



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**MAINE**

Maine Autism Institute for  
Education and Research

# Pathways

Fall 2020



## 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/](https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/donate-to-maier/)

## Seasons Greetings from Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research,

When the work at MAIER first came to a sudden halt last March, many of us thought this would be a temporary inconvenience. Very quickly, we learned otherwise, and it has been a continually changing world ever since. Fortunately, our Spring 2020 professional development (PD) speakers stepped up to record their workshops as webinars, and we offered those free of charge to educators and professionals around the state of Maine. Over the spring and summer, we delivered more than 500 viewings of our spring and archived PD workshops! Kudos to all of you who carved out the time and energy to devote to your professional development during a time of unprecedented stress and change.

We now recognize we are in a time of continuous adaptation, accommodation, and flexibility for the long haul. Here at MAIER, we are striving to support your professional development in meaningful ways during this time. In this issue of Pathways, we will share the latest information about our 2020-21 PD Workshops, direct you to COVID-related resources, and catch you up on MAIER research news. Be sure to check out and bookmark [MAIER's Event Calendar](#) to learn about our colleagues and community partners' additional educational opportunities.

Finally, we would like to introduce you to the UMaine students who joined the MAIER team this fall: [Taylor Roos](#) and [Anna Soule](#) are UMaine graduate students who will be working with us to support MAIER research, media, and other projects. [Kaitlin Robinson](#), a senior undergraduate at UMaine, returns to MAIER this fall to support our professional development work. Visit [MAIER's staff page](#) to learn more about the UMaine students who support the work at MAIER!

We wish you all a safe and peaceful holiday season. Please feel free to contact MAIER by phone or email with questions or assistance. We may not be together in person, but we continue our work and dedication to the autism community and those who educate and support them.

All the Best,  
Deborah L. Rooks-Ellis, Ph.D., Director, MAIER  
Donna Doherty, MAIER Family Partnership Director



## Have you seen the Maine Parent Guide to Autism Spectrum Disorders?

The Maine Parent Guide to Autism Spectrum Disorders (2nd ed.) is now a four-volume set, having undergone review and revisions in 2018. We have updated the content and added new information addressing adults living life on the spectrum, personal safety, family issues, and augmentative and alternative communication. To learn more about the new edition, including how to order your own copy, go to: <https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/pathways/fall-2018/2018-parent-guide/>

## Professional Development News

### MAIER Professional Development has a new look for 2020-21!

This year MAIER is introducing new ways for educators and support staff to continue your professional development in ways that are convenient and easy to access. In these times, when our lives and workplaces ask more of us daily, we want to make something in your life as low stress as possible. Since we cannot be together in person, MAIER is offering our professional development in an online webinar-style manner. We will be launching individual workshops throughout the year in a format you can view conveniently upon registration. Sessions will be free to view and will award education contact hour certificates upon completing the post-workshop survey. See the list of currently available sessions in the PD Workshop listings (left).

Earlier this fall, we launched our first two PD workshops, and already over 200 educators, professionals, and parents/caregivers have viewed these sessions, which are still available to view. Read about our first session, *“Our Journey Together: From a Mother and Son Perspective,”* in the Family Focus section below, and visit our [Professional Development webpage](#) for individual session descriptions and registration information of workshops currently available.

Finally, be sure to check out two new MAIER online videos, [“Do it Yourself AAC at Home”](#) and [“Supporting Literacy Development,”](#) available to view on our website. These half-hour videos were developed by graduate student Haley Usilton, studying Communication Sciences and Disorders at UMaine. And don't forget that many of MAIER's past PD workshops are also available to view online at no cost and with contact hours available upon submission of post-viewing surveys. Visit our [PD Series webpage](#) for more information on MAIER's professional development offerings.

### Fall 2020 Professional Development Workshops

For full description, presenter bios, and registration information, visit:

<https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/trainings/2020-pd-opportunities/>

This year, MAIER's workshops will be offered online and are free upon registration, pre-recorded for your viewing convenience. Contact hours will be awarded upon completion of the post-viewing surveys.

#### [“Our Journey Together: From a Mother and Son Perspective”](#)

Speakers: Jessica Archer & Connor Archer

#### [“Supporting Augmentative and Alternative Communication \(AAC\) and Language Skill Development at Home”](#)

Speaker: Jennifer Seale, Ph.D., CCC-SLP

#### [“Parent-Mediated Early Interventions for Children on the Autism Spectrum”](#)

Speaker: Megan G. Kunze, Ph.D., BCBA-D

#### [“Supporting Students with ASD to Work Independently”](#)

Speaker: Gretchen Scheibel, MS, OTR, BCBA

Did you know many of **MAIER's past PD workshops** are available to view on-line, at no cost, with educator contact hours available, upon registration? FMI and registration, visit our

**MAIER Professional Development Series page** at

<https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/trainings/maier-professional-development-series/>

for these archived viewing options.



## Nature Links for Lifelong Learning

Young adults with intellectual disabilities in the Blue Hill Peninsula area now have the opportunity to participate in a nature-based post-secondary education thanks to the hard work and dedication of Gregory Bush, Ph.D. founder of Nature Links for Lifelong Learning. Working with the local community and state providers, Dr. Bush builds a community of learning for young adults ages 18-35 with intellectual disabilities, including autism, who often find it challenging to find post-secondary learning opportunities. Overall, the program aims to support students in “creating individualized pathways to volunteer and job opportunities.”

Nature Links curriculum is headed by lead teacher, Madeline Johnson, who is joined by Culinary Arts educator Stacey Stolman. Their innovative program links fields such as the culinary arts, gardening, and environmental studies with job readiness and communication skill-building while fostering social connections among students and their community and building independent living skills. While COVID has created challenges to in-person studies, learning has continued this year online and through some limited socially distanced activities using pandemic safety protocols. Classes are offered on a seasonal basis, and enrollment is ongoing at Nature Links. To learn more about this unique educational program, visit the Nature Links website [naturelinksmaine.org](http://naturelinksmaine.org), call 305-926-5001 or email: [info@naturelinksmaine.org](mailto:info@naturelinksmaine.org)

## Research News

### Telehealth Study and Sexuality Study

MAIER Research Highlights from Drs. Deborah Rooks-Ellis and Sarah Howorth include two recently published studies encompassing two distinct research projects. The first investigated the use of telehealth for providing early intervention (EI) services to rural families. The second reported the effectiveness of a brief sexuality education intervention offered to parents attending a breakout session presented at a family disability conference. Read more at <https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/2020/08/26/maier-research-highlights/>

### CONTAECT-ME Project

Deborah Rooks-Ellis, assistant professor of special education in the College of Education and Human Development's School of Learning and Teaching and Director of the Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research, will lead a Cross-disciplinary Online Training to promote Augmentative and Alternative Communication and Tele-Intervention for Maine (CONTAECT-ME). This project will train educators to support young children with intensive communication needs and their families, including using augmentative and alternative communication tools. Partners include Jennifer Seale, assistant professor in the UMaine Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, and the Maine Department of Education. UMaine will receive \$249,950 from the U.S. DOE during the first year of the grant, with continued funding expected for five years. Read more at:

<https://umaine.edu/edhd/2020/10/01/umaine-receives-federal-grant-to-train-special-educators-other-professionals-to-support-young-children-with-high-intensity-communication-needs/>



## ***Family Focus***

Fall Greetings to all our MAIER families and friends,

To say that our lives have been turned upside down by the events of this year would be an understatement; however, I am heartened by the adaptations and compassion I see around me as families adjust and schools, agencies, and communities find new ways to connect and support one another. Although we miss the MAIER events that brought us together in person, we have worked to develop new ways to connect and offer resources to support you in new challenges. In this issue of Pathways, we will share news you may find useful, direct you to new resources developed in response to the Pandemic by MAIER and our community partners, and offer you some opportunities for your family to engage in much-needed diversion and fun.

As we head into the end of this year, I would like to share these words of wisdom and encouragement from a MAIER Family Partnership Mom: *Life is full of moments, and this is just one. Every child will be behind in something next school year, even without an IEP. I think the key in all this is good communication and flexibility. This is much harder for all of us during these stressful times. But we are all having our own struggles to deal with, and some have it harder than others. Do what you can and communicate with the people that are expecting something from you (schools, work, or family). Schedules are very important to all of us, but during unknown times is where we should have the most flexibility. Things are continually changing and can be hard to keep up with, but special needs parents are some of the best equipped to do this. (May 2020)*

Wishing you good health and safety,

*Donna  
Donna Doherty, MAIER Family Partnership Director*





# OUR JOURNEY TOGETHER

FROM A MOTHER AND  
SON'S PERSPECTIVE  
CONNOR & JESSICA ARCHER



## Our Journey Together: From a Mother and Son Perspective

The journey from childhood to adulthood is unique for each child on the autism spectrum, but families can learn a great deal from one another. Thanks to our MFP friends and community partners, Jessica and Connor Archer, we are offering the FREE webinar **“Our Journey Together: From a Mother and Son Perspective”** to families, education professionals, and interested community members. In this one-hour webinar, Jessica and Connor share their personal journey as a mother and son dynamic duo facing the challenges and accomplishments of living life on the spectrum. Together, they offer information and strategies based on their lived experience and Jessica’s professional knowledge and expertise as a middle school teacher with an advanced degree in special education.

Connor currently attends Husson College in Bangor and is the CEO of the “Courageous Steps Project,” a non-profit he founded in 2014. The Courageous Steps Project is dedicated to helping people of various abilities “to step courageously beyond obstacles and towards a fulfilling life.” Jessica is an educator teaching middle school science, math, and language arts while serving as Vice-President of the Courageous Steps Project. Read more about the mission and work of the Courageous Steps Project on the CS Project website:

[www.thecourageousstepsproject.org](http://www.thecourageousstepsproject.org)

Learn more about the “Our Journey Together” webinar at:

<https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/maine-family-partnership/our-journey-together/>

Register to view using our easy online registration form:

<https://forms.gle/mjZcNgwCrV3NNNac8>

## News and Announcements

### Free Webinars from MAIER

**Supporting Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and Language Skill Development at Home:** In this webinar, Dr. Jennifer Seale, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, addresses the ways in which individuals can support and promote the use of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) in their daily routines.

**Register here:** <https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/maine-family-partnership/supporting-acc/>

### **Supporting Literacy Development, Access, and Communication for Home and School:**

Two new videos developed by Haley Usilton, a UMaine graduate student in Communication Sciences and Disorders, to support the use of augmentative and alternative communication at home and at school and to support literacy development, access, and communication.

**DIY AAC Tools at Home:** <https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/resources/do-it-yourself-aac/>

**Supporting Literacy Development for Individuals with ASD:** <https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/resources/supporting-literacy/>

**“Our Journey Together- From a Mother and Son Perspective”** with Connor and Jessica Archer (*see full article above*): This webinar is composed of three topics of discussion, focusing on suggestions, strategies, and guidance for those diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

**Register here:** <https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/maine-family-partnership/our-journey-together/>

### **Teaching Social Nuances and Social Skills in the Home:**

This 45-minute webinar with Sarah Howorth, Ph.D., UMaine faculty member, and BCBA-D, is intended to help individuals on the Autism Spectrum Level 1 but can be adapted for others on the spectrum or individuals experiencing social awkwardness or social anxiety.

**View here:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vr\\_kOK\\_MJlg&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vr_kOK_MJlg&feature=youtu.be)

**Resource List:** <https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/wp-content/uploads/sites/150/2020/05/SN-SS-Webinar-Resource-List.pdf>

### New Online Resources

**Family Resources During COVID-19:** [https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/covid\\_19/](https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/covid_19/)

This MAIER web-page includes links to resources for back-to-school and work, daily life with a family member on the autism spectrum, and state and federal agencies with COVID-19 information and updates.

**MDOE/Office of Special Services:** <https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/specialed/covid19/families>

**Resource page for Families and Caregivers** Extensive web-page to support families and caregivers as you become teaching partners with schools during this health crisis.

**PreK-12 Resources for Educators and Families:** <https://umaine.edu/edhd/pk12-resources/topics/>

Website developed by the UMaine College of Education and Human Development to help address the demand for reliable resources related to remote learning and other issues related to educating and supporting students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Visiting from Home:** <https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/maine-family-partnership/places-and-spaces/directory/visiting-from-home/>

MAIER web-page developed to direct families to the many recreational, cultural, and educational organizations that have jumped into this unprecedented opportunity to bring you virtual “visits” to museums, national parks, zoos, learning spaces, music, and performances.

## Opportunities for Learning with our Community Partners

**SMILE Boxes:** <https://www.adaptiveoutdooreducationcenter.org/smilebox>

Earlier this fall, MAIER's Family Partnership joined with our friends at the Adaptive Outdoor Education Center in Carrabassett Valley in offering monthly SMILE Boxes to the autism community. SMILE boxes are designed with children with ASD in mind to promote physical activity, social skills, and sensory exploration. One parent wrote to share her son's experience, writing, "I was really impressed with the ... [picture symbol cards] ... that came with it, we used those right away. He loved it. Everything was put together with a lot of thought put into it, it really showed!" More than 25 families participated in this fall's SMILE boxes, so stay tuned for future SMILE Box opportunities to be announced in 2021!

**Maine Discovery Museum "Discovery Kits":** <https://www.discoverykits.org/>

Our community partners at the MDM in Bangor have developed science-filled boredom-blasters "Discovery Kits" to engage creative and curious kids while waiting for the time when the Museum will be able to reopen safely. Each kit is filled with science and sensory activities, all materials and tools needed, easy instructions, and science facts and resources. Discovery kits are purchased online and picked up at the Museum, with the option to be shipped to your home for an additional charge.

The Discovery Kits for November and December are **SOLD OUT**, however, folks can visit the **MDM website** (<https://www.discoverykits.org/>) to pre-order the 2021 Discovery Kits!

You can also visit some special animal residents of the MDM on the **Maine Discovery Museum's Youtube Station** (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UClwy3aFoC3Rd4QYLDROEHbA>) while we wait for them to reopen!



### Research News: Invitation to Participate in PEERS® Study for Teens

Do you have a teen on the autism spectrum? Dr. Sarah Howorth, Assistant Professor of Special Education at the University of Maine, is conducting a research study to investigate the delivery of the PEERS® interpersonal skills curriculum delivered to participants via Zoom. Check out the *flyer on the last page of this newsletter* for more information about this invitation to participate.



### Messages from Home- *an invitation to share your family stories, photos, and wisdom*

How are you spending your time with family during these past months? Want to share a fun family story, photo, or some words of encouragement with other MAIER families? Send along your photo and message (50 words or less) for us to consider posting to our website "Visiting from Home" page at:

<https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/maine-family-partnership/places-and-spaces/directory/visiting-from-home/> and help us create messages of hope and connection during these challenging times. Send to Donna at MAIER: [donna.doherty@maine.edu](mailto:donna.doherty@maine.edu)





## Holiday Fun! G.E.A.R. Parent Network Webinars in December

Looking for some holiday cheer with some at-home activities?  
Register for some FREE Holiday Fun! G.E.A.R Parent Network Webinars in December!

**G.E.A.R. Parent Network Webinar: Holiday Fun! Creating a Cookie Jar Mix Gift**  
**December 5 @ 10:00 am - 12:00 pm | FREE**

During this family activity, you will create a homemade gift from your kitchen to show family and friends you honestly care! Join us for fun in creating a cookie jar mix as a gift for that special someone. You will also personalize your jar by painting it and adding a topper, a tag, and a simple ribbon or bow for a one of a kind touch. *Note:* G.E.A.R will provide a list of supplies & ingredients upon registration so that you can join in the fun with your kids.

**Register at:**

<https://gearparentnetwork.org/event/special-event-holiday-fun-creating-a-cookie-jar-mix-gift/>  
**or call 1 (800) 264-9224**

**G.E.A.R. Parent Network Webinar: Holiday Fun: Creating Salt Dough Ornaments!!**  
**December 10 @ 5:30 pm - 7:30 pm | FREE**

During this family holiday craft activity, we will share a simple 3-ingredient salt dough recipe that we will be using to create Salt Dough Ornaments. Let's have fun together, be creative, and leave you with a little memory to hold on to or have a personal gift to give this holiday season! Fun for all ages!!

**Register at:**

<https://gearparentnetwork.org/event/holiday-fun-creating-salt-dough-ornaments/>  
**or call 1 (800) 264-9224**

**G.E.A.R. Parent Network Webinar: Ho-Ho-Ho! Holiday Activities! G.E.A.R. Webinar**  
**December 10 @ 5:30 pm - 7:30 pm | FREE**

Join us for some online Holiday Cheer! We will be celebrating the season with some great holiday themed games and a fun painting activity for the whole family to enjoy, so gather your family and join us in having some fun!

**Register at:**

<https://gearparentnetwork.org/event/ho-ho-ho-holiday-activities/>  
**or call 1 (800) 264-9224**

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!



# TELEHEALTH GROUPS AVAILABLE



## INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY: Investigating the delivery of the PEERS® interpersonal skills curriculum delivered via Zoom

*Sarah K. Howorth, PhD, BCBA-D, Assistant Professor, UMaine*

*Libby Stone-Sterling, PhD, Director Maine Office of Vocational Rehabilitation*

- We are looking for individuals between the ages of 14-19 to participate in interviews conducted via phone or Zoom (30-60 minutes) to determine eligibility to participate in a research study.
- You will be asked to complete some surveys before the skills sessions begin and again after they end. Each time it will take about an hour to complete these forms.
- If eligible, social skills group sessions will take place once per week for a total of 90 minutes via Zoom. There will be 6-12 participants in each group. Your teen must be willing to participate in 13 of the 16 weekly sessions.

If you would like to participate and/or have questions about this study, please contact: [libby.stone-sterling@maine.gov](mailto:libby.stone-sterling@maine.gov)