NJLEND Annual Update 2019 - 2020
ABOUT NJLEND

NJLEND is New Jersey's Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities program, and is a component of The Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities, Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. NJLEND provides graduate-level interdisciplinary, leadership training aimed at preparing the next generation of health and allied health leaders to deliver culturally competent care that addresses the needs of children and young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), health disparities, related developmental disabilities, and other maternal and child health populations. NJLEND Fellows and faculty represent eight disciplines across Rutgers and Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences. NJLEND also provides continuing education to families and Maternal and Child Health professionals and technical assistance to Title V and other community programs.

LEND programs are funded under the Autism Collaboration, Accountability, Research, Education, and Support (CARES) Act, and are administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration’s (HRSA) Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB).

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Friends,

We are delighted to introduce you to the Year 4 Cohort of Clinical Interdisciplinary Leadership Fellows of NJLEND, New Jersey’s Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities program, and provide some updates as we continue to grow and refine the program.

This year we have 11 LEND Leadership Fellows, two Boggs Center Interdisciplinary Trainees who are moving toward careers in maternal and child health, and a second year LEND fellow who is pursuing a joint MD/PhD degree. Our fellows represent six disciplines including Family. With support from the New Jersey Autism Center of Excellence (NJACE), we have been able to add Genetic Counseling as a discipline to NJLEND. The NJLEND program also trains approximately 150 additional students from medicine and other disciplines in a less intensive capacity each year.

We welcome William Waldman, former commissioner of NJ’s Department of Human Services and recently retired Professor of Professional Practice at Rutgers School of Social Work, who brings his 50 years of professional experience to the leadership training component of LEND. We congratulate Dr. Sallie Porter, NJLEND Nursing Discipline Coordinator and Associate Professor, Rutgers School of Nursing, as the first recipient of the NJACE Faculty Scholarship for Autism Spectrum Disorder Clinical Course Development, sponsored by the NJ Governor’s Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Autism. We also welcome Nicole Royer, MSW, LSW, as NJLEND Program and Data Coordinator.

NJLEND was recently awarded funding from the Association of University Centers on Disabilities to support a Focused Assistance to Support Training (FAST) project to enhance NJLEND alumni engagement. Dr. Carrie Coffield will serve as Principal Investigator and Maria Leary, 2017-2018 NJLEND Family Fellow, has been appointed as NJLEND Alumni Coordinator. We very much look forward to the new opportunities this project will provide to keep NJLEND alumni connected to the program and each other.

NJLEND and all the other LEND programs around the country are made possible by the federal Autism Collaboration, Accountability, Education and Services (CARES) legislation. Autism CARES, reauthorized in September 2019, was introduced to Congress and co-sponsored by Representative Chris Smith and Senator Robert Menendez. We are grateful for their leadership and longstanding commitment to individuals with ASD, their families and those who work on their behalf.

Deborah M. Spitalnik, PhD
Professor of Pediatrics
Director of NJLEND
NJLEND CLASS OF 2019-2020

Angie Alberti, MEd, BSN, RN
PhD Candidate
NJLEND Nursing Fellow

Angela Alberti is a second-year nursing PhD student at Rutgers University. From a young age, she has explored a deeper understanding of how the mind and body are connected and can impact wellbeing and longevity. She received her bachelor's degree in sports management and her master's degree in exercise psychology, both at Bowling Green State University. She then began her professional career in healthcare consulting where she helped large corporations design and measure the effectiveness of employee wellness and chronic condition management programs. After a decade in corporate America, she entered the nursing field as a second career, and is now focused on quality of life issues and the role of self-compassion in the lives of caregivers. Angela is pursuing her PhD with a commitment improving the quality of lives of caregivers of children with autism.

Aimee Ascolese, BS
MSW Candidate
NJLEND Social Work Fellow

Aimee is a Master of Social Work student at Rutgers University, New Brunswick. She graduated in 2018 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Family & Human Services with a minor in Applied Disability Studies from Towson University in Maryland. After working with students with developmental disabilities as an instructional aide and adults with autism as a social program mentor, she knew that she wanted to focus more on disabilities in the MSW program and in her future career. Aimee is in the Management and Policy Specialization and hopes to use this experience to improve policies and conditions affecting individuals with disabilities and their families.

Carol D’Innocenzio, BSN, RN
DNP Candidate
NJLEND Nursing Fellow

Carol is a Family Nurse Practitioner student, in the Doctoral Nursing Program at Rutgers School of Nursing. She has been a Registered Nurse with a BSN for ten years, working at the bedside and as a case manager in a variety of settings including the Emergency Department, Long-term Acute Care Hospital, and Family Centered Care. Carol teaches for a Licensed Practical Nurse program, where she enjoys sharing her love of the nursing field. Carol is a wife and mother of two, a two year-old son and three year-old daughter, who have added to her passion of working with families. It is her professional goal to provide patient centered care and empower all those she cares for.
**Kasey Dudley**  
**NJLEND Family Fellow**

A former Senior Online Marketing Director for Yahoo, Kasey Dudley left her promising career when her son was born at just 26 weeks and unknowingly began her journey of advocacy. Weighing only 2 lbs., 2 oz., her son was one of the first children to be exclusively breastfed in the NICU as a result of her advocacy. In her current role, Kasey is the Project Director for the Parent as Champions Project at SPAN Advocacy. She previously served as the consulting Program Coordinator for the Autism Medical Home at Hackensack University Medical Center from 2014-2019. She holds a degree in Marketing and Advertising, and is also a trained Support Coordinator, Certified Lactation Counselor, and licensed Clinical Massage Therapist who specializes in infant massage and sensory integration for children and adolescents on the autism spectrum.

**Grace Ibitamuno, BS**  
**2nd Year NJLEND Medicine Fellow**

Grace Ibitamuno is a second year NJLEND Fellow pursuing her MD/PhD degrees at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and in the Department of Health Systems and Policy at Rutgers School of Public Health. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Biology from Marymount University in Virginia. While Grace has studied HIV and gynecologic cancers in the past, her present academic and professional focus is developmental disabilities, particularly Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). She is the author of the novel, “Not Yet Beautiful,” which tells the story of a 19-year-old survivor of trafficking and exploitation, and explores the oppression of women and girls in the developing world. She is a TEDx speaker on the topic of resilience entitled, “The Power of the Middle.” Grace completed a Fellowship with the New Jersey Department of Health, Divisions of Community Health Services and Family Health Services studying rural health disparities.

**Anne Lyle, MSN, APN, CPNP-AC**  
**NJLEND Developmental Behavioral Nursing Fellow**

Anne is from Philadelphia, PA. She graduated from Cabrini College with a Bachelor’s of Science in Exercise Science and Health Promotion. Anne then received a Bachelor’s of Science in Nursing from Thomas Jefferson University and her Master of Science in Nursing from The University of Pennsylvania. Anne is currently a Developmental Behavioral Pediatric Advanced Practice Nurse Fellow at Children’s Specialized Hospital. She hopes to use what she learns during her time with the interdisciplinary group at NJLEND to empower children and families, sharing knowledge with them and helping them to maximize their connections with their local schools and communities.
Jessica Middleberg, PsyD
Post-Doctoral Fellow
NJLEND Psychology Fellow

Jessica Middleberg, PsyD, is a Postdoctoral Fellow in Inpatient Pediatric Psychology at Children’s Specialized Hospital in New Brunswick, NJ. Dr. Middleberg obtained her doctorate in Clinical Psychology from William James College in 2019, her Master’s degree from William James College in 2016, and her Bachelor’s degree in Equine Facilitated Therapeutics from Wilson College in 2010. As part of her current training, Dr. Middleberg is rotating amongst inpatient teams and collaborating on research projects that exist within the Chronic Illness Management and Chronic Pain programs in the areas of treatment efficacy, assessment measures, and long term treatment outcomes. Throughout her training program, Jessica has held practicum placements in public schools, therapeutic day schools, in home-based family therapy, and in outpatient psychotherapy, and seeks to provide treatment from a biopsychosocial perspective to address the needs of children, adolescents, young adults, and their families.

Madison Perry, PsyM
PsyD Candidate
NJLEND Psychology Fellow

Madison Perry is a clinical psychology doctoral candidate at Rutgers Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology. Madison earned her BA in Psychology and American Culture Studies from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri in 2014. From 2014-2016, Madison worked in a public school district in her hometown of Portland, Oregon, providing special education services to children with varying needs. In 2016, Madison began the Clinical PsyD program at Rutgers. She is currently applying for her pre-doctoral internship, aiming to focus on child/adolescent psychological services. In addition, Madison is working on her dissertation, which will provide an evaluation of elements of the Tim Howard Leadership Academy (THLA) for children with tics/TS that takes place on Rutgers’ campus via the New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome. Madison has served as an extern at the Foster Care Counseling Project, The Tourette Syndrome Clinic, Children’s Specialized Hospital in Mountainside, and is currently on externship at Trinitas in the Child Outpatient/Adolescent DBT Program.

Rachel Shafrir, BA
PsyD Candidate
NJLEND Psychology Fellow

Rachel is a school psychology doctoral student at Rutgers Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology. She is also a part of the Gifted Education Certification program through Rutgers School of Education. Rachel has experience working with children and adolescents with various special needs as President of a non-profit organization called The Friendship Circle, in addition to being a Child Study Team intern in several school districts. Her special interest lies in the assessment and identification of twice-exceptional students (those who are gifted and have a disability). Rachel hopes to assist students, parents, and families in navigating the special education system in order to ensure that every individual with a disability receives appropriate services to help them succeed, as both a psychologist and an advocate.
Jackie Shinall, MS  
PsyD Candidate  
NJLEND Psychology Fellow

Jackie is a PsyD student at the Rutgers Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology. She has been working with people with autism and neurodevelopmental disorders for almost 10 years. Her work at a residential school for children with autism prompted her to go back to school to learn more about the developing brain. She earned her Master of Science in Neuroscience and Education and worked for several years doing autism research at various labs, as well as working as an ABA therapist and tutor. Her research and clinical interests are in the area of assessments of vocational skills and various jobs or job opportunities available to people with autism. She has a strong passion for helping the transition aged and understanding autism throughout the lifespan.

Michelle Shulman-Repole, RN, MPH, MSN, CPNP-PC  
NJLEND Developmental Behavioral Nursing Fellow

Michelle Shulman-Repole is Children’s Specialized Hospital’s (CSH) Neurodevelopmental Disabilities Nursing Fellow for 2020, and a recent graduate of Seton Hall’s CPNP-PC program. She graduated from Downstate School of Nursing with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 1988 and has a diverse pediatric nursing background. Michelle has worked as a PICU nurse at New York-Presbyterian/WeilCornell Medical Center, a general pediatric nurse and manager at Beth Israel Medical Center in NYC, and served as an adjunct faculty member at the NYU School of Nursing. After moving to NJ, Michelle worked as a pediatric nurse in a variety of settings, including Monmouth Medical Center's pediatric unit, Pine Grove Day Camp, Lacey School District, Delta T Group, and a busy pediatric office. She served as adjunct faculty at Ocean County College and worked for the Monmouth County Health Department under a federal grant to research lead toxicity in children under the age of 5 due to the effects of Hurricane Sandy in low socioeconomic Mexican communities. During her education at Seton Hall, Michelle rotated through CSH in Toms River as a student PNP for a semester, and decided to shift her focus to developmental disabilities after completing her rotation.

Dierdre Sumski, BS  
MS Candidate  
NJLEND Genetic Counseling Fellow

Deirdre Sumski is from Cornwall, New York. In May of 2017, she graduated with a BSc specializing in genetics from the University College of Dublin (UCD) in Ireland. During her undergraduate degree she interned with Pinto Labs at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, where she contributed to the International Autism Research Project. After graduation, she volunteered at Camp Sunshine for kids with life threatening illnesses. Her experience at Camp Sunshine inspired her to become a genetic counselor and use her degree to help families navigate genetic testing and genetic conditions. Deirdre is now enrolled in the Rutgers Genetic Counseling Master's Program. Deirdre was inspired to enroll in the NJLEND program as she knows that as a genetic counselor, she will be working closely with patients that have developmental disabilities and desires to further educate herself.
Lily Yip, BS, MS  
NJLEND Family Fellow

Lily is a passionate parent advocate, and mother of two adult children, Nicole (25) and Eric (22), with autism and intellectual/developmental disabilities. Lily recently graduated with the class of 2018 Leadership Somerset, and the class of 2018-2019 NJ Partners in Policymaking. She joined the NJLEND program to expand her leadership skills to continue advocacy and promote social change, enhance disability policy, help families with resources, and provide family support. Lily believes that all individuals with developmental disabilities can work towards leading purposeful lives by reaching their full potential. Lily’s professional background is in the information technology field. Her interests include music, travel and photography.

BOGGS CENTER  
INTERDISCIPLINARY TRAINEES

Angie Hernandez

Angie Hernandez is from Morristown, NJ and is a senior in the School of Arts and Sciences at Rutgers University. She is pursuing a Bachelor’s degree in Psychology and Cognitive Science and a minor in Linguistics. Angie will be earning her undergraduate degree in May 2020. During her junior year at Rutgers University, she became a peer mentor for the College Support Program, where she has the opportunity to work with Rutgers students on the autism spectrum. This program has formed strong interests in working with and learning more about people with developmental disabilities.

Patricia Shelton, BA

Patricia recently graduated from Rutgers University in May 2019 with a BA in Biological Sciences. She discovered a passion for working with people with disabilities and their families as a teammate and later as the President and Coach of the Rutgers Special Olympics Unified Sports team. Patricia is currently working as a research assistant at The Boggs Center with Dr. Deborah Spitalnik, and at the Child Health Institute of NJ with Dr. Manuel Jimenez. She will be attending medical school starting July, 2020 and hopes to serve people with developmental disabilities as a physician in the future.
Class of 2016-2017

Stacey Callahan, MSW, 2016-2017 NJLEND Social Work Fellow, moved into a new Civil Service Title in June 2019. Stacey is now a Research Scientist 3 within the New Jersey Department of Human Services Office of Research, Evaluation and Special Projects.

Mikala Hanson, PsyD, BCBA, 2016-2017 NJLEND Psychology Fellow, is completing a postdoctoral internship at the Pediatric Developmental Disabilities Clinic at Kennedy Krieger Institute, where she also completed her predoctoral internship and a second LEND program.

Spandana Nallapati, MD, 2016-2017 NJLEND Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics Fellow, is now practicing at a Children’s Specialized Hospital ambulatory care site in Jersey City, NJ.

Ronide Noelizaire, MSW, 2016-2017 NJLEND Social Work Fellow, is currently working with children with various psychiatric and behavioral issues as a full-time therapist at a Partial Hospitalization Program at St. Francis Medical Center in Trenton, NJ.

Rachael Patusco, DCN, MS, RD, CSP, 2016-2017 NJLEND Nutrition Fellow, was selected to present her abstract entitled, “Weight Status is Associated with Health Related Quality of Life among a National Sample of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder” at the Rutgers School of Health Professions Research & Scholarship Symposium.

Deepa Srinivasavaradan, 2016-2017 NJLEND Family Fellow, has been selected to receive the 2020 Merle McPherson Award for exemplary contributions to further family/professional collaboration within state Title V programs and the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs. Deepa continues to serve as New Jersey’s Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s “Learn the Signs. Act Early” Ambassador and supports many statewide early childhood initiatives through her role at SPAN Parent Advocacy Network.

Class of 2017-2018

Gabriela Fernandez, DNP, RN, CPN, 2017-2018 NJLEND Nursing Fellow, presented her project entitled “Lowering Parental Stress Levels Through Use of Mindfulness-Based Smartphone Application,” in April 2019, earning her Doctor of Nursing Practice degree.

Rachael Hanson, BA, 2017-2018 NJLEND Psychology Fellow, has started her first year as a clinical PsyD student at Widener University. She is currently working at Clinical Neuropsychology Associates in Philadelphia administering neuropsychology evaluations to adults and young adults referred for dementia, traumatic brain injuries, learning disabilities, and/or strokes. She is hoping to begin administering the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) and performing neuropsychology tests for children with developmental or intellectual disabilities in the future.

Stephani Johnson, MS, RD, 2017-2018 NJLEND Nutrition Fellow, is conducting a systematic review of previously published literature comparing the anthropometric indices of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to children without disabilities. The results of this study can inform the development of preventive initiatives aiming to promote healthy weights and guidelines for addressing abnormalities in anthropometric indices, such as treatment strategies for underweight, overweight, or obesity for this population during childhood and adolescence with the intent of decreasing the risk of co-morbidities associated with unhealthy weight across the life course.

Katie Kishel, EdM, BCBA, 2017-2018 NJLEND Psychology Fellow, passed her examination to become a Board Certified Behavior Analyst and is continuing her education at the University of Florida, where she is working toward her PhD in Behavior Analysis.

Maria Leary, BA, 2017-2018 NJLEND Family Fellow, is participating in the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) program at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) as a Family Fellow. Maria remains connected to The Boggs Center in her new role as NJLEND Alumni Coordinator.

Mercedes Rosa, 2017-2018 NJLEND Family Fellow, has accepted a position as the Director of Community Outreach at Community Access Unlimited. She is a member of the Catalyst Center National Advisory Committee which serves as the National Network for advancing systems of services for children and youth with special health care needs. Mercedes continues to work independently on faith-based integration initiatives, and is a member of The Boggs Center’s Consumer Advisory Council.

**Class of 2018-2019**

Dillon Reitmeyer, BA, 2018-2019 NJLEND Social Work Fellow, has been accepted into the Master of Social Work/PhD program at Rutgers University. Dillon is a Daniel Jordan Fiddle Adult Autism Family Support Fellowship award recipient.

Nicole Hopkins, 2018-2019 NJLEND Family Fellow, facilitated the parent engagement session at the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network (ECCS CoIIN) Annual Conference in Atlanta this past September. The three-parent panel presentation was attended by 150 participants from three states and received a standing ovation.
NJLEND FACULTY AND STAFF

Deborah M. Spitalnik, PhD
Executive Director, The Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities
Director, NJLEND
Professor of Pediatrics
Professor of Family Medicine & Community Health

Nicole Royer, MSW, LSW
NJLEND Program and Data Coordinator

NJLEND Faculty Discipline Coordinators

Patricia Findley, DrPH, MSW, LSW
NJLEND Discipline Coordinator, Social Work
Associate Professor of Social Work
MSW Director
Rutgers School of Social Work

Jill Harris, PhD
NJLEND Coordinator, Children’s Specialized Hospital (CSH)
Director of Research Development, CSH

Manuel Jimenez, MD, MS, FAAP
NJLEND Discipline Coordinator, Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics
Director of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics Education
Assistant Professor of Pediatrics & Family Medicine and Community Health

Jessica Rispoli Joines, MGC, CGC
NJLEND Discipline Coordinator, Genetics
Director, Rutgers Genetic Counseling Master’s Program

Amy Kratchman, BA
NJLEND Discipline Coordinator, Family
Senior Research Family Consultant, CHOP

Bob LaRue, PhD, BCBA-D
NJLEND Discipline Coordinator, Psychology
Clinical Professor
Rutgers Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology
Director of Behavioral and Research Services, Douglass Developmental Disabilities Center

Sallie Porter, DNP, PhD, APN, RN-BC, CPNP
NJLEND Discipline Coordinator, Nursing
Associate Professor
Division of Advanced Nursing Practice
Rutgers School of Nursing

Evan Spivack, DDS
NJLEND Discipline Coordinator, Dentistry
Professor of Pediatric Dentistry
Rutgers School of Dental Medicine
Director, Special Care Treatment Center

Willaim Waldman, CSWM
NJLEND Leadership Faculty
Professor of Professional Practice Emeritus, Rutgers School of Social Work

Jane Ziegler, DCN, RD, LDN
NJLEND Discipline Coordinator, Nutrition
Associate Professor, Nutritional Sciences
Rutgers School of Health Professions (SHP)
Program Director, Rutgers SHP Doctorate in Clinical Nutrition Program

NJLEND Affiliated Faculty

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Karmazin and Lilard Chair in Adult Autism
Associate Professor, Rutgers Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology

Naomi Pickholtz, PhD
Inpatient Psychology Supervisor, Psychology Department
Children’s Specialized Hospital
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