



Fall 2019



**The Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research**

(MAIER) is a partnership between the University of Maine College of Education and Human Development and the Maine Department of Education.

MAIER is dedicated to building state-wide capacity to improve outcomes for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

- Leadership
- Training
- Professional Development
- Technical Assistance
- Consultation
- Research



The Maine Department of Education provides significant support and funding for the activities and outreach of the Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research.

**Donate to  
MAIER**

Help support MAIER's outreach to Maine families through our educational and social events. It's easy using our online donation page: [umaine.edu/autisminstitute/donate-to-maier/](http://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/donate-to-maier/)

**Holiday greetings from the Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research,**

As the year winds down and we look forward to 2020, we bring you this issue of *Pathways* to share news about recent MAIER activities and our plans for the coming year. It is our goal to support individuals on the autism spectrum through our work with educators, professionals, researchers, families, and communities, which brings us to many places across the state of Maine, but also provides us with the opportunity to share our work with professionals around the country.

This past summer, MAIER staff participated in the University of Maine's (UM) pilot program to assist High School students with autism prepare for college. The "Step-Up Program" was a partnership with the Maine Department of Labor, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and several UM departments, and was designed to help prepare HS juniors and seniors gain the skills and experiences needed for post-secondary success. To read more about the program and its components, visit the UMaine website: [ccids.umaine.edu/2019/09/06/step-up-program-helps-high-school-students-with-autism-prepare-for-college/](http://ccids.umaine.edu/2019/09/06/step-up-program-helps-high-school-students-with-autism-prepare-for-college/)

We have some exciting news to share with you about our children and teen social skills groups! We are now partnering with KidsPeace, a private charity dedicated to serving the behavioral and mental health needs of children, families, and communities. MAIER staff will train and coach the KidsPeace staff to implement the Children's Friendship Training and the PEERS for Adolescents' social skills groups. At this time, these groups will be open to those families who were to begin these groups this past fall before we lost our funding. The no-cost social skills groups will begin in mid-February, 2020, being held on Tuesdays from 4:30 pm-6 pm for the Children's Friendship Training and 6:30pm-8pm for the PEERS for Adolescents. Sessions take place at the University of Maine, Memorial Union.

Check out this issue to learn about the PEERS project at UM, MAIER's plans for presenting at national conferences in 2020, and recent changes coming to the Early Start Maine program. In addition, read about MAIER Family Partnership (MFP) activities and announcements of special interest to families in our *Family Focus* section below.

We wish you all a peaceful holiday season. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us if we can be of assistance. Contact us by email ([maineautisminstitute@umaine.edu](mailto:maineautisminstitute@umaine.edu)) or phone (207-581-2352).

Best regards,

*Deborah L. Rooks-Ellis*, Ph.D. Director, MAIER

*Donna Doherty*, M.S., Editor, MAIER Family Partnership Director

## MAIER Faculty Share their Research and Expertise with International Audiences

In 2020, MAIER faculty will be presenting at two upcoming conferences! In January, Dr. Sarah Howorth and Dr. Deborah Rooks-Ellis will share their research findings at the 21<sup>st</sup> *International Conference on Autism, Intellectual Disability and Developmental Disabilities* in Sarasota, Florida. In February, they will present at the *Council for Exceptional Children Convention* in Portland, Oregon. Presentation topics include “Breaking Down Classroom Barriers for Students with Autism in College,” “Telehealth Parent Training Using the Early Start Denver Model,” “Autism Leader Teams and Professional Development,” “Sexuality and Autism,” and a “Meta-Analysis of Reading Interventions for Students with Severe Disabilities.” Are you attending either of these conferences? Be sure to stop by and say hello!

### Upcoming 2020 Professional Development Series

For full description, presenter bios, and registration information, visit: [umaine.edu/autisminstitute/events/category/professional-development/](http://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/events/category/professional-development/)

**February 13, 2020:** [Using Technology to Support Students with Disabilities](#). (UMaine at Machias). **Speakers:** Sarah Howorth, Ph.D., BCBA-D & Deborah Rooks-Ellis, Ph.D.

This session will cover many popular technology platforms (iPads, Chrome/ Chromebooks, etc.) and the wide selection of educational apps available for them. *Note: This workshop is a FREE session offered through a partnership of MAIER and the Washington County Consortium. Registration required.*

**March 11, 2020:** [Assistive Technology Mini-Maker Fair: Developing and Supporting Communication Skills for Individuals with ASD](#) (Jeff’s Catering, Brewer). **Speaker:** Jennifer Seale, Ph.D., CCC-SLP

This workshop will focus on augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) and assistive technology (AT) solutions that can be used by individuals who have autism.

**April 16, 2020:** [Keeping it Simple: Easy Tier 2 Group Strategies to Increase Student Engagement](#) (Jeff’s Catering, Brewer) **Speaker:** Cary Trump, M.A. Ed., BCBA

Provides a comprehensive guide on implementing group contingencies. Participants will: be able to identify and discuss various group contingencies; learn how to implement various group contingencies and teach classroom routines and skills using behavior and skills training and; learn how to fade reward frequency, based on student performance.

**May 14, 2020:** [Developing Social Connectiveness: A Key Component to Successful Inclusion](#) (Thomas College, Waterville) **Speaker:** Terese Dana, M.S., BCBA

You will learn ways to naturally motivate both autistic and non-autistic students to participate together in engaging collaborative activities that promote positive experiences, and lay the groundwork for building meaningful social connections.

**June 4, 2020:** [From First Words to Written Expression! Building Communicative Competence in Learners with ASD and Intellectual Disability](#) (Well’s Conference Center, UM, Orono) **Speaker:** Robert Pennington, Ph.D., BCBA-D

In this interactive session, participants will learn strategies for developing their students’ communication skills within school environments.

**Workshops:** \$35/person unless otherwise noted. Check-in begins at 8:30am and start time at 9am. Contact hours certificates are provided at each PD, with CEUs available by contacting MAIER two weeks prior to each event and a \$20 processing fee. Lunch is responsibility of participants.

Register online ([umaine.edu/autisminstitute/events/category/professional-development/](http://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/events/category/professional-development/) )

**Did you know MAIER’s 2016-17 PD series** was available to view free online?

All nine of our workshops are now available to view online for free and *Contact Hours* are available. This Archived viewing option allows you to watch each selected workshop at a time convenient with your schedule. Check out our Professional Development page to register: [umaine.edu/autisminstitute/trainings/](http://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/trainings/)

## MAIER Faculty Now Nationally Certified to Deliver PEERS Social Skills Intervention

The Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relationship Skills (PEERS) was developed at the UCLA Semel Institute by Dr. Elizabeth Laugeson. As of today, it is the only evidence-based social skills intervention for teens and young adults with autism that is supported by more than 30 research studies conducted worldwide. PEERS is a manualized, social skills training intervention for adolescents and young adults. It has a strong evidence-base for use with teens and young adults with autism spectrum disorders, but is also appropriate for teens and young adults with ADHD, anxiety, depression, and other socioemotional problems.

Drs. Deborah Rooks-Ellis and Sarah Howorth of MAIER have been certified by the Semel Institute to deliver this intervention and to train others to also deliver this intervention here in Maine.

### PEERS Research at UMaine

This research involves assisting children and adults (ages 6-years-old to college-aged young adults) who have a diagnosis of either a Developmental Disability or an Autism Spectrum Disorder (Aspergers, Autism Spectrum disorder), in learning prosocial skills. This study will take place over the course of a 10-month school year and will teach social skills including: Conversational skills (i.e. entering and exiting conversations); electronic communication; appropriate use of humor; good sportsmanship; peer entry strategies; conflict management strategies; characteristics of friendships; planning get-togethers; dating etiquette; and handling teasing and bullying.

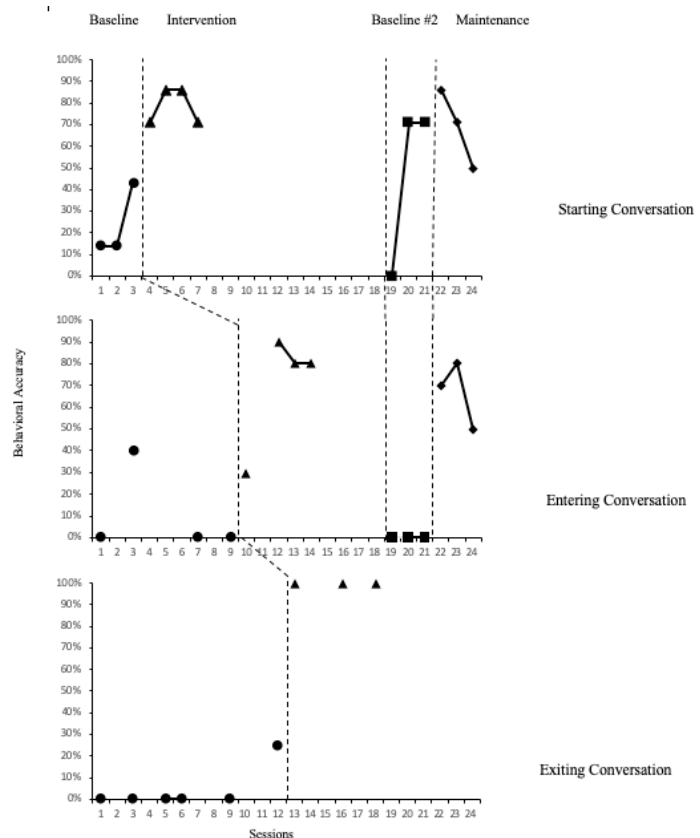
After intake surveys and interviews are conducted (75-90 minutes) and eligibility is determined, social skills groups and parent/social coaching groups will take place once per week for a total of 90 minutes at the University of Maine, Orono. Participants and their parent/social coach will meet in two, separate but concurrently timed groups. Virtual videos recorded will be of the participant and their social skills group role-play partner (another participant) using a 360 camera (e.g.: Samsung Gear 3601) with 4K resolution to fully immerse both participants in the virtual experience.

### PEERS for Young Adults

This past fall, 2019, seven young adults and their social coaches have been participating in the PEERS for Young Adults weekly interpersonal skills training. These young adults have been learning conversational skills, how to pay attention to their humor feedback, skills for handling disagreements, dating etiquette, and procedures for handling direct and indirect bullying. Their social coaches have been guiding them through weekly out-of-group activities that help them to generalize these skills to their daily lives (i.e., school, jobs, and relationships).

We are currently recruiting for our Spring sessions to begin in mid-February 2020. If you are interested in participating or would like more information about this study, please contact the researchers by email: ([maineautisminstitute@maine.edu](mailto:maineautisminstitute@maine.edu)) or phone: 207-581-2352

This image demonstrates the effectiveness of the fall 2019 group on the development and maintenance of conversational skills for one participant. Each data point reflects the ability of each participant to complete the steps outlined for each conversational skill.



## Update on the Early Start Maine Program

Since January 2015, the Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research (MAIER) and Maine Child Development Services (CDS) have collaborated to provide the Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) intervention to young children with autism, birth to age three, and their families. Known as Early Start Maine, this statewide program has served 374 young children with autism and their families. As of December 31, 2019, MAIER will transition oversight of the Early Start Maine program to Maine CDS.

Resources developed through the project funding will remain available on the MAIER website, including the **Parent Coaching Modules** ([umaine.edu/autisminstitute/parent-coaching-modules/](http://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/parent-coaching-modules/)). These modules are designed for parents and caregivers to encourage positive emotions and happy interactions with your child in a manner that promotes learning. These modules do not require special equipment and take advantage of toys and play materials readily available in most homes. Each module includes information, resources, and activities to help you help your child achieve important learning goals. In a step-by-step manner, the modules build from teaching you how to capture your child's attention to higher level social communication skills. We will support the online resources until the content is no longer applicable.



Please join us in thanking MAIER's Early Start team of nine research assistants for their dedication and commitment to the families, children and early intervention providers that they have served these last five years. We value their accomplishments and contributions to the field of early intervention and wish them well as they begin new adventures.

If you have a young child with autism, please contact your regional Child Development Services office ([maine.gov/doe/learning/cds/contact](http://maine.gov/doe/learning/cds/contact)), or the state office (877-770-8883) to learn more about the Early Start Maine program.



## *Family Focus*

Season's Greetings to all our families and friends of MAIER,

The fall has flown by for us this year as we connected with many of you at our family events, the fall ASM conference, or at smaller community meetings. I am always grateful for your willingness to share your stories and families with us as we work together to support your needs and enrich your lives.

Recent MAIER family partnership events included our summer event co-hosted with the Adaptive Outdoor Education Center (AOEC) in Carrabassett Valley for a day of outdoor activities and nature-based play. Despite the rain, spirits remained high and our staff, volunteers and those families attending enjoyed our time together. This fall, MAIER partnered again with the AOEC and the MaineBound Adventure Center at UMaine to offer an afternoon of Adaptive climbing and activities. Check out the news and see photos from these MFP events on our website: [umaine.edu/autisminstitute/maine-family-partnership/mfp-events/](http://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/maine-family-partnership/mfp-events/) And be sure to read about our annual holiday celebration at the Maine Discovery Museum in a feature story in this issue.

We continue to build our resources to support Maine families impacted by autism, so be sure to check our **Family Resource** pages ([umaine.edu/autisminstitute/resources/](http://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/resources/)) regularly for updates. We added a new page to our **Places and Places Directory** ([umaine.edu/autisminstitute/maine-family-partnership/places-and-spaces/directory/](http://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/maine-family-partnership/places-and-spaces/directory/)) highlighting National Autism-friendly opportunities beyond the Maine borders, and thanks to our MFP friends Marilyn and Dan Gott, we developed a new handout "Adaptive Sports and Recreational Opportunities in Maine." See: [umaine.edu/autisminstitute/maine-family-partnership/places-and-spaces/adaptive-sports-and-rec/](http://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/maine-family-partnership/places-and-spaces/adaptive-sports-and-rec/)

I hope you will take a few moments to read and share this edition of *Pathways*, and perhaps drop me an email or make a call to share what you have been up to or your ideas for family events.

Hope to see you in the coming year!

*Donna*  
*Donna Doherty, MAIER Family Partnership Director*



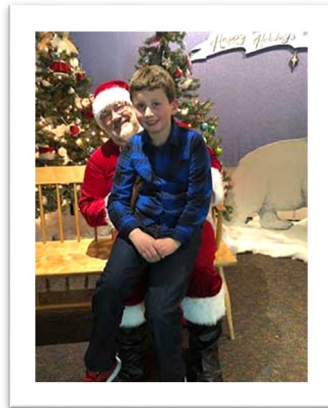
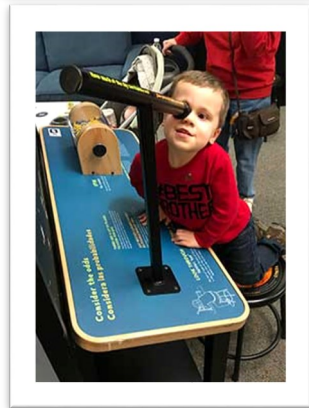
## MAIER Families Visit with Santa at the Maine Discovery Museum



It was a special day at the Maine Discovery Museum (MDM) in Bangor as Santa's Village came alive for children attending the sensory-friendly "My Day to Play" on Sunday December 8<sup>th</sup>. Thanks to an on-going partnership between the MDM and the Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research (MAIER) at the University of Maine, more than 30 families experienced the excitement and joy of visiting with Santa in an environment designed to support children on the autism spectrum on their own terms.

Whether it took the gentle coaxing of a friendly elf, the silly smile or gentle hand of Santa, or the support of a sibling or parent, most found the courage to sit beside the jolly old elf. UMaine College of Education & Human Development (COEHD) student volunteers guided Christmas craft activities in Santa's Village and supported play in the gross motor room as our special guests explored all three floors of the Museum. Families left with smiles on their faces, newly crafted ornaments and holiday gift bags thanks to community donations.

Our Santa's Village at the MDM is truly one of our highlights of the year for MAIER's Family Partnership. It was wonderful to see old friends again (and watching your children grow year to year), and it is a joy to make new friends with those who joined us for this year for the first time. Check out the photos below sent to us by MFP parents capturing some of the fun!



Our sincere thanks to the amazing and supportive Museum Staff who provide such a wonderful space for all of us to celebrate the holiday season, and to Rosalyn Fisher, retired OT and lead volunteer for the *My Day to Play* program. Thanks especially to Santa Roy, our faithful Santa for yet another year; you make the magic possible! And to our dedicated COEHD student volunteers, we couldn't do this without your cheerful support and dedication to our community.

Check out all the wonderful photos from the event on our website: [umaine.edu/autisminstitute/pathways/fall-2019/santas-village-event/](http://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/pathways/fall-2019/santas-village-event/)

## MAIER Family Partnership Survey 2019

Thanks to all of you who took the time to respond to our invitation to participate in our MAIER Family Partnership survey last spring! Your responses helped us examine our effectiveness and guide future planning for our outreach to Maine families. The research report provided evidence of the impact and importance of our family and community outreach activities, projects, and resources to our funding agency (MDOE).

In their surveys, parents and caregivers shared the value of our resources, such as the *Maine Parent Guide to Autism Spectrum Disorders* and those who attended our family events reported positive experiences for their entire family, noting how difficult it often is to participate in community events. Parents told us they enjoyed meeting families who share their experiences and challenges, and were grateful for the opportunity to have some family fun in a supportive and judgement-free environment.

We would like to share some of the comments we received to give you a better idea of the experiences families report when joining us for MFP events, and hope this encourages you to join us for MFP events in the coming year!

Parents wrote:

*Staff and volunteers are always wonderful, offering up help and giving parents an opportunity to breathe, feeling like their kids are in a safe enough environment to run and play without being on edge (like we normally are at public events).*

*I love that you are doing this to help all of us who are limited in what we can do with our children. I want nothing more than to be able to take my son to do all the same things others can do, like swimming and enjoying parks, etc., and feel safe doing it.*

*For me it was being able to talk to other parents who have gone through or are going through the same types of things we are. It's comforting knowing that we're not alone, and getting/giving tips on how to handle certain situations is always a plus.*

*Having a child with autism can be extremely isolating. Feeling disconnected from the world...even a visit to the local playground must be carefully coordinated...to be able to see my daughter with smiles from ear to ear on the Ferris wheel and the merry-go round with no worries about a meltdown and judgment but a fun filled stress free day for a 5-year-old that has no friends simply because of her diagnosis. Thank you so much for these events; they are already providing the best memories for our kiddos!*

*It was a great opportunity for those of us who have a child with autism to attend events with other families who are affected and helps connect and feel less lonely. It's nice to be with people who will not see your child as odd or badly behaved.*

*[I am] not worrying about neurotypical kids reacting badly to my little guy while he's playing or trying to play with them.*

*[MFP events] allow our child to experience things in a safe space for him around others like him.*

*Being able to do activities with our children in a more sensory friendly environment without all the hustle of public interference. Our children have a hard time in crowded spaces and with bolting as a huge concern for us especially with the younger three boys, it makes it a lot easier to stay together or locate them should the part.*

*Being able to access sensory-friendly events that help us feel included.*

*We feel it is a safe and judgement-free environment.*

Again, we appreciate all those who participated in our survey. If you are interested in learning more about the results of this research, contact Donna at MAIER by email ([donna.doherty@maine.edu](mailto:donna.doherty@maine.edu)) or phone (207-581-2468)

## Parent's Bookshelf

*The Parent's Bookshelf is a service to families who would like to share this information with other families in our family partnership. MAIER does not specifically endorse or advocate these offerings. This issue's reviews are submitted by Cheryl Stallonis, mother to 21-year-old son, Eric. Books are available through your favorite bookseller.*

### **look me in the eye: my life with asperger's by John Elder Robison** Three Rivers Press (2008)

I feel compelled to offer an appreciative thank you to J. E. Robinson for allowing us such a descriptive and personal walk-alongside-look into his unique life experiences. I feel as though I read Dr. Seuss with him and his son, "Read it right, Dad!" from the chapter entitled "I Get a Bear Cub," and walked along the railroad tracks with him. There is no hiding of feelings, mincing words, or camouflaging past adventures, struggles and triumphs. It is a style of writing with great readability, intimacy and surprises around, if not each corner, around many corners! Robinson shares a journey into greater and greater happiness within his diagnosis of Asperger's. Personal and family stories are interspersed with chapters full of insight, such as "Logic vs. Small Talk," and "My life as a Train."

### **The Science of Making Friends: Helping Socially Challenged Teens and Young Adults by Elizabeth A. Laugeson, PSY.D.** Jossey Bass (2013)

This book is for parents, and is dedicated to "all of the parents who work tirelessly to support their children." It is also decidedly for teens and young adults who want to work on improving their own social skills. The topics are well planned and presented in sequence, and readers are enlightened easily. The concepts of learning social skills through practice, and what is socially relevant today, are well-presented throughout this text and accompanying DVD. What is typically a complex subject becomes not so complex, and making new friends becomes well within reach! I found this learning experience to be fun, and I highly recommend this book to all.

## Upcoming Events

**"Relaxed Performance" of Roald Dahl's *Matilda*** at the Penobscot Theater in Bangor: December 26, 2019, 1pm show : [penobscottheatre.org/](http://penobscottheatre.org/) Penobscot Theater is offering one "relaxed performance" designed for audience members who may be sensitive to sound and light, or have difficulty sitting/being quiet for long periods of time. Tickets are going fast, so check online or call the theater for ticket availability. 207-942-333.

**Horizons ski program:** [adaptiveoutdooreducationcenter.org/skiing](http://adaptiveoutdooreducationcenter.org/skiing) The Adaptive Outdoor Education Center (AOEC) is now partnering with both Sugarloaf and the New Hermon Mountain ski areas to offer ski lessons for people of all abilities, including those on the autism spectrum. Programs open right after the holidays, so visit their website for additional information and to register for the program.

**Maine Red Claws Autism Awareness Night: Friday, January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020 at 7pm:** [groupmatics.events/event/AutismAwarenessJersey](http://groupmatics.events/event/AutismAwarenessJersey) This game is sponsored by Volk Packaging Corp at the Portland Expo. Red Claws will wear especially themed jerseys and create a sensory-reduced environment. Tickets (\$10-\$30) come with a Maine Claws cap and supports Spurwink Service.

**Wings for Autism event at Bangor International airport:** February 1, 2020 : [thearc.org/our-initiatives/travel/](http://thearc.org/our-initiatives/travel/) The Arc's Wings for Autism®/Wings for All® (Wings) program gives families and aviation professionals the confidence to take to the skies with ease by providing an airport "rehearsal," as well as a presentation on the aircraft features and in-flight safety protocols. Chapters of The Arc, local partners, and airport/airline/TSA personnel work collaboratively to design and carry out each Wings event. For more information and to sign up, visit the website listed above.

Bookmark our Events Calendar ( <https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/events/> ) to be sure to learn about upcoming events for families and professionals in the coming year!