

# 2026 Reclaiming Youth Seminars

## Preliminary List of Presenters & Topics

### **Indigenous Wisdom and Mental Health**

Larry Brendtro

The Circle of Courage integrates traditional Indigenous wisdom with contemporary science to form a powerful, simple insight—mental health results from the fulfillment of universal developmental needs for Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity. Meeting these needs creates resilience and well-being. But when these needs go unmet, a host of emotional and behavioral problems emerge.

The first to link Indigenous wisdom with modern science was Abraham Maslow who was profoundly influenced by his experience in the summer of 1938 living with Blackfoot First Nations people in Canada. He concluded that most emotional disturbance and destructive behavior are not signs of innate pathology but the result of unmet basic developmental needs, especially in childhood. He argued that mental health grows naturally when environments support normal human needs. Thus, the focus is not on diagnosing disorders or medicating undesired behavior, but building safe, secure, nurturing relationships with family, school, peers, and community. This discussion draws from the book *Cultures of Respect: Re-Righting History* (Martin Brokenleg & Larry Brendtro, 2025).

### **Rediscovering Lost Truths (Community Session)**

Larry Brendtro

With the rise of democracy, reformers sought to challenge the prevailing white supremacy view of Western Civilization—only to have their writings ignored or suppressed. Here is a quick sample of eminent thinkers whose “lost truths” are now being rediscovered: Charles Darwin countered the “survival of the fittest” notion, describing how humans evolved an instinct for compassion: Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you is the foundation of morality. Ruth Benedict, pioneer in American anthropology: People in insecure cultures seek to dominate one another. People in secure cultures seek to meet the needs of both individuals and the group.

Abraham Maslow describing the mental health of Indigenous people: As many as 80 to 90 percent of the Blackfoot people were mentally healthy, compared to perhaps only 10 to 20 percent of Americans. Marija Gimbutas, leading expert on egalitarian civilizations of Old Europe challenges the patriarchy: “It takes women to tame men and boys.”

### **Belonging: Circles the Foundations of Community**

#### **Building Inclusive Communities through the Circle of Courage and Circle Work**

Anna Brokenleg

In an era where educational landscapes are increasingly complex, the fundamental human need to belong remains the primary catalyst for growth, resilience, and academic success. This session explores the powerful intersection between the Circle of Courage model and Restorative Practices Circle work with students and staff, offering a blueprint for creating environments where every student and staff member feels seen, valued, and connected.

### **Same and Different**

Martin Brokenleg

Contemporary times show a social concern with sameness and differences among people. This session will define terms useful in thinking about social dynamics. Cultural and subculture norms influence youth and the adults who care about them. We will reconsider these patterns to enhance our professional skills.

### **Choice and Consequence (Community Session)**

Martin Brokenleg

Our professional and personal lives are motivated by our values. As we enter the social period called “The Post Secular World,” an awareness of our values becomes an increasingly important tool in youth work. Martin Brokenleg will lead an experience that focuses on an awareness of some of our values.

## **Planning Restorative Outcomes (PRO)**

Mark Freado

Planning Restorative Outcomes (PRO) is a strength-based assessment and evaluation process created within the Reclaiming Youth at Risk model. PRO engages young people as partners in understanding their life experiences, identifying unmet developmental needs, and building on their strengths. Grounded in the Circle of Courage—belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity—it shifts the focus from diagnosing problems to creating restorative plans that promote healing, resilience, and positive growth within the youth's relationships and environment.

Through a structured process with a relational approach, practitioners explore the youth's story, ecology, and coping strategies to uncover the meaning behind behavior and reframe challenges as opportunities for growth. At the same time, PRO guides adults and professional staff in making purposeful adjustments to their approach—shifting responses, expectations, and environments to better align with the young person's developmental needs. The result is a collaborative, action plan that strengthens relationships, builds competencies, and supports sustainable change across the young person's life.

## **Getting a G.R.I.P. (Gaining Relationship, Insight, and Power) with Students Who Usually Outwit Adults**

Mindy Guthrie

Working with youth in broken systems (educational and social) is not an easy task. More than ever, it is important for staff to get a "GRIP" (Gaining relationship, Insight and Power), in order to foster resiliency for students. This presentation is meant to inspire staff to have the courage to change what they can so they can continue to help re-engage the disengaged.

## **Reclaiming in the Ruins: Cultivating Cultures of Respect within Toxic Systems**

Vikki Hennard

Even the most dedicated youth care professional can feel paralyzed by a "toxic" system—one defined by zero-tolerance policies, chronic stress, and a deficit-based view of youth. Traditional disciplinary models often view youth at risk through a lens of deficit, focusing on the "broken" rather than the "whole." Drawing on the Circle of Courage and Resilient Alliances, this session moves beyond theoretical ideals to offer an "Incidental Reclaiming" toolkit for leaders, consultants, educators, and frontline staff, particularly in restrictive environments. Participants will learn how to maintain a "culture of respect" when the surrounding system demands coercion. We will explore strategies for "quiet leadership," using Response Ability Pathways (RAP) to create a micro-culture of safety and strength-based intervention, even when the macro-system remains stuck in a compliance-only mindset.

## **The Soul of the System: Reclaiming our Power to Heal (Community Session)**

Vikki Hennard

In high-stress environments like residential care, juvenile detention, and schools, the "system" often defaults to a language of compliance and control. But what happens to the educators and staff caught in that machinery? This session explores the "Soul of the System," shifting the focus from managing behavior to mentoring positive development. By bridging research with decades of frontline experience, the presenter shares insight on how to create a "Climate of Respect" even within toxic environments. This session is a call to action for every adult to reclaim their agency, protect their own "Circle of Courage," and rediscover the restorative power of respectful alliances.

## **The Spirit of Mastery: I Can Succeed**

Nick Jackson, Assistant Professor of Education, Augustana University

In this session participants will take a deep dive into the independence quadrant of the Circle of Courage. We will actively learn about concepts like cooperation over competition, learning from mistakes, growth mindset vs. fixed mindset, needing others, participation, and productive struggle.

## **Transformational Impact: Restoring Wholeness**

Sue Jones

Restoring Wholeness is a process that moves individuals from a state of brokenness to a state of harmony and renewed purpose. It's not about simply fixing problems or finding faults but promoting growth in ways that ultimately lead to positive outcomes. During this discussion, Sue will share her personal and professional experience as a Special Educator and Trauma Informed Practices Coach, focusing on enhancing adult capacity within organizations that serve youth and their families.

## **Collective Efficacy & Positive Work Culture: A Reclaiming Framework for Thriving**

Janice Kotowich

The responsibility of successful client/student outcomes cannot rest squarely on the frontline staff that support them. The responsibility of cultivating professional cultures that place the client/student at the heart of all decision-making falls to leaders. Therefore, leaders are ultimately responsible for mediating the challenges that clients/students and staff are facing in their environments. Leaders are responsible for creating an environment wherein staff can safely engage in meaning making and challenge themselves to deeply understand the best practices in their work. Complex systems require leaders to focus on what matters the most in improving their organizations. Solving the issues inherent in complex systems is best tackled by a team of people working collaboratively. A leader's role in these collaborative dialogues is key to organizational health and growth. Leaders who work side by side (equally not hierarchically) with their staff to uncover and collaborate on the key issues in their organizations will have the highest impact on positive change. John Hattie provides a definition of Collective Efficacy as teams of people that believe they can make a difference. This session will challenge all stakeholders to evaluate their role in fostering the culture of "together we can make a difference."

## **Healthy Morning Parenting Rituals That Work for Schools**

Steven Van Bockern, Aaron Dang, and Maggie Brusven

New studies by Reem Raouda (2025) highlight nine simple morning parenting behaviors associated with children who report greater happiness, resilience, and readiness for the day. This article summarizes these practices and connects them to the Schools That Matter model, a framework emphasizing the role of belonging, mastery, independence, generosity, safety, and adventure in educational settings. Parallels between home and school practices show how consistent, supportive rituals create a powerful ecosystem of thriving for young people.

