



## **Communities In Schools of Nevada Staff Bios**

### **Tami Hance-Lehr, State Director & CEO**

Tami believes in the beauty of the world and the endless possibilities one can achieve through determination, positivity and catapulting over one goal, to race to the next. All done with the belief that doing “whatever it takes” doesn’t mean sacrifice, but exhibiting strength and smarts to master any challenges.

Exuberant and driven, Hance-Lehr played a leading role as a shareholder and senior vice president at Destinations by Design (DBD), for 26 years. Destinations by Design is the largest DMC and special event company in Las Vegas and is an innovator in creative, event management. In April, 2017 Hance-Lehr took a leap of faith and left DBD in pursuit of a purpose driven life. Shortly after, she joined the CIS of Nevada team as Resource Development Director. In this role she expanded our donor base and partnership effort across the state while strengthening relationships with long time donors. After a year in the Resource Development position, Tami was awarded the promotion to State Director and CEO of CIS of Nevada.

Being a leader represents a significant part of how she lives her life. Since moving to Las Vegas in 1984, Hance-Lehr has been passionate about her community. At the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), she aligned herself early on with empowering women, serving as president of the Theta ETA chapter of Sigma Kappa in 1991. Graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree, with an emphasis in Communication Studies, Hance-Lehr leveraged her love of Las Vegas and ventured into a career in the hospitality industry.

In 2014 Hance-Lehr served as the president of the Las Vegas Hospitality Association (LVHA), the largest hospitality organization in Southern Nevada. She continues to volunteer for LVHA with the Chairman’s Club, which is the board dedicated to the future of the organization. She also served on the Meeting Planners International (MPI) Foundation U.S. Council for two years; 2014-2016. Giving back continues to be a priority, Hance-Lehr is a past president (2015-2017) of Nevada Women’s Philanthropy (NWP), a member driven, large impact grant making organization. Since its inception in 2005, NWP has granted over \$4 million dollars to Southern Nevada area non-profits. She also currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Nevada Community Foundation. In 2016 Hance-Lehr was awarded a Leadership Badge from the Girl Scouts of Southern Nevada.

### **Kelly Pearsall, Chief Financial Officer**

Kelly Pearsall brings to the organization nearly two decades of financial management experience in the private and nonprofit sectors, with a focus on developing policies and procedures to improve performance and productivity. Before joining Communities in Schools, she served as the CFO for Grant A Gift Autism Foundation, a nonprofit in partnership with UNLV School of Medicine and lead their efforts to establish the Ackerman Autism Center. Earlier, she worked for Boys and Girls Club of Southern Nevada and Apple, Inc in California. Kelly helped these organizations define their strategic direction, prepare new business plans, streamline financial and procedural policies, develop tactical partnerships and create monitoring and accountability systems. Balancing the need to maintain tight controls while also allowing and enabling creative and innovative programs to flourish. Kelly received an MBA from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, with a double major in Finance and Strategic Management.

### **Alexis Benavidez, Senior Director of Operations**

Alexis hails from Albuquerque, New Mexico where she received her BA in Mass Communication/Journalism & Political Science from the University of New Mexico. She holds her Non-Profit Management Certification from Arizona State University. Her career spans over 13 years in the non-profit management sector. Prior to joining Communities In Schools, Alexis was as a junior account executive at a large advertising firm in New Mexico. With a desire to shift her focus back to the community she grew up in, she transitioned to serving as a non-profit policy research analyst for a grassroots lobbying and PR firm. After a few years researching various causes she landed in the education reform field of charter schools where she ran professional conferences, membership drives, provided legislative support and handled internal/external communications with key stakeholders for six years. Alexis relocated to Las Vegas, Nevada in 2013 with a goal of continuing non-profit work and happily landed at CIS of Nevada as the Chief of Staff where she has served for the past six years. Alexis now proudly serves as the Director of Operations and enjoys the unique challenge of managing operational oversight while ensuring that everything CIS of Nevada engages in puts the students first.

**Laura Meyer, Senior Director of Grants, Program Support & Equity:** Laura holds a Master's of Anthropology from the University of Memphis with a focus in community-based initiatives and collective impact prevention and intervention initiatives. Laura has over 10 years experience in the nonprofit and social services fields, having worked in all areas of grant writing and management including direct service program management, government grant administration and grant writing and program evaluation. Laura's grant writing and fundraising experience have raised over \$30 million in private and public funding in areas of housing, education, substance abuse prevention, community health initiatives and youth development programs. Laura joined CIS of Nevada in August 2015 as the Director of Grants and Program Support, and oversees all aspects of the agency's grant fundraising efforts, and data management and evaluation for the organization.

### **Jennifer Courier, Senior Director of Human Resources**

Jennifer Courier started as the Human Resources Director for Communities in Schools of Nevada in December 2017. In this capacity, Courier conducts recruitment and administrative orientation, ensures employee background checks are completed, offers staff development opportunities, works with the staff to ensure personnel policies are kept current and Board approved and operates alongside the Chief of Staff to support the needs of the office.

Courier's career spans more than 16 years of managing a full spectrum of human resources programs. Most recently, she spent three years as the Assistant Director of Human Resources at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel where she oversaw the recruitment function, which led the fill rate to the number one spot in the Mandarin group of hotels in the United States. In addition, she would provide Human Resources leadership and direction throughout the property for employment activities, employee relations, performance management, engagement, trainings and many other areas. A highlight of her career was achieved when she was challenged to develop innovative ideas for the future of the workplace. Courier's team came up with one of the 21 winning ideas selected among 6,500 entrees in the Innovate Jardines Future of Work Challenge, where she presented the idea in Hong Kong to a panel of judges.

Courier was also the Assistant Director of Human Resources for Trump International Hotel and Tower where she oversaw the consistent application of Human Resources strategies and deliverables and previously held the position Director of Human Resources for Turnberry for over 9 years.

As a long-standing member of the Las Vegas community, Courier has participated in a variety of professional and volunteer organizations. Highlights include the Society for Human Resource Management, Southern Nevada Human Resource Association, past president of Through the Eyes of a Child Foundation and more. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Hotel Administration from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and enjoys spending time with her family and friends.

### **Alex Bybee, Senior Director of Strategic Partnerships & Marketing**

Alex is a lifelong Nevadan, graduate of the Clark County School District, and proud alumnus of the University of Nevada, Reno. His passion for equity, accountability and high standards for our education system date back to his involvement as a student advocate in CCSD, having served as the President of the Nevada Association of Student Councils and Chairman of the Nevada Youth Legislature.

Alex joins Communities in Schools from Teach Plus, where he served as the inaugural State Leader for Nevada and led his teachers in legislative efforts which preserved student outcomes as part of Nevada's teacher evaluation system and overhauled Nevada's decades-old school finance plan to achieve greater equity in the state's funding formula.

Previously, Alex worked as the Senior Director of Development and Community Relations at The Public Education Foundation, working closely with the CEO to lead the Foundation's annual fundraising events, major donor portfolio and strategic community partnerships.

His proudest accomplishment is managing and leading the strategy for Save Our Schools Washoe, which brought together a diverse and broad-based coalition of partners that successfully campaigned for passage of a ballot initiative that provides a new and permanent funding stream for the construction and repair of Washoe County schools.

Alex is passionate about youth leadership—volunteering as a mentor and counselor for the Nevada Youth Legislature, Nevada Association of Student Councils, and the American Legion Nevada Boys State, all programs for which he is an alum. He also currently serves on the Board of Governors for the Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest LGBTQ civil rights organization.

Alex's favorite book to read for Nevada Reading Week is "If Kids Ran the World." Indeed, if they did, it would be a better place.

### **Nicole Neal, Resource Development Director**

Nicole Neal is honored to have established herself personally and professionally as a hospitality professional, with a strong legacy in community leadership.

Nicole has spent over 20 years in visible leadership positions, including 8.5 years with Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts – as the opening Manager of Concierge & Guest Services, Director of Spa and Director of PR and Communications at the Silicon Valley property; over 3 years with Ritz Carlton as a Les Clefs d'Or Concierge and board member for the Northern California Concierge Association and additional luxury properties in Northern California. Nicole's experience and activities have allowed her to serve as a property ambassador, develop and leverage new business relationships with a broad range of corporate and non-profit organizations and personally champion initiatives which both impact the local community and further establish the properties she represents.

Nicole takes pride in cultivating, developing, and leveraging new business relationships with a broad range of corporate and not-for-profit organizations, and her extensive hospitality background ensures exceptional experiences and In 2015 segued to roles which leveraged her drive for service with her love of community serving Southern Nevada's business community as Director of Engagement for the Las Vegas Metro Chamber of Commerce and Girl Scouts of Southern Nevada as Director of Corporate Initiatives.

Nicole is passionate about designing and implementing outreach strategies that create stronger, lasting relationships between organizations and their audiences; communicating complex issues in a way that invites people to join the conversation, become educated, understand—and become active in their support, financially or as promoters.

Nicole's skills also include: Exceptional motivator, mentor and influencer with the ability to create strong synergy within teams and a high level of passion and energy.

**Karen Hernandez, Human Resources Manager**

Karen Hernandez came to Communities In Schools of Nevada in January 2016 as the State Administrative Coordinator. In this role Karen assists in all aspect of the State Office Operations, including planning for our largest fundraising events of the year. She has transitioned to the Human Resource Department as the HR Coordinator. Karen has a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and a Master's degree in Business Administration concentrated in Human Resources. Karen has worked in Las Vegas area nonprofits for over seven years.

**Hannah Arnold, Development and Event Manager**

Hannah Arnold is Las Vegas raised and is proud to call Nevada home. She attended Chaparral High School before earning her Bachelor's degree from UNLV's William F. Harrah College of Hospitality where she majored in Meetings and Events Management. Hannah began her events career in the non-profit world as the Volunteer Coordinator and Publications Manager at the Lili Claire Foundation. From there she spent six years at Destinations by Design, honing her sales experience and gaining a vast knowledge of event design and coordination along with more logistical components that accompany destination management. Most recently Hannah comes from Brooklyn Bowl Las Vegas where she rounded out her event experience by adding a knowledge of Catering Sales and Servicing.

**Diane Presser, Marketing Manager**

Diane grew up in Las Vegas and has ten years of marketing in the hospitality and real estate industries. Outside of work, she teaches kids at a martial arts studio - which is what led her to pursue a career in non-profit. Diane previously worked at the largest apartment management company in Las Vegas and Venetian Palazzo. She also is a proud Notre Dame grad - Go Irish!

**Peggy Slen, Staff Accounting**

Peggy Slen had worked at non-profit for thirteen years as an Accountant at SEIU-UHW Joint Employer Education Fund, California. She has a bachelor's degree in Accounting. She's recently joined to Communities In Schools of Nevada in October 2019 as a Staff Accounting position at State office. Her role is supporting the Director of Finance in carrying out the responsibilities of the Finance/Accounting Department. She assists with functions including: Accounts Receivable and Income accounting; Accounts Payable and vendor management; Credit card and cash maintenance and recording tasks; General ledger, including, journal entries and reconciliations.

**Teri Saldana, Administrative Coordinator**

Teri Saldana joined Communities In Schools of Nevada in September 2019 as the State Office Administrative Assistant. Her role is to support the State Team with various responsibilities to keep the office running smoothly. Teri has held several positions with CCSD. She enjoys using her creativity and craft making hobby to brighten people's days.

**Jamie Chazan, Grants Coordinator**

Jamie has dedicated her career to ensuring access and equity for all students and working to provide her community members with a higher quality of life. Prior to joining Communities In Schools of Nevada, Jamie was the Director of Grants and Community Impact for The Public Education Foundation. She brings extensive experience writing, securing, and monitoring state and federal grants.

Jamie spent over ten years working for a large anti-poverty nonprofit in Western Massachusetts. She began her career as a GEAR UP advisor, striving to increase postsecondary enrollment for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. She went on to become the GEAR UP Regional Coordinator. Jamie later became the WIC Director, where she worked to decrease food insecurity by providing pregnant women and children with nutrition assistance and education. As the Director of Programs, she provided administrative oversight to 27 grant programs in six departments including Adult Education, College and Career Readiness, Energy Assistance, Homeless and Supportive Services, Senior Services, and WIC.

Jamie earned her Bachelor of Arts Degree in English Literature from Western New England University and her Master of Education Degree in Higher Education Administration from the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Jamie spent two years traveling around the world with her husband before settling in Las Vegas in 2019. She spends most of her free time finding new places to explore.

#### **Cheri Ward, Executive Director II, CIS of Southern Nevada**

Cheri brings over 20 years of management experience, including 8 years developing nonprofit organizations, to her role as Executive Director of CIS of Nevada's Southern Nevada Affiliate. Cheri was instrumental in starting Crackdown on Cancer under the UNLV School of Dental Medicine and Miles For Smiles in Las Vegas and opening a dental clinic and the Ronald McDonald truck in Elko, NV. Cheri has been with CIS of Nevada since 2010, serving previously as Associate Director of Southern Nevada Affiliate and Associate State Director of the State Office. Cheri directly supervises the work of all Southern Nevada Affiliate staff, currently including a management team, Site Coordinators, AmeriCorps volunteers, and multiple Bachelor level and Master level interns from UNLV Department of Educational and Clinical Studies as well as UNLV School of Social Work.

#### **Sarah Goicoechea, Executive Director II, CIS of Northeastern Nevada**

Sarah is a 37-year-old married mother of two, born and raised in Elko, Nevada. She is a Elko High School graduate and attended the University of Nevada Reno earning a Bachelor's degree in Social Work. Sarah has always had a passion for helping individuals who may not fully be able to help themselves. Before joining Communities In Schools as a site coordinator in 2011, her prior experience included working for the Elko County School District in the special education department and coordinating services for the State of Nevada. Specifically working with individuals with developmental disabilities. After working one year as a CIS site coordinator at Spring Creek High School co-facilitating the CIS Academy, Sarah held the position of program director for the last six years. Advancing into the Executive Director position for the Northeastern Nevada affiliate has been a natural progression for Sarah who has played a major role in contributing much to the local rural community. Outside of work Sarah has two very active children ages 10 and 6 who are involved in competitive sports. Sarah is also the assistant varsity basketball coach at Spring Creek High School and is approaching her seventh season with the Lady Spartans.

#### **Nicole Willis Grimes, Executive Director, CIS of Western Nevada**

Prior to becoming the CIS Western Affiliate Executive Director, Nicole was the director of public affairs for a public affairs/public relations firm in Reno, Nevada. She was responsible for managing the firm's clients and their legislative, regulatory and public outreach priorities. Additionally, she represented clients before city, county and state officials. Nicole also worked extensively on political, ballot question and other statewide campaigns, including the 2010 and 2020 Nevada Census statewide public awareness campaigns.

Prior to moving to Reno, Nicole served for three years as a legislative affairs coordinator for the largest regional bureau at the U.S. State Department in Washington, D.C. She was responsible for writing Department position papers on proposed legislation, coordinating Department officials' briefings and hearings on Capitol Hill, and organizing outreach events for foreign dignitaries, congressional Members, and congressional staff. She received several awards commending her achievements in improving relations between the State Department and Congress.

Nicole also has experience as a staff member, volunteer, and board of directors member for several local and international non-profit organizations in Nevada, Washington, D.C., Minnesota, Armenia, Ukraine, and the Czech Republic.

Nicole received her B.A. from Bard College in New York. Upon graduation, she received a Fulbright Scholarship that took her to eastern Germany for a year. She also received the University of Minnesota Human Rights award for which she conducted field research in Armenia and Ukraine on domestic

violence against women and human trafficking. She received her M.A. in International Affairs from the George Washington University in Washington, D.C.