

# Kentucky's Child Care Breakthrough: Lessons for Leaders Facing Gridlock

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## Speaker Biographies



**Charles Aull**  
Vice President of Policy at the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce

Charles Aull is currently the Vice President of Policy at the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce. He began his journey at the KY Chamber of Commerce as a Senior Policy Analyst and has previously held multiple positions in public policy and legislature. Aull graduated from the University of Southern Indiana with a B.A. in History. He also holds a post-baccalaureate in Classics, Literature and Linguistics from Georgetown University, a master's in history from IU-Bloomington and a Ph.D. in Philosophy from IU-Bloomington.



**Ashley Novak Butler**  
Executive Director at Lift a Life Novak Family Foundation

Ashley Novak Butler serves as the Executive Director of the Lift a Life Novak Family Foundation. Her work includes developing and managing grant investments with the Foundation's strategic nonprofit partners, overseeing board communication and staff development, marketing, financial investments and grant evaluation. She joined the Foundation in 2010 and has since created and implemented their investment strategy in the key areas of hunger relief, student leadership development, juvenile diabetes, early childhood education and military family support.

Ashley serves on the board of various nonprofits including Thrive by 5 Louisville, Community Coordinated Child Care, Norton Children's Hospital Foundation, and the Ready for K Alliance leadership team, the Guiding Team. Prior to joining the Novak Family Foundation, she worked for Southwest Airlines as a Marketing and Corporate Relations Manager. Ashley earned a B.A. in Political Science and Human Organizational Development from Vanderbilt University and is from Louisville, Kentucky. She is married to Jonathan Butler and has three amazing children, Audrey, Claire, and Luke.



**Mariah Levison**  
CEO and President of Convergence

Mariah Levison serves as CEO and President of Convergence. With decades of experience, Mariah is a seasoned consensus-builder who excels in bringing diverse groups together to address critical state and national issues.

She catalyzes greater problem-solving capacity through frequent publications and speaking at venues such as the Council on Foundations, US Chamber, TED and many others. Mariah captured her expertise, wisdom, and years of experience in a new book co-written with Convergence Founder and First CEO, Rob Fersh, entitled, *From Conflict to Convergence: Coming Together to Solve Tough Problems*.

When she isn't working, Mariah can be found biking, cross-country skiing, or reading books with her two young sons and husband in Minneapolis.



**Gus LaFontaine**  
Co-Founder of LaFontaine Preparatory School  
and LaFontaine Early Learning Center

Gus LaFontaine is the founder of LaFontaine Preparatory School, a preschool through fifth-grade private school, and LaFontaine Early Learning Center, a birth to three-year-old childcare center, both located in Madison County. He is also the founder of The Nature Schools, which serves preschool through second-grade students with locations in Richmond and Lexington. He earned both his undergraduate degree in Elementary Education and his master's degree in Educational Leadership from Eastern Kentucky University. Gus is also a retired Lieutenant Colonel in the Kentucky Army National Guard and a Bronze Star recipient who served tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. He is married to Kristin LaFontaine, and together they share five children ranging in age from 9 to 14.



**Mandy Marler**  
Principal at Baldwin Consulting

Mandy Simpson Marler is a Principal with Baldwin Consulting. She specializes in navigating intricate policy landscapes to make progress on some of Kentucky's most complex issues, including child care, child welfare, housing, behavioral health, and nonprofit impact. Prior to joining Baldwin, Mandy served as Chief Policy Officer for Metro United Way in Louisville where she advocated for policies and investments increasing access to child care, including local zoning reforms, new state-level affordability programs, and historic investments from local and state governments. Previously, Mandy worked in communications for Jefferson County Public Schools and in print journalism covering education and local government.