



Autism Spectrum Disorders for the Primary Care Practitioner and Other Providers

Friday, May 5, 2023

Virtual Conference

Jointly Sponsored by Healthfirst and the State University of New York
Downstate Health Sciences University



DOWNSTATE
HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS FOR THE PRIMARY CARE PRACTITIONER AND OTHER PROVIDERS

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

This Continuing Medical Education (CME) activity is designed to provide primary care physicians, nurse practitioners, social workers, and other providers with an overview of early identification and management of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). The event will address early recognition of ASD warning signs, systematic screening, the systems for evaluation and services, and first steps in referral and care coordination.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this activity, participants will be able to:

- Recognize early signs of ASD in young children
- Implement surveillance and screening approaches to identify young children with ASD
- Make appropriate referrals for evaluation and services through Early Intervention and Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE)
- Organize appropriate medical evaluation (e.g., hearing screening, labs, consider genetic w/u)
- Provide family-centered care for children newly diagnosed with ASD

Learner Outcomes: Improved adherence to national guidelines (American Academy of Pediatrics) for screening and surveillance of developmental disabilities.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Primary care physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, nurses, child/adolescent psychiatrists, child neurologists, psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, physical therapists and speech language pathologists, and other providers involved in the care of children with ASD.

JOINT PROVIDERSHIP ACCREDITATION

This activity has been planned and implemented in accordance with the accreditation requirements and policies of the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) through the joint providership of the State University of New York (SUNY) Downstate Health Sciences University and Healthfirst. The State University of New York Downstate Health Sciences University is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education to provide continuing medical education for physicians.

DESIGNATION STATEMENT

SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University designates this live activity for a maximum of 6.0 AMA PRA Category 1 Credit(s)[™]. Physicians should claim only the credit commensurate with the extent of their participation in the activity.

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS FOR THE PRIMARY CARE PRACTITIONER AND OTHER PROVIDERS

Nursing: SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University is approved as a provider of nursing continuing professional development by the Northeast Multistate Division Education Unit, an accredited approver by the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Commission on Accreditation. Attendance of at least 90% of the live activity is required for nursing contact credits.

Physician Assistants: AAPA accepts category 1 credit from AOACCME, Prescribed credit from AAFP, and AMA category 1 credit for the PRA for organizations accredited by the ACCME.

Social Workers: SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University is recognized by the New York State Education Department's State Board for Social Work as an approved provider of continuing education for licensed social workers #SW-469.

MOC STATEMENT

Successful completion of this CME activity, which includes participation in the activity and individual assessment of and feedback to the learner, enables the learner to earn up to 6 MOC points in the American Board of Pediatrics' (ABP) Maintenance of Certification (MOC) program. It is the CME activity provider's responsibility to submit learner completion information to ACCME for the purpose of granting ABP MOC credit.

ADA STATEMENT

Special Needs: In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University seeks to make this conference accessible to all. If you have a disability that might require special accommodations, please email your need to Angela Sullivan at asullivan@healthfirst.org.

DISCLOSURE SUMMARY

SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University Office of CME (OCME) and its affiliates are committed to providing educational activities that are objective, balanced and as free of bias as possible. The OCME has established policies that will identify and mitigate all conflicts of interest prior to this educational activity. All accredited providers are required to mitigate and disclose to the activity audience the relevant financial relationships of the planners, presenters, and authors involved in the development of accredited content. An individual has a relevant financial relationship if he or she has a financial relationship in any amount occurring in the past 24 months with an ineligible company whose products or services are discussed in the accredited activity content over which the individual has control. **All of the relevant financial relationships listed for these individuals have been mitigated.** There is no commercial support being received for this event. This educational activity does not include any content that relates to the products and/or services of an Ineligible company with whom there is a financial relationship.

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS FOR THE PRIMARY CARE PRACTITIONER AND OTHER PROVIDERS

The following faculties reported no relevant relationships with any organization that could be perceived as a real or an apparent conflict in the context of the subject of the presentation.

Catherine Canary	Richard Honigman	Jennifer Morrison-Diallo
Maja Castillo	Liz Isakson	Neelima Nayyar-Gujral
Anne David	Harris Huberman	Jerry Piper
Kate Dolan-Cheney	David Kaye	Farrah Rios
Dolores Giurdanella	Ivana Krstovska	Shena Walker
Joan Hittelman	Moshe Kupferstein	Jessica Wallenstein

All of the relevant financial relationships listed for the individual(s) below have been mitigated.

Planning Committee Members

Relationships

Maja Castillo	Maria Gabriela Mantilla-Garcia
Melisa Damcevska	Edeline Mitton (CME)
Mahmoud Dweik	Jennifer Morrison-Diallo
Harris Huberman	Neelima Nayar
Elizabeth Jean-Jacques	Zeldy Singer
Ivana Krstovska	Pelumi Soyemi
Moshe Kupferstein	Angela Sullivan
Allen Lewis	

None

Friday, May 5, 2023

8:00AM – 8:30AM **Welcome and Introduction to CME Activity**
Allen Lewis, PhD, CRC
*Dean and Professor, School of Health Professions
SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University*

Introductions from Partner Organizations

8:30AM – 9:00AM **Disparities in ASD Evaluation and Care, Increasing Evaluation Capacity & Community Outreach**
Jennifer Morrison-Diallo, PhD, BCBA-D
Project Director, LEND Brooklyn, Director of Mental Health Services-Intellectual Disability Services, New York City Health + Hospitals/Kings County

Coding and Billing for Developmental/Behavioral Care in Primary Care Setting
Maja Castillo, MD, MHA
Assistant Vice President, Pediatric Medical Director, Healthfirst

Early Child Development, Role of PCP, Diagnosis and Next Steps

9:00AM – 10:30AM **Early Childhood Development/ Autism Spectrum Disorders**
Richard Honigman, MD, FAAP
Pediatrician, New York State Association for Infant Mental Health

Medical Evaluation of Autism
Moshe Kupferstein, DO
Board Certified Pediatrician, Parcare Community Health Network

Next Steps: Diagnosis, Prognosis, Treatment and Family-Centered Care
Harris Huberman, MD, MPH
Director, Division of Child Development, SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University

10:30AM – 10:45AM **Question and Answer Session**

10:45AM – 11:00AM **Break: 15 Minutes**

Early Intervention and Special Education Systems

Young Children with ASD and the New York City Early Intervention Program

Catherine A. Canary, MD, MPH

Medical Director, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Bureau of Early Intervention

Dolores Giurdanella

Director, Regional Office Operations, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Bureau of Early Intervention

11:00AM – 12:00PM

Early Learners and Special Education: Information about Transition to Preschool, CPSE, and Kindergarten

Anne David

CPSE Administrator, New York City Public Schools

Kate Dolan-Cheney

Director, ASD Programs, New York City Department of Education

Jerry Piper

Process Management Analyst, Strategic Initiatives, New York City Public Schools

Jessica Wallenstein

Senior Executive Director, Committees on Special Education, New York City Public Schools

12:00PM – 12:15PM

Question and Answer Session

12:15PM – 1:15PM

Break/Lunch: 60 Minutes

Systematic Identification and Ongoing Management

Meeting the American Academy of Pediatrics Recommendations for Developmental Surveillance and Screening

Liz Isakson, MD, FAAP

Executive Director, Docs for Tots

1:15PM – 2:15PM

Ongoing Care for Patients with ASD: What Project TEACH Can Do For You!

David Kaye, MD

Professor of Psychiatry, University at Buffalo Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences

Executive Director, Project TEACH

2:15PM – 2:30PM

Break: 15 Minutes

Roundtable Discussion

Bridging the Gap and Integrating the Pieces: Enhancing Early Identification of ASD

Facilitator: Jennifer Morrison-Diallo, PhD, BCBA-D

Panelists:

Shena Walker, Family Advocate
Farrah Rios, Family Advocate
Ivana Krstovska, PhD, BCBA-D
Neelima Nayyar-Gujral, RN, BSN
Joan Hittelman, PhD
Catherine A. Canary, MD, MPH
Kate Dolan-Cheney
Dolores Guirdanella
Richard Honigman, MD, FAAP
Harris Huberman, MD, MPH
Liz Isakson, MD, FAAP
David Kaye, MD
Moshe Kupferstein, DO

2:30PM – 4:00PM

4:00PM

Closing Remarks/Adjourn

Jennifer Morrison-Diallo, PhD, BCBA-D



Project Director, LEND Brooklyn, Director, Mental Health Services-Intellectual Disability Services, New York City Health + Hospitals/ Kings County

Jennifer Morrison-Diallo earned her doctorate in psychology with a specialization in learning and behavior analysis from the City University of New York – The Graduate Center and is a board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA) as well as a New York State Licensed Behavior Analyst. She has worked at New York City Health + Hospitals/Kings County for the past nine years and is currently serving as a director of mental health services for a specialty adult behavioral health inpatient unit for individuals diagnosed with autism and/or other neurodevelopmental disorders and comorbid psychiatric diagnoses. This unit is the only inpatient unit for this population in New York State and serves the most acute and high-risk individuals across New York City's five boroughs. This unit is a collaboration to provide biopsychosocial supports with the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), the Office of Mental Health (OMH), and NYC Health + Hospitals. Jennifer teaches a variety of different psychology and behavior analytic courses at Daemen University and CUNY Queens College and is the Project Director, Behavioral Health and Community Services for SUNY Downstate's MCHB HRSA LEND grant.



Maja Castillo, MD, MHA



Assistant Vice President, Pediatric Medical Director, Healthfirst

Maja Castillo, MD, MHA, is the Assistant Vice President Pediatric Medical Director at Healthfirst. In her leadership role, she provides clinical direction for programs and activities to transform care for children, including creating and facilitating programs that improve member access to care and promote desired health outcomes. Additionally, Dr. Castillo provides support for care and utilization management, especially for complex and vulnerable child members.

Dr. Castillo joined Healthfirst in 2020 after many years as a practicing pediatrician in New York City working both in primary care and the Pediatric Emergency Department at Columbia Presbyterian. In addition to her work with Healthfirst, she is an advisory board member for the United Hospital Fund PEDS Network and supports health promotion activities with the Hispanic Federation.



Richard Honigman, MD, FAAP



Pediatrician, New York State Association for Infant Mental Health

Richard Honigman, MD, FAAP, is a board-certified general pediatrician with more than 40 years' experience in practice. His interest is in developmental, relational, and environmental aspects of early-life adversity. He was part of the initial cohort of Project TEACH in 2010–2011. Following this, he was part of the 2012–2013 cohort of Dr. Ed Tronick's University of Massachusetts-Boston Infant Parent Mental Health Post Graduate Fellowship Certificate Program.

He has completed Bessel Van Der Kolk's online Traumatic Stress Studies (2014–2015) and Bruce Perry's Child Trauma Academy Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics Phase 1 (2016–2018) and Phase 2 (2019–2020) trainings. In September 2019, Dr. Honigman became New York State American Academy of Pediatrics (NYS AAP) District 2 Chapter 2 Developmental/Behavioral Pediatrics Committee Chair, and in November 2019 was elected to the Board of Directors of the New York State Association for Infant Mental Health. As Chair, he was awarded a National AAP Grant (and later given an AAP Special Achievement Award) to increase primary care-developmental pediatric collaboration, which he utilized to present a series of guest lectures in current concepts of normal and abnormal developmental processes in pediatrics. Dr. Honigman also serves as a reviewer for the online journal *Frontiers In*.

Presently Dr. Honigman functions as an AAP Infant Mental Health HUB facilitator. He has been a speaker on Adverse Childhood Experiences for NYS AAP District 2 Chapter 2, and UMass IPMH program. He served as a pediatric advisor for the monthly Adelphi University Developmental Psychology Infant Mental Health Program interdisciplinary conferences. Dr. Honigman also collaborated with Docs for Tots Help Me Grow/Center for Youth Wellness, Long Island, NY collaboration in their 2018–2019 initiative to teach primary care physicians the science and methodology behind ACES screening in the primary care office.

Since 2009, Dr. Honigman has been affiliated with *Reach Within*, a NYC-Grenada based NGO whose goal is to improve outcomes for children affected by early-life adversity/ACEs/toxic stress in Grenada and the Caribbean. In his capacity as Chair of Reach Within's Education and Research, Dr. Honigman helped devise somatosensory and psychosocial interventional programs for children living in residential facilities and for their caregivers to improve outcomes. Additionally, Dr. Honigman led international conferences in Grenada for child caregivers focusing on early childhood development (2014, 2015) and assisted UNICEF in the Eastern Caribbean Region in various capacities. He was part of a panel discussion at the 2018 Rome World Association for Infant Mental Health (WAIMH) conference and was a presenter on Trauma Informed Care at the 2018 Bermuda ACES Awareness Conference. Additionally, Drs. Honigman and Tronick, along with several others, conducted a preliminary ACEs study among nutmeg processing plant workers in Grenada that was published in 2019, Vol 11 Issue 2 of the *Caribbean Journal of Psychology*. Dr. Honigman also participated in recent Clinton Global Initiative/Clinton Action Network meetings. In August 2022, Dr. Honigman gave a virtual presentation on Adverse Childhood Experiences to teachers from the Jamaican Ministry of Education and Youth.



Moshe Kupferstein, DO



Board Certified Pediatrician, Parcare Community Health Network

Dr. Moshe Kupferstein started taking care of children several years before attending medical school. He worked in a group home, caring for medically frail children and children with developmental disabilities. This connection led him towards medicine, specifically pediatrics.

Dr. Kupferstein attended medical school at Nova Southeastern University in Florida and completed his Pediatric Residency program at SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University in Brooklyn, NY. He developed a focus in mental health and children with developmental disabilities.

Since residency, Dr. Kupferstein has worked in outpatient offices in New York and enjoys challenging cases and helping children with chronic diseases, such as asthma, diabetes, and obesity. He diagnoses and treats ADHD, anxiety, and depression with medication as needed.

He currently lives in Staten Island with his wife, Leah, and two daughters, and enjoys cooking and the outdoors.



Harris Huberman, MD, MPH



Director, Division of Child Development, SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University

Harris Huberman, MD, MPH, is a developmental pediatrician and the director of the SUNY Downstate Division of Child Development. He was the Medical Director of the NYC Infant Child Health Assessment Program — NYC's Early Intervention Child Find program — and has been the Principal Investigator (PI) of several NIH and MCHB-funded studies of interventions to improve early child development. Currently he is the PI on two clinical trials to treat young children with ASD with leucovorin in collaboration with Phoenix Children's Hospital and is the Project Director of the newly formed Brooklyn Leadership Education in Neurodisabilities (LEND) program funded by MCHB. Dr. Huberman's areas of interest include autism, public health and its intersection with child development, preventive parenting programs to improve developmental outcomes for children living in poverty, and international health.

Dr. Huberman currently directs the Behavior and Development rotation for SUNY Downstate's pediatric residents and with his team runs a Child Development clinic which is heavily focused on identifying and caring for children on the Autism Spectrum.



Catherine A. Canary, MD, MPH



Medical Director, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Bureau of Early Intervention

Catherine Canary, MD, MPH, joined the Bureau of Early Intervention (EI) as their Medical Director in October 2015. She provides clinical oversight to the five Regional Offices as well as to the Evaluation Standards Unit, the Assistive Technology Unit, and an innovative systems integration project using the healthcare systems' electronic health record to make EI referrals combined with bidirectional information exchange.

Dr. Canary completed a six-year premedical-medical program at the University of Michigan and earned an MPH from New York University. She worked at the Developmental Disabilities Center at Roosevelt Hospital for several years, seeing pediatric and adult patients and teaching residents and fellows. She then became medical director at New Alternatives for Children, a foster care and preventive services agency for children with complex medical and developmental disorders. She spent 10 years at the Mount Sinai Medical Center evaluating infants and toddlers as part of their Early Intervention evaluation site, and then continued to work for EI as an independent contractor until 2012. She most recently worked at Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn as part of their Center for Brain and Behavior; she taught pediatric residents and evaluated children of various ages from post-NICU up through high school.



Dolores Giurdanella



Director, Regional Office Operations, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Bureau of Early Intervention

Dolores Giurdanella has been serving as the Director of Regional Office Operations at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Bureau of Early Intervention, since January of 2022. In this role she works collaboratively with internal and external partners to advocate on behalf of the children and families served by the program, oversees the staff of the five Early Intervention Regional Offices, and the NYC Early Intervention Program as a whole, which provides supports and services to approximately 30,000 families annually. Ms. Giurdanella started her social service career as a substitute teacher working with adults with intellectual disabilities in classroom settings.

Ms. Giurdanella found her passion and dedicated herself to helping children with disabilities and their families after developing a deep understanding of how everyday learning environments and the importance of caregivers can improve the developmental trajectory of very young children with special needs. Ms. Giurdanella has 26 years of experience in the Early Childhood field, specializing in Early Intervention. Ms. Giurdanella has had many roles in the NYC Early Intervention systems, beginning in 1996 when she took on her first Service Coordination case. While working in the Early Intervention provider community, Ms. Giurdanella transitioned to management and training roles. Committed to the work and mission of the Early Intervention Program, Dolores joined the NYC Bureau of Early Intervention in 2007 as an Assistant Director and in 2012 was promoted to Director for the Manhattan Regional Office. As the Regional Director of Manhattan, Dolores worked on projects such as Health Homes and Case Continuity to help support the program and ensure that eligible children and families received their services.



Kate Dolan-Cheney



Director, ASD Programs, New York City Department of Education

Kate Dolan-Cheney is a speech language pathologist (SLP) by training and has worked with children on the spectrum for more than 27 years in a variety of medical and educational settings in New York. While with the New York City Department of Education, Kate has worked as an SLP in both D75 and community schools. Before joining the Central Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Programs Team in 2016, Kate worked in an ASD Nest Program as an SLP providing social development interventions for Nest students.

Kate is a graduate of St. John's University where she earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Special Education, and a Master of Arts degree in Speech Language Pathology. Additionally, Kate has a special interest in yoga, establishing a weekly yoga program for special needs children on Long Island.



Liz Isakson, MD, FAAP



Executive Director, Docs for Tots

Dr. Liz Isakson is a pediatrician and public health practitioner with more than 20 years of experience. She is Executive Director of Docs for Tots, a non-profit organization that promotes practices, policies, and investments that will enable young children age 0 to five to thrive. Docs for Tots creates linkages between doctors, policymakers, early childhood practitioners, and other stakeholders to ensure that children grow up healthy. Dr. Isakson has multiple publications published across the systems of early care and education, health, and family economic security. She teaches advocacy to graduate-level students at Mt. Sinai School of Public Health. Dr. Isakson trained in general pediatrics at the Children's Hospital of New York, where she was Chief Resident. She received her medical degree from the University of Connecticut Medical School.



David Kaye, MD



Professor of Psychiatry, University at Buffalo Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences Executive Director, Project TEACH

David L. Kaye, MD, is a child/adolescent psychiatrist and Professor of Psychiatry at the University at Buffalo (UB) Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. Dr. Kaye received his medical degree from the University of Vermont in 1977 and subsequently completed his residency training in general and child/adolescent psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin. He has been on the faculty at the University at Buffalo since 1982, established the residency training program in child/adolescent psychiatry in 1991, and remained the Director of Training until 2014. Since 2010 he has been the Medical Director for the child psychiatry access program Project TEACH (www.projectteachny.org) and in 2022 became Executive Director. The program received the APA Psychiatric Services Bronze Medal in 2016–17 and the Rieger Service Program Award for Excellence from AACAP. He has served in many positions of leadership regionally, nationally, in the medical school, hospitals, and department of psychiatry at UB.

Dr. Kaye has published papers and chapters on a variety of topics, including education, collaboration with primary care, and psychodynamic psychotherapy in children and adolescents. He is the first author on a book for primary care providers entitled *Child and Adolescent Mental Health* (Lippincott Williams and Wilkins 2002). He has presented frequently at national meetings and has been a leader in national organizations, including the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and the American Association of Directors of Psychiatric Residency Training (AADPRT), serving as its president in 2009–10. He has received two of AACAP's highest awards as recipient of the Catchers in the Rye Award in 2016 and the Simon Wile MD Leadership in Consultation Award in 2021. He is a Distinguished Fellow of both the American Psychiatric Association and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.



Joan Hittelman, PhD



Director, Children's Mental Health Center (CMHC), Director, Infant and Child Behavior Laboratory, SUNY Downstate Medical Center

Dr. Hittelman is currently the Director of the Children's Mental Health Center (CMHC) and the Director of the Infant and Child Behavior Laboratory at SUNY Downstate Medical Center. CMHC was originally founded as the ICLC Mental Health services in 1975; and the Behavior Laboratory in 1972. As a clinical psychologist and neuropsychologist, she has been diagnosing, evaluating, treating, and advocating for children for more than 48 years. The Infant and Child Learning Center (ICLC) was established in 1987 to provide Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education Services for children on two long-term prospective studies of perinatal exposure to HIV infection in infants and children (MITS and WITS 1986–1993). Within a few years its services expanded to serve all medically fragile children with developmental disabilities, and soon after all young children with developmental delays. Currently, CMHC provides psychological and neuropsychological evaluations, psychotherapy, medication management, and advocacy for children and their families. CMHC is unique in that it can refer families for legal counsel to assist in finding appropriate educational services for their children.



Ivana Krstovska, PhD, BCBA-D



Psychologist, Behavior Analyst, and Special Education Teacher; Psychological Evaluator, New York City Early Intervention Program; Adjunct Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology at Lehman College, City University of New York

Ivana Krstovska, PhD, BCBA-D, is a psychologist, behavior analyst, and special education teacher with more than 20 years of clinical experience in the field of autism and other neurodevelopmental disabilities.

Dr. Krstovska is a faculty at the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and other Disabilities (LEND) training program. She is also an adjunct assistant professor at the Department of Psychology at Lehman College, City University of New York, where she teaches classes related to psychology and behavior analysis. Dr. Krstovska works as a psychological evaluator in the New York City Early Intervention Program. As a consultant, she develops and conducts trainings and workshops for parents and caregivers, educators, and other clinicians to address learning and behavioral challenges of children with neurodevelopmental disabilities within various educational and clinical settings in New York City and internationally. Dr. Krstovska presents at state, national, and international professional conferences on topics related to evidence-based treatment for individuals with neurodevelopmental disabilities, teaching early social-communication skills to young children with autism, health disparities and access to early autism diagnosis and treatment, as well as the importance of advocacy and parent support.



Neelima Nayyar-Gujral, RN, BSN



Nurse Coordinator, Division of Child Development, SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University

Ms. Nayyar-Gujral is the Nurse Coordinator for SUNY Downstate's Division of Child Development. She coordinates the Division's developmental clinics and research initiatives, as well as the Behavior & Development resident training module. Ms. Nayyar-Gujral has extensive experience in pediatric primary care nursing and has certificate training in patient care coordination. She has served as a Developmental Care Manager in Downstate's ambulatory pediatric clinic. Ms. Nayyar-Gujral is also one of the few New York developmental providers who conducts Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule evaluations in Urdu.



Farrah Rios



Family Advocate

Farrah Rios is a parent advocate who is passionate about promoting neurodiversity, cultural sensitivity, special education advocacy, and accessibility of information and technology. Ms. Rios has an 11-year-old son on the Autism Spectrum, and she has used her skills with her personal advocacy journey to help other parents who are in need of navigating the complex systems of early intervention, special education, and access to evidence-based treatment. Ms. Rios completed the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and other Disabilities (LEND) fellowship at SUNY Downstate, where she co-founded the LEND Parent Support Group, and she continues to actively participate in the group meetings and advocacy training series. Ms. Rios has presented workshops in NYC and at state conferences on health disparities and access to early autism diagnosis and the importance of ongoing parent support.



Shena Walker



Family Advocate

Shena Walker is a parent advocate who has been using her advocacy skills to help her son with autism access the services in the educational system that he is entitled to. She participates in the LEND Parent Support Group at SUNY Downstate, where she shares her advocacy experience in order to help other parents with their advocacy journey. She organizes workshops in her community about recognizing the early signs of autism and the importance of early referral to access diagnostic evaluations and treatment.

