

## Presenters' Bios 2021 PARID Virtual Conference

**Billy Sanders** credits his love for serving within the Deaf community to his mother, Debra - who is Deaf. Having earned both a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and a Master of Science in Public Administration from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, Billy is currently a doctoral student in the Community College Leadership Program at Morgan State University. A staunch advocate for education, Billy has taught extensively since the year of 2000 at a myriad of colleges and universities in the subjects of American Sign Language, Signed Language Systems, and Strategies for Cross-Cultural Communication.

Billy is a Communications Consultant with Bridges Consulting, a company he founded over twenty years ago to champion cross-cultural communication through education and empowerment. Additionally, he is a veteran mentor for College Bound - the pathway to college mentorship program for Washington, DC high school students, an Executive Board Member to Light the Way Foundation - which hosts an annual summer teen film camp, and an Executive Board Member for the Friends of the Buea School for the Deaf in Cameroon, West Africa to raise monies for the annual operational costs of Cameroon's premier school for the Deaf.

Aside from living out his passion, Billy loves to spend time with his 22-year old son, Donovan, who is a scholar-athlete, social justice advocate, and recent graduate of the University of Virginia.

**Edna Johnston** has a large deaf family with roots in Alabama and Indiana. She has double Bachelor's degrees in ASL Studies and English Literature from Gallaudet and a Master's degree in Deaf Education from McDaniel College. She also holds an Educational Specialist degree in Administration and Supervision from Gallaudet. Edna was a tenured faculty at Columbia College Chicago in the ASL-English Interpretation Department for 12 years. For the past 16 years, she has taught at Maryland School for the Deaf, where she graduated; English, ASL Linguistics, ASL Literature, and Deaf Studies in High School. Edna also taught ASL (and related topics) as an adjunct at Gallaudet University, Towson University, Catonsville College of Baltimore County, and Frederick Community College. She travels to do workshops and currently works with the American Society for Deaf Children facilitating ASL Weekend Retreats for hearing parents of deaf children. She has served as an ASL Master for several theaters including Shakespeare Theater in Washington DC and as a Technical Editor for several books. Edna is married with four children who are in first grade through college. During her free time, Edna enjoys community advocacy, travelling, and filming for ASL preservation.

**Jessica Bentley-Sassaman** has been working in the field of interpreting since 2001 after obtaining a B.S. in Interpreting for the Deaf from Bloomsburg University. She then attended Gallaudet earning her M.A. degree in Linguistics in 2006. She finished her Doctoral Degree in Education in January 2011. Her research focus was on the teamwork approach of Deaf-Hearing Interpreter Teams. She has conducted

presentations on mentoring, linguistics, working in Deaf-Hearing Teams, and legal interpreting. She holds RID Certifications CI & CT, SC:L, and Ed: K-12. Jessica currently teaches at Bloomsburg University in Pennsylvania as an Associate Professor and is the Program Coordinator. When Jessica is not teaching, she still works as a freelance interpreter primarily in legal, governmental, and community settings in Pennsylvania.

**Crom Saunders** grew up in Northern California, graduating from California State University, Sacramento with a M.A. in Creative Writing. Crom has his own one-man show, “Cromania!”, which tours internationally, featuring skits, comedy, improv, and storytelling. Crom also has interpreted dozens of plays, has taught dozens of ASL linguistics and theatrical workshops across the nation. He is currently the Director of Deaf Studies at Columbia College, Chicago. You can check out some of his work on <http://thecromsaunders.com> or on the “Ink-Stained Fingertips” Facebook page.

**Heather Schmerman** is a Certified Deaf Interpreter and American Sign Language Instructor with over a decade of experience in primary, secondary and higher education including Pennsylvania State University and Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia. She has worked with the Graduation to Certification program under Catie Center at St. Catherine University and independently as a mentor for interpreters completing their training and preparing for their Registry for the Deaf Interpreter’s performance examination. She has worked as an ASL coach for professional interpreters and consulted for theaters. She has given workshops and consulted on a variety of communication needs for clients including AIRBUS, Temple University, Rutgers University, California State University, Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders, and the Australian Association for the Deaf. She has been taking Project CLIMB's Legal Interpreter Training and mentor under University of Northern Colorado since May 2019 and will complete in April 2021. She has studied in Brisbane, Australia and Siena, Italy, traveled extensively in Europe and Southeast Asia, and is passionate about performance arts, language, and open-minded cultural exchange.