session Title: Empowered Journeys: Stories of Strength and Advocacy in Autism

Session Description:

This breakout session is a heartfelt and inspiring panel discussion where 4-6 panelists will share their personal journeys of empowering their loved ones with autism—or even themselves. Originally planned as a lunch session, this discussion has been given its own dedicated time to allow participants to fully engage with the powerful stories and insights that will be shared.

Panelists will explore their experiences navigating the world of autism advocacy, how they've empowered autistic voices, and the lessons they've learned along the way. This is an opportunity for the audience to deeply connect with these narratives, reflecting on the strength, resilience, and love that have shaped their advocacy.

This session will also invite meaningful interaction, with participants encouraged to ask questions and share their own reflections in a supportive and collaborative environment. Whether you are a caregiver, professional, or self-advocate, etc., this session will provide a space to celebrate the triumphs and challenges of those on the autism spectrum, offering guidance and inspiration for others walking a similar path.

Learning Objectives:

Attendees will:

- Gain insight into the personal journeys of panelists as they empower autistic voices in their families or communities.
- Learn practical strategies for advocacy, from navigating IEPs and 504 Plans to fostering independence and self-advocacy for those with autism.
- Explore the emotional and social aspects of empowering individuals with autism, and how these stories can inspire strength and resilience in others.
- Participate in an open Q&A where they can engage directly with panelists, ask questions, and share their own experiences in a supportive environment.