

The second annual Autism Health Fair took place this past September at SUNY Downstate with thirty local organizations providing information, entertainment, and giveaways to over three hundred attendees! The fair served as a platform for local families to learn about autism spectrum disorder. SUNY Downstate's Occupational Therapy students created a sensory playground that included a variety of textures and interactive components to engage children in socializing and exploring their environment. The FDNY participated with free giveaways and a fire truck for the children to explore. Children played with games and toys, created arts and crafts, interacted with therapy dogs, and watched an entertainer specializing in fun performances for children with developmental disabilities.

While children enjoyed a wide variety of activities, adults learned about autism spectrum disorder. Informational resources were given out about the disorder, treatments, and tips for self-care. Dr. Harris Huberman from the SUNY Downstate Child Development Clinic, and two mothers from the local community gave educational speeches. The Autism Health Fair provided a comprehensive educational and awareness platform for the local community to learn about a disorder that affects more than 3 million people in the United States.

The fair's success came from a dedicated team of SUNY Downstate students and faculty, led by Downstate Developmental Disabilities and its founder, Ben Schindel. Ben, a current MD/MPH student, served as this year's fair coordinator and planned a fun-filled day packed with informative resources about autism. Downstate students from different disciplines, including the College of Medicine, the College of Health Related Professions, and the School of Public Health, volunteered at the fair as well.

Downstate Developmental Disabilities is a student-run organization with two central missions, (1) to educate future healthcare practitioners and raise awareness about developmental disabilities and (2) to use available resources at SUNY Downstate to advocate for local families living and dealing with developmental disabilities. Downstate Developmental Disabilities organizes events including fairs and lectures to achieve its missions. The organization not only seeks to assist local families, but also to raise awareness within Downstate about developmental disabilities. Ben, Downstate Developmental Disabilities' founder, finds this to be an essential aspect of the organization's work because "helping people with disabilities is a multi-disciplinary effort. It is not just a physician's job and it is not just a therapist's job, but it is up to physicians, therapists, public health workers and professionals of different fields to come together and understand how to work for the benefit of people with developmental disabilities."

Interested public health students can join the Downstate Developmental Disabilities to learn more about developmental disabilities. The organization will be planning Downstate Disabilities Week, expected to take place in March or April 2017. Public health students may have time spent volunteering for the upcoming Downstate Disabilities Week count towards their Field Experience (FE) time requirement and may contact Dr. Karen Benker for more information about FE at

karen.benker@downstate.edu. Additionally, public health students can join Downstate Developmental Disabilities to learn about research opportunities that may fulfill their Culminating Experience (CE). For more information about Downstate Developmental Disabilities, students can contact Ben Schindel by emailing him at Downstate.Devel.Disabilities@gmail.com.