



Communities In Schools of Nevada State Staff Bios

Tami Hance-Lehr, State Director & CEO

As the Chief Executive Officer & State Director of Communities In Schools of Nevada, the nation's leading and most effective dropout prevention and intervention organization, Tami Hance-Lehr brings 30 years of leadership, strategic planning, crisis management, relationship building, and communication skills to the position of CEO. Tami's passion is driven by the belief that every child has unlimited potential but may not have access to equal opportunities to succeed.

Prior to joining CIS of Nevada, Tami was the leading vice president and shareholder of Destinations by Design, the largest and foremost hospitality event company in Nevada. Her passion for giving back to the community began long before her role at CIS. Previously, she was president of Nevada Women's Philanthropy, and the Las Vegas Hospitality Association. She was awarded a leadership badge by the Girl Scouts of Southern Nevada in 2016, and currently serves on the board of directors for Nevada Community Foundation.

In July 2020, Tami and Communities In Schools of Nevada, joined forces with the Governor's Covid-19 Task Force, the Elaine P. Wynn & Family Foundation, and the Public Education Foundation to create "Connecting Kids", a public-private partnership to ensure that 100% of Nevada students were able to successfully access remote learning. In just four months this coalition tracked down every student utilizing digital learning and ensured each had a connection to a device and a reliable internet source at home. This "Whatever It Takes" mentality is the foundation of the CIS mission, bringing the community into the schools to make sure every student crosses the finish line career and college ready.

To Tami being a leader represents a significant part of how she lives her life. Since moving to Las Vegas as a teenager, she has been passionate about the city and community. A graduate of Ed W. Clark High School, she then attended the University of Nevada, Las Vegas where she aligned herself early on with empowering women, serving as president of the Theta ETA chapter of Sigma Kappa in 1991 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree, with an emphasis in Communication Studies.

Tami shares her life with her husband Ben, a retired Clark County Firefighter, her two bonus daughters, Merissa, and Ilana and her two Labrador Retrievers, Pepper & Ryder.

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 14 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 nonprofit 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 nonprofit work and happily landed at CIS of Nevada where she has served for the past eight years. Alexis now proudly serves as the Senior 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, Programs and 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 Communications & Strategic Affairs

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.

Salina Villegas, Senior Program Manager

Salina Villegas is a proud first-generation college graduate who completed her degree in English and Communications while competing in collegiate sports at Belhaven University in Jackson Mississippi. She resides in Reno Nevada with her husband and college sweetheart, Juan who also serves the school district as a high school teacher. Prior to Communities In Schools, Salina had spent the previous five years in the non-profit sector managing teams in programs for at-risk youth through the City of Jurupa, Boys and Girls Club, and Washoe County School District. Salina's most recent role has been serving her Western Nevada affiliate as the Senior Program Director and has been a part of the Western Nevada CIS team since 2015. Salina started with her team as a Site Coordinator to open the affiliate's first and second middle school sites before advancing into the Program Director position. Salina feels very fortunate for the amazing and hardworking team of Site Coordinators that she has had the privilege to oversee, and is so proud of the growth and expansion that she has seen in the Western affiliate over the previous 6 school years. Working for CIS has been a dream come true for Salina as she has found an organization whose mission allows her to be a part of positively impacting lives every single day.

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 transition 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!

Karen Pickens, Accountant

Karen Pickens was born in Pittsburg, PA and raised in Los Angeles, CA. She is a graduate of California State University, Los Angeles with a Bachelor of Arts in Economics. Ms. Pickens moved to Las Vegas, NV in 2010, where she continued her career as a seasoned accounting professional, beginning at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). Her experience includes all sides of accounting from bookkeeping, payroll, financial statements to preparing personal & business tax returns. She has performed accounting services in academia, non-profits as well as in a variety of other industries.

Karen is a self-proclaimed “workaholic,” acquiring many accolades for her expert accounting skills, due diligence, and professionalism. When she is not working Karen spends time with family; rides her bike, listens to audio books. She has a passion for interior decorating, organizing and helps family and friends with her innate creative skills.

Teri Saldana, State 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.



Affiliate Executive Directors

Sarah Goicoechea, Executive Director II, CIS of Nevada Northeastern Nevada Affiliate

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.

Debbie Palacios, Executive Director, CIS of Nevada Southern Nevada

Debbie is originally from Miami Beach, Florida, a proud product of Miami-Dade County Public Schools graduating as Valedictorian of Miami Beach Senior High School in 2001. She earned her Bachelor's Degree (Double-major in Cultural Theory and Developmental Psychology) from Duke University and two Master's Degrees in Elementary Education and Educational Policy & Leadership from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

As a first-generation U.S. citizen, the importance of educational opportunity has been at the forefront of her personal and professional journey. As the daughter of Peruvian immigrants, her parents stressed the importance of education as a pathway to any goals she wished to achieve. Their perseverance and sacrifice continues to be a driving force.

Through Teach for America, Debbie began her career in the Clark County School District (CCSD) in 2005. She has held positions as a teacher, English Language Learner Specialist, Learning Strategist, Title I Facilitator, and Coordinator, prior to becoming the Director of Family and Community Engagement Services (FACES) in 2019.

Debbie has a passion for resource coordination, data, grant writing, community outreach, and technology – all aimed at advocating for children, empowering and supporting families, and increasing student achievement. She is the proud mother of two CCSD students and wife to a CCSD educator. Above all, Debbie wholeheartedly subscribes to the notion of #collectiveimpact. The collective impact is greater than the individual parts. She believes we must capitalize on our strengths and funds of knowledge and work together as we relentlessly pursue the success of all children.