

# 2026 Avanti Therapeutic Projects Symposium

## Course A: It Only Takes a Spark: Harnessing the Power of Intensity

*All proceeds from Course A will directly support Camp Avanti. All of the speakers for this course are donating their time and expertise.*

**Speakers:** Julia Wilbarger, PhD, OTR/L; Tracy Stackhouse, MA, OTR; Nancy Lawton-Shirley, OTR/L; and Sheila Frick, OTR/L, and Jaymie Stavdal, MS, OTR/L

**Date:** Thursday February 26th, 2026; 8:30 a.m - 4:00 p.m. CST

**Location:** Live webinar via Zoom; on-demand via Thinkific for 45 days; recordings will be released within 1 week of the event.

6 Contact hours

**Audience:** OTs, SLPs, PTs, mental health professionals, and interested others

### Course Description:

In the dynamic world of pediatric occupational therapy, intensity matters. This innovative and collaborative course explores the multifaceted concept of intensity—from its definition to its neurological underpinnings to specific applications in pediatric occupational therapy practice. A group of expert occupational therapists will share their insights and wisdom on the topic of intensity, equipping participants with evidence-informed strategies to deliver effective interventions and models of care that promote safety, engagement, adaptive responses, and functional growth in their clients.

### Course Objectives:

By the end of the course, participants will be able to:

1. Examine various perspectives on and therapeutic components of intensity in pediatric occupational therapy.
2. Apply the concept of sensory intensity as a therapeutic variable—adjusting input within and across sensory systems to match or expand an individual's regulatory capacity—in order to foster safety, engagement, and adaptive responses through relationship-based and play-centered interventions.
3. Apply clinical reasoning in the use of sound and rhythm for therapeutic outcomes through the range of options: voice, drum, commercial music, and specialized music protocols.
4. Clinically reason the use of sensation with power and precision to support clinical outcomes across contexts.

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<b>Course A: Agenda</b>		
<b>8:30 AM - 9:30 AM CST</b>	<b>Perspectives on Intensity</b>	<b>Julia Wilbarger</b>
<b>9:30 AM - 10:00 AM CST</b>	<b>Panel Discussion</b>	
<b>10:00 AM - 10:15 AM CST</b>	<b>Break</b>	
<b>10:15 AM - 11:15 AM CST</b>	<b>The Neuroscience of Intensity</b>	<b>Tracy Stackhouse</b>
<b>11:15 AM - 11:45 AM CST</b>	<b>Panel Discussion</b>	
<b>11:45 AM - 12:45 PM CST</b>	<b>Lunch</b>	
<b>**12:30 - 12:45 PM CST</b>	<b>** Optional: return early from lunch to hear about Camp Avanti (for campers and OTs)</b>	<b>Avanti Board Member</b>
<b>12:45 PM - 1:45 PM CST</b>	<b>Tools of Intensity: Using Sound and Rhythm to Deepen Therapeutic Impact</b>	<b>Nancy Lawton-Shirley</b>
<b>1:45 PM - 2:15 PM CST</b>	<b>Panel Discussion</b>	
<b>2:15 PM - 2:30 PM CST</b>	<b>Break</b>	
<b>2:30 PM - 3:30 PM CST</b>	<b>Tools of Intensity: The Power of the Body Senses</b>	<b>Sheila Frick and Jaymie Stavdal</b>
<b>3:30 PM - 4:00 PM CST</b>	<b>Panel Discussion</b>	
<b>4:00 PM CST</b>	<b>Adjourn</b>	

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## Speaker Biographies:

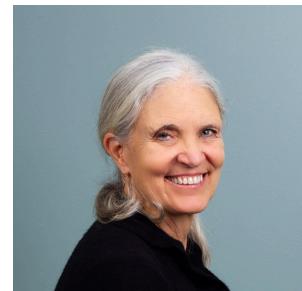
**Julia Wilbarger, PhD, OTR/L**, received a BS in Physiological Psychology from UC Berkeley, a MS in OT from Boston University, and a PhD in Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience from the University of Denver, Colorado. She has practiced as an OT in early intervention with high risk and developmentally delayed infants and toddlers, in the public schools and in private practice. At The Children's Hospital, Denver, she served as a clinical specialist in sensory integration. She joined the faculty at Dominican University of California in the Occupational Therapy Department as an Associate Professor in 2012. Dr. Wilbarger has done extensive research, published and presented on issues of sensory processing, sensory modulation disorders, and sensory integration in children. Her research is focused on the study of affective and sensory processing and intervention in a range of clinical populations.



**Tracy Stackhouse, MA, OTR** is an occupational therapist recognized internationally for her expertise in Fragile X syndrome, neurodevelopment, sensory integration, polyvagal theory, and relationship-based practices. She is the co-founder and Director of Innovation at Developmental FX, a nonprofit clinic and training organization dedicated to supporting children and families through relationship-based, neuroscience-informed care. With over four decades of experience, Tracy has worked alongside families, educators, researchers, and therapists to translate complex science into practical strategies that foster growth, resilience, and engaged belonging. She is a frequent presenter at national and international conferences, a co-author of key clinical resources, and a trusted mentor to professionals worldwide.



**Nancy Lawton-Shirley, OTR/L**, is an occupational therapist who has integrated many techniques into her rehabilitation and wellness clinical practice. She has been in private practice serving children and adults for over 35 years in Hudson Wisconsin. Her passion is the integration of more traditional and less traditional, cutting edge techniques and programs. She has had advanced training in a wide variety of energy techniques including: CranioSacral Therapy/Myofascial Release, Pranic Healing, AcuEnergetics, Integration of CranioSacral Therapy and Acupuncture, QiGong, and Higher Brain Living. She was co-director for 25 years of Camp Avanti—St. Croix, which was a special camp for children with sensory processing challenges. She speaks nationally and internationally on topics related to sensory processing and craniosacral therapy/ myofascial release. She is a Berard Auditory Integration Training instructor. Nancy also served on the board of Red Thread



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Charities which worked with orphanages in China to assist rehabilitation program development for their special needs children.

**Sheila M. Frick, OTR/L**, is an internationally esteemed clinician, lecturer, and pioneer in Occupational Therapy. She has over 40 years of clinical experience, having worked in psychiatry, rehabilitation, and home health before specializing in pediatrics. Her expertise includes sensory processing dysfunction, sensory integration, and auditory interventions. She created and continues to expand Therapeutic Listening®, which she has taught to over 15,000 therapists worldwide. She also lectures on such topics as clinical neurology, respiration, the vestibular/auditory system and various auditory interventions. She is the creator and author of Listening With the Whole Body and co-author of Core Concepts In Action, Astronaut Training: A Sound Activated Vestibular-Visual Protocol, Out of the Mouths of Babes and M.O.R.E: Integrating the Mouth with Sensory and Postural Functions.



## Disclosure Statement

Financial - president of Therapeutic Resources, Inc. of which Vital Links is a subsidiary. Co-author of the Listening with the Whole Body book and receives royalty payment.

Non- financial - married to Ronald Frick, president of Vital Sounds, Inc.

**Jaymie Stavdal, MS, OTR/L**, is passionate about sharing joy, compassion, playfulness, and connection with the world. As an occupational therapist, she specializes in sensory integration and has training in trauma responsive practices, relationship/attachment theories and interventions, sound therapies, and craniosacral therapy. She is also a practitioner in Trust-Based Relational Intervention and Circle of Security Parenting. Jaymie works at Center For Family Connection in Worcester, MA, where her work emphasizes a collaborative approach for family centered care. She also works as a consultant at multiple schools in the Boston area. Jaymie has held the roles of President and Secretary on the Board of Directors of Avanti Therapeutic Projects and currently serves as the Continuing Education Director.



## Moderator Biography:

**Eileen Richter, MPH, OTR/L, FAOTA**, was a co-director of Camp Avanti during its first 20 years in Wisconsin and has continued to support Avanti in various positions throughout the years. She was responsible for organizing the traditional Pre-Camp conferences for many years, bringing innovative occupational therapists to discuss novel topics that have influenced the practice of pediatric therapy. Camp Avanti has introduced new theory and practice applications such as Sensory Defensiveness, the “How Does Your Engine Run?” program for self regulation,

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the power of music and listening strategies, integrating energy work in OT treatment and much more. Organizing learning and sharing opportunities from skilled practitioners that improve service delivery for children is a favorite endeavor for Eileen.

## Panelist Biographies:

**Patti Oetter, MA, OT, FAOTA**, earned her bachelor's degree in occupational therapy from the University of Kansas and her master's degree in special education, with special emphasis on education and learning difficulties, from Hays Kansas University. Ms. Oetter has extensive clinical experience in Sensory Integrative therapy, Samonas Sound Therapy, Cranial Sacral Therapy, and Neurodevelopmental Therapy (NDT). She has provided consultation and education for teachers, parents, and therapists in the US, Asia, and Europe and she has worked extensively in schools, special programs, and private practice. She is a Fellow of the American Occupational Therapy Association. Ms. Oetter has co-authored a number of publications related to the treatment of sensory processing disorders including; "MORE: Integrating the Mouth with Sensory and Postural Functions" and "Out of the Mouths of Babes: The Developmental Significance of the Mouth."

**Jennifer Kiellach, MHS, OT/L**, has been involved with Avanti since 2007. She currently serves as the Practicum Coordinator at Camp Avanti and on the Board of Directors for Avanti Therapeutic Projects. Jennifer credits Camp Avanti as the reason she founded her private practice, Sensory Solutions, LLC in Sarasota, Florida, an SI outpatient clinic that offers occupational and speech therapy as well as a sensory preschool program and a variety of therapeutic summer camps.

**Kara Schultz, MA, OTR/L** has 20+ years of experience working in outpatient and school-based settings. Her clinical approach integrates myofascial and craniosacral therapies, reflex integration, sensory processing, trauma-informed care, and sound therapy. She has presented on school-based OT, regulation, movement, sensory processing, and trauma-sensitive practices. She has also had the privilege of treating and training in Chinese orphanages through Red Thread Charities. Kara has been involved with Camp Avanti since 2005 and currently serves as an active board member. She is passionate about connecting with children—mind, body, heart, and spirit—so they can live as their most authentic selves.

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