Greetings from the Duke Center for Autism!

Your Quarterly News & Updates

What's in this issue:

- **Welcome from Geraldine Dawson**
- **Our Mission Statement**
- **Faculty Spotlight: New Leadership Roles**
- **Research: What is it and what does it mean to participate?**
- **Current Research Opportunities**
- **News and Events**

Visit Our Website

---

**Welcome!**

Thank you for signing up for the Duke Center for Autism electronic newsletter. We look forward to keeping in touch and sharing with you exciting news about our research, our clinic, and opportunities to partner with us. Our staff is dedicated to helping each individual with autism and related developmental disabilities reach his or her full potential, thereby allowing society to benefit from the talents and diversity which persons with autism and other developmental disabilities offer. We are a group of dedicated clinicians and scientists who work in partnership with people with autism and related disabilities, families, and the broader community to realize this goal.

Over the past two years since we began building the Duke Center for Autism, it has been my great pleasure to meet many of you in person through community events, research studies, or in the clinic. We feel privileged to partner with you in our shared mission of improving the lives of persons with autism spectrum disorder. I hope you enjoy our first newsletter in which we share news about some of the new staff who have joined the Center as well as highlight a few of our ongoing studies. Enjoy!
Our Mission

NEW Associate Director, Duke Center for Autism and Brain Development

We are pleased to announce that, on August 1st, Dr. Lin Sikich joined the faculty at Duke University and has stepped into the role of Associate Director of the Duke Center for Autism. As a leading child and adolescent psychiatrist with over 18 years of experience in autism related clinical research, Dr. Sikich brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the center. A significant portion of her time will be dedicated to clinical research, and Dr. Sikich will focus on finding innovative and novel approaches to improving social communication skills in individuals with autism spectrum disorders. Dr. Sikich will also be part of the clinical services team at our Center. She will supervise fellows, residents and interns training in psychiatry who are providing direct care to individuals with autism. Dr. Sikich is confident that huge strides in the treatment of autism spectrum disorders will be made right here at Duke.
Dr. Katherine Davlantis
NEW Director of Early Intervention and Assessment Services

In her role at the Duke Center for Autism, Dr. Davlantis oversees early intervention and assessment services, including infant-toddler assessments. Dr. Davlantis trains and supervises psychology and psychiatry trainees who provide services to families with young children. She is a certified therapist, parent coach, and trainer in the Early Start Denver Model, an early intervention model appropriate for infants through preschool aged children that blends relationship-focused and ABA strategies. At the Center, our focus is on coaching parents to use ESDM therapy strategies with their young child with autism throughout their daily routine.

Research at Duke Center for Autism

What studies are being conducted and how can I participate?

At the Duke Center for Autism, research is a central part of our mission. We conduct research to discover more effective methods for screening, diagnosis, and treatment, with the goal of reducing disability that is associated with autism. It's an important part of what we do, but we can't do it without a close partnership with individuals with autism and their families.

What does being a volunteer research participant look like? Participating in a research study can mean a lot of different things--our studies are varied. For most studies, it involves caregivers and/or their children coming to one of our family-friendly research labs and completing various cognitive and behavioral assessments. Assessments can include activities such as watching short videos on an iPad, eye-tracking tests, and EEG tests. Studies range from basic research on how individuals with autism learn to clinical trials testing new medications or even computer games that could be therapeutic.

The easiest way to get connected with our research program and hear about what research you might be interested in is by signing up for the Duke Registry for Autism Research. The registry allows us to let families and individuals with autism spectrum disorder know about studies for which they might be eligible. It's easy to register! Just email elise.nelson@duke.edu or call toll free at 1-888-691-1062. Please let your friends and acquaintances know about the Duke Registry for Autism Research.

Do you have other questions about participating in research? Some of your questions might be answered here! Below are some examples of the types of studies being conducted at our Center.
Featured Studies Currently Enrolling

NIH Study of Oxytocin in Autism Reciprocal Social Behaviors (SOARS-B)

We are currently conducting a NIH-funded research study involving children (ages 3-17 years) with a diagnosis (or suspected diagnosis) of an autism spectrum disorder. The study is evaluating an investigational medication called oxytocin, a hormone that is associated with social behavior. Oxytocin is administered in the form of a nasal spray. Participants will take fake medication (placebo) or active medication (oxytocin) for 6 months. After the initial 6 months, everyone will get to try the real medication (oxytocin). The study involves monthly visits to Duke. Cognitive tests, physical exams, and blood tests are involved. If you have any questions or would like to participate in this research study, please call 1-888-691-162 or email elise.nelson@duke.edu.

Sensory Processing and Anxiety in Preschool Age Children with ASD

Recent research is beginning to provide some clues as to why some children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) also are anxious or fearful. In a federally-funded study, Duke is exploring whether sensory over-responsivity - a set of symptoms characterized by heightened and unusual reactivity to sensory stimuli - is associated with increased risk for anxiety in preschool age children with ASD. Our goals are to (1) understand the relationship between sensory processing, anxiety symptoms, GI (tummy) symptoms, and parental stress using a combination of parent report, observational, and brain based measures, and (2) explore new methods that could potentially improve our ability to assess sensory processing, attention, and anxiety in young children. Diagnostic and cognitive evaluations with feedback to caregivers are conducted as part of this study. This information will help us to develop better treatment programs for children with autism who have anxiety symptoms. If you are interested in this study please call 1-888-691-1062 or email elise.nelson@duke.edu.

Enrolling Soon!

NIH Study of Social Development in 4-11 year old Children with ASD

Duke is one of five universities across the nation to receive funding from the National Institutes of Health for a $28 million project which aims to better understand social development in preschool and school age children with ASD. The goal of the study is to develop a better understanding of children's social communication abilities so that improved measures of social communication can help clinicians diagnose, track, and assess treatments in children with ASD. Diagnostic and cognitive evaluations with feedback to caregivers are conducted as part of this study. This study will launch this fall. For more information, call 1-888-691-1062, email...
News and Events

Grand Opening Celebration

This summer we hosted an exciting opening celebration for the Duke Center for Autism and Brain Development, which included a ribbon cutting ceremony at our brand new state-of-the-art research facilities. Speakers included Dr. Victor Dzau, President of the Institute of Medicine, Duke Provost Dr. Sally Kornbluth, and Dr. Holly Lisanby, Chair of Duke's Department of Psychiatry. The highlights of the event were speeches given by Shelagh Kenney, who shared powerful remarks from the perspective of a parent, and artist D.J. Svoboda, who spoke eloquently about his experience as an adult living with ASD and pursuing his passion to live life to the fullest. We are proud to feature D.J.’s imaginative drawings in our reception area at the Center.

Researchers from many departments at Duke presented posters detailing their autism-related research projects. Duke Center for Autism staff provided tours of our new research facility, during which guests particularly enjoyed hearing from Dr. Mike Murias about the Center's EEG lab which is set up to make an EEG assessment entertaining for children and adults.

We were grateful to see so many individuals from Duke and the Durham community who showed support for our mission. Photos of Dr. Kornbluth, Dr. Dzau, D.J. Svoboda, and Dr. Katherine Davlantis are shown directly below, followed by photos of Shelagh Kenney, a parent, with her son, and Dr. Michael Murias and Samantha Major in the EEG lab.

For more photos from the event, visit our facebook page!
Raleigh Parents Find Comfort In Duke Care For Autistic Son

The Duke Center for Autism was featured in August by ABC11 news. Click here to hear about one family's experience with their 3 year old son.

Duke Center for Autism Hosts Els for Autism Golf Clinic

We were honored this year to be selected as a site for an Els for Autism Golf Challenge event and #gameON golf clinic. In June, 20+ youth with ASD from our
community were able to come to the Washington Duke Golf Club to gain some chipping, putting, and driving skills from expert coaches. The 104 degree weather didn't keep our brave golfers away, and the day was a great success. We may have some new golf talent in our midst now too! These pictures highlight some of the fun we had with the families. We hope to host this event again in future summers.