

SUNY Downstate’s School of Health Professions and College of Medicine Awarded \$2.2 million 5-year HRSA Grant to Establish Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and other Disabilities (LEND) Program in Brooklyn!

OVERVIEW

Designed to address marked disparities in the identification and treatment of *Autism Spectrum Disorder* (ASD) and other neurodisabilities, this project will be a collaboration between Downstate’s **School of Health Professions** (Co-PI Dean Allen Lewis) and the **College of Medicine’s Department of Pediatrics** (PI Dr. Harris Huberman). Together, the Downstate team will create a Brooklyn LEND Autism Center of Excellence Training and Education Program, with the goals of: enhancing ASD services across the lifespan by expanding capacity for early ASD diagnosis and evidence-based treatments, building a cadre of culturally-responsive providers, promoting leadership, and strengthening connections between providers, families and community organizations. The LEND program will be interprofessional (drawing both teachers and trainees from Pediatrics, Family Medicine, Psychiatry, Psychology, Social Work, and Occupational, Speech and Physical Therapy), will include family members along with self-advocates, and will provide both a core didactic program and a range of practicum experiences in Downstate clinics and in the community. This initiative builds on Downstate’s Early Child Development Autism Center of Excellence (ECDACE) program, and will complement current plans to establish a Behavioral Training program within the School of Health Professions (i.e., Applied Behavior Analysis MS degree program).

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Project Title: “Bridging the Gap and Integrating the Pieces: Enhancing Autism Services Across the Lifespan in Brooklyn.”

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In Brooklyn accessing evaluation and treatment services for children and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other neurodevelopmental disabilities (ND) is extremely challenging. There are significant health disparities both in the timing and quality of initial diagnostic evaluation and in the availability of evidence-based treatments for poor families and families of color. Significant factors include limited community awareness and shortage of qualified and culturally responsive providers to evaluate and provide critical evidence-based treatments such as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA).

The proposed program has several inter-related goals:

1. The first is to improve and ***expand capacity for early and accurate diagnosis and effective treatment*** of ASD and/or ND, starting in early childhood and extending through adulthood.
2. The second is to ***build a cadre of neurodevelopmental providers who are culturally responsive*** and fully understand the larger family, social and community context of children and adults with ASD and ND’s.

3. The third is to ***increase community awareness and strengthen connections*** between evaluation, treatment and training programs and families, and community organizations.

We propose an integrated, holistic, interprofessional model of ASD/ND services, building on existing programs at SUNY Downstate and its neighboring institutions. We will create an interdisciplinary Autism Center of Excellence Training and Education Program (ACETEP), provide long term training (LTT) to 7 trainees and medium (MTT) and short term (STT) training to practitioners from diverse fields and backgrounds. The program will include:

- A core series of interdisciplinary courses for all trainees
- An interdisciplinary / interprofessional team approach,
- Further didactic and practicum experience for:
 - 1) diagnosis and evaluation
 - 2) Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA), Speech Therapy (ST), Occupational Therapy (OT) evidence-based treatments
 - 3) neuroscience and its clinical and treatment implications
 - 4) entry-level ABA practitioner MTT and STT training
- Emphasis on practicum experience and field placements
- Ongoing cross-track team meetings and case discussions
- A capstone requirement for LTT trainees to address problems at a community / policy level
- Ongoing technical and Continuing Education support for trainees and others in the community

Short- and long-term outcomes will be assessed with objective indices of age of diagnosis, services received, and educational progress of samples of individuals with ASD / ND's in the surrounding communities. We will also assess the knowledge, proficiency and performance of the trainees throughout their training, and at 2, 5 and 10 years after program completion.

SUNY Downstate and its partners offer a robust setting for a LEND program: a renowned academic center including a School of Health Professions, early child development programs, adult programs, established programs dedicated to diversity and health disparities, active ASD research, and a long history of engagement with families and community around ASD.