

Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research

Quarterly Report

March 2019

Cumulative for Grant Period October 1, 2018 - March 15, 2019

Introduction

The Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research (MAIER) is dedicated to improving outcomes for individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) throughout the spectrum and life cycle. We work to build statewide capacity in support of our mission through leadership, training, professional development, technical assistance, collaborative consultation, technology, and research. MAIER is located at the University of Maine in Orono.

MAIER is a unique partnership between the Maine Department of Education, Office of Special Services and the University of Maine, College of Education and Human Development, Special Education program. Established in 2014 with significant financial support from the Maine Department of Education (MDOE), these two organizations joined forces to promote evidence-based strategies and effective practices for educators and professionals working with individuals with ASD and for supporting families impacted by ASD.

MAIER Family Partnership

MAIER's Family Partnership (MFP) is dedicated to providing outreach to individuals and families affected by autism spectrum disorders across the state of Maine. Together, MAIER staff and families work to identify issues of concern for Maine families and collaborate on projects to promote greater awareness and acceptance, develop print and online resources, address access to services, and support research efforts. Individuals and families involved in the MFP have been integrally involved in the development and revision of the *Maine Parent Guide to ASD*, the *Places and Spaces Project*, and all MFP events.

MAIER's Family Partnership also works with community partners, such as the Maine Discovery Museum and local YMCAs, to promote inclusion and greater understanding through staff education, collaborating on special events for families impacted by ASD, and by providing assistance in developing tools and supports for visitors.

Summary of Maine Family Partnership Activities

It has been a busy fall and winter for MAIER's Family Partnership (MFP), with growth in our community outreach, the addition and updating of resources for families and community members, and social and educational events held in the fall/winter and planned for spring and summer 2019. (See below for specific information related to events and new resources.)

While family outreach continues to be the foundation of the MFP, we are pleased by the increase in inquiries from the greater community seeking information on autism and our expertise to foster and support inclusion in their businesses, organizations, and activities. For example, early this year we were contacted by both the Some Theater Company in Orono and the Midcoast Actors Studio in Belfast for the production of "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time," a play featuring a teen on the autism spectrum with exceptional math abilities and a desire to solve a neighborhood mystery. We provided information, technical support, to the production crew and cast prior to the showings, participated in media coverage of the event (both radio and television), collaborated to offer a Sensory-friendly show for families impacted by autism, provided an information table for general audiences, and participated in a "talk back" session after the final show. These efforts supported our mission to raise awareness, understanding, and inclusion of individuals on the spectrum, and was the impetus for the development of an [Autism Fact sheet](#) suitable for the general public.

Additional new collaborations include a partnership with the Maine Bound climbing center at UMaine and the Adaptive Outdoor Education Center (AOEC), Carrabassett Valley. MAIER staff provided a presentation to staff and volunteers of their Horizons Adaptive Climbing program on autism and guidance on supporting individuals on the

spectrum, culminating in a family climbing event attended by 12 MFP families. Sparked by this partnership, AOEC staff were inspired to create a social narrative (an evidence-based practice) for their adaptive climbing program, for which MAIER staff provided guidance and expertise. (See table below for listing of upcoming MFP events.)

Looking forward to the upcoming months, we are in the early stages of planning a daylong summer event for families at AOEC. Also, we are re-energizing our *Places and Spaces* task force (including an adult on the autism spectrum and two parents) to develop videos for the MAIER website to support autism awareness and community inclusion and developing a new handout for families identifying outdoor recreational opportunities for families impacted by special needs.

Maine Family Partnership: Database information

MAIER Family Partnership (MFP) Database includes 796 entries, primarily these are parents and caregivers, but also include individuals on the autism spectrum, relatives (e.g., grandparents), or interested community members.

Table 1

MAIER Family Partnership (family support and community outreach October 2018- February 2019)

| MFP Events | Date | Description | Attendance |
|---|-------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Adaptive Climbing Event at UM | November 18, 2018 | <p>Partnership with Maine Bound Adventure Center (UM) and the Adaptive Outdoor Education Center (Carrabassett Valley) for indoor climbing event</p> <p>Presentation to staff and volunteers prior to event (autism awareness & expectations, accommodations, etc.)</p> <p>Free family event to explore indoor climbing with volunteers and staff trained to support individuals with physical and cognitive disabilities.</p> <p>Foster family-to-family connections, resources offered</p> <p>Opportunity for UM student volunteer and community service</p> <p>Guidance to staff in the development of Social narrative "I am going to Maine Bound Climbing Center" for use as a family resource (will be available on their website and hardcopy at the center).</p> | 12 families participated/23 climbers |
| Santa's Village at the Maine Discovery Museum: Annual Christmas Party | December 2, 2018 | <p>Visit with "Sensitive" Santa and his elves at "Santa's Village"</p> <p>Craft activities led by UM student "elves" volunteers</p> <p>Children received gift bags and storybook by Jan Brett</p> | 29 families attended |

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| | | Resources offered | |
| Sensory-Friendly showing of "Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time" presented by the Some Theater Company, Orono | February 24, 2019 | | 10 families attended |
| Community Outreach | Date | Description/Impact | |
| Fall Autism Conference (Orono/ASM) | November 3, 2018 | Exhibit Table: MAIER publications distributed (65 Parent Guides) | |
| MaineBound Climbing Center | Fall 2018 (ongoing) | Presentation to climbing staff and volunteers around autism, including and supporting individuals with autism. | |
| Adaptive Outdoor Education Center | Fall 2018 (ongoing) | Presentation to new volunteers: autism basics, including and supporting individuals with autism. Guidance and support in developing a Social Narrative for "Maine Bound Climbing Program" for use in ongoing adaptive climbing program. | |
| Some Theater Company | January & February 2019 | Support to production company regarding accommodations for sensory-friendly events; partner for free sensory-friendly showing. Info table at all showings. | |
| Midcoast Actors Studio | February 2019 (ongoing) | Presentation to cast and production crew about autism basics, including and supporting individuals with autism in their offerings; Support for sensory-friendly showing; Info table at all showings | |
| Maine Discovery Museum | Ongoing | Continued informal support for staff in connection with their "My Day to Play" events and Child Health Fair (educational materials, Parent Guides) | |
| Upcoming Events | | | |
| <i>Southern Maine Autism Conference</i> | March 16, 2019 | Exhibit Table | |

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| <i>Extraordinary People:</i> documentary showing with panel discussion. In partnership with the Autism Society of Maine | April 2, 2019 | Free event |
| Autism Awareness Fun Day, Rockland | April 6, 2019 | Exhibit Table |
| Parent/caregiver workshop: Beyond the Birds and the Bees: The importance of sexuality education for youth with autism. Presented by Victoria Slocum, Ph.D. | April 11, 2019 | Free event for parents and caregivers |
| Sensory-Friendly showing of "Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time" Midcoast Actors Studio | May 2, 2019 | Presentation/discussions with cast and crew to increase knowledge about autism and family dynamics, and support their efforts to develop suitable accommodations Info table during all showings Sensory-friendly showing |
| In the planning stages: Outdoor Adventure Day at the Adaptive Outdoor Education Center, Carrabassett Valley | Tentatively planned for August 2019 | Outdoor activities, adaptive sports, picnic |

Education and Professional Development

The Institute serves as the primary source for education and training concerning evidence-based practices for professionals working with children and families impacted by autism spectrum disorders, and for undergraduate and graduate students aspiring to serve children, families, schools, and community service providers. MAIER also provides professional development through the Maine Autism Leader Team (MALT) trainings and associated coaching support. MALT teams receive training to implement evidence-based practices to support individuals with autism spectrum disorder in their schools and agencies.

Technical Assistance to Schools

No specific Technical Assistance provided to individual schools during this reporting period, December 2018 – March 2019.

MAIER Advisory Committee (MAC)

MAC did not meet during this reporting period, December 2018 – March 2019.

The MAIER Professional Database includes 2,074 entries, majority are educators, others include education support professionals, paraprofessionals, administrators, and early childhood educators.

Please see the [Google Drive March 2019 Quarterly Report folder](#) for handouts and materials for all 2018-2019 professional development opportunities. Table 2 presents a listing of MAIER PD for 2018-2019. Table 3 presents a listing of conferences attended to share the work of MAIER for 2018-2019.

Table 2

MAIER Professional Development 2018-2019

| Date | Title | Presenter | Workshop Description | # attendees |
|-----------------|---|------------------------|---|-------------|
| October 4, 2018 | Beyond the Birds and the Bees: Sexuality and Relationship Education for Persons with Autism and DDs | Victoria Slocum, Ph.D. | The first of a two-part workshop to present the history as well as the current state of sexuality and relationship education for people with autism and developmental disabilities. This workshop will present the history as well as the current state of sexuality and relationship education for people with autism and developmental disabilities; evidence-based strategies for including sexuality education in special education curricula and IEPs; present resources currently available for teaching sexual health education; and present strategies to use when facing | 37 |

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| | | | barriers. A resource list will be available. | |
| October 22, 2018 | Building Resiliency in School-aged Children: The Resilient Brain | Elyse Pratt-Ronco, Ph.D. | Collaboration between MAIER and SPRPCE to offer this 5-part Series. Overview of how trauma and stress impact the brain, gaining an understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) | 125 |
| October 29, 2018 | Building Resiliency in School-aged Children: Educating with Poverty in Mind | Elyse Pratt-Ronco, Ph.D. | Collaboration between MAIER and SPRPCE to offer this 5-part Series. Poverty and the impact, with strategies that help mitigate the negative effects of poverty | 125 |
| November 1, 2018 | Teaching Emotional Regulation Skills to Children | Terese Dana, M.S., BCBA | To successfully respond to life's everyday social interactions, children need to be able to regulate their emotions. In this workshop, specific behavior management techniques that focus | 102 |

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| | | | on prevention, problem solving, and defusing emotionally charged situations will be introduced. Easy to implement, evidenced-based methods will be discussed and practiced. Participants will learn how to incorporate a categorization system that uses visuals as supplementary cues and prompts to increase self-regulation. Each participant will receive a set of visuals to carry over strategies learned during the workshop. | |
| November 5, 2018 | Building Resiliency in School-aged Children: Hope is Not an Emotion | Elyse Pratt-Ronco, Ph.D. | Collaboration between MAIER and SPRPCE to offer this 5-part Series. Learning about what hope is as a cognitive construct and how hope can be “grown” in students/children. | 125 |

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| | | | Practice hope-building skills. | |
| November 28, 2018 Webinar | Identifying and Avoiding Pseudoscientific and Controversial Methods in Autism Treatment and Education | Jason Travers, Ph.D., BCBA | The use of ineffective and pseudoscientific interventions negatively impacts students with autism, wastes time and other limited resources, and can lead to frustration and burnout. Unfortunately, the social media revolution has made it increasingly difficult to identify effective interventions for these learners. This webinar will share resources and a process for scrutinizing intervention claims and will emphasize a process for selecting interventions most likely to confer student benefit. (2 hours) | 23 |
| December 3, 2018 | Building Resiliency in School-aged Children: Be a Lamp, a Lifeboat, a Ladder | Elyse Pratt-Ronco, Ph.D. | Collaboration between MAIER and SPRPCE to offer this 5-part Series. The importance of | 125 |

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| | | | relationships in building resilience. How to build relationships with students and the role we play in their lives. | |
| December 5, 2018 Webinar | Using Research-based Strategies to Teach STEM | Victoria Knight, Ph.D. | In this presentation, Dr. Knight will articulate the rationale for including students with a range of learning needs, including students with ASD, in STEM content and contexts. She will focus on cutting edge research in this area to support this rationale. In addition, she will discuss methods she has used internationally to train professionals to promote content-based learning for all students in the classroom.(2 hours) | Postponed until spring 2019 |
| December 10, 2018 | Building Resiliency in School-aged Children: Classroom Strategies | Elyse Pratt-Ronco, Ph.D. | Collaboration between MAIER and SPRPCE to offer this 5-part Series. Breaking down | 125 |

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| | | | barriers to social mobility, strategies for the classroom and building academic perseverance. | |
| February 7, 2019 | Preparing for the Transition to Adulthood for Students with Disabilities: What do you need to know? | Sarah Howorth, Ph.D., BCBA | <p>Morning: Transition Services and Requirements of IDEA and the Rehabilitation Act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Transition Services for Students under IDEA · Transition Services for Students and Youth with Disabilities under the Rehabilitation Act · Distinctions between New Terms · Coordination and Collaboration between State Educational Agency (SEA) and VR Agency · Youth with Disabilities No Longer in School · Examples to Consider: States are Coordinating Transition Services | 48 |

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| | | | <p>Afternoon: Supporting Student-Made Decisions for Adult Life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Setting High Expectations for Secondary School Students with Disabilities · Person-Centered Planning · Addressing Students' Social and Emotional Needs · Providing the Student and Youth with Support to Make Their Decisions · Making Informed Choices | |
| February 20, 2019 Webinar | Written Expression Needs and Strategies for Students with Disabilities | Sara Flanagan, Ph.D. | <p>This session will explore common challenges that face students with disabilities in writing. Then, it will demonstrate potential interventions for each, including those that are more “traditional” (paper-based graphic organizer) and using technology (ex.</p> | 10 |

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| | | | Inspiration software, assistive technology). (2 hours) | |
| March 14, 2019 | Executive Function/Mindfulness: Explored and Applied | Diane Jackson, Ed.D. | To successfully respond to life's everyday social interactions, children need to be able to regulate their emotions. In this workshop, specific behavior management techniques that focus on prevention, problem solving, and defusing emotionally charged situations will be introduced. Easy to implement, evidenced-based methods will be discussed and practiced. Participants will learn how to incorporate a categorization system that uses visuals as supplementary cues and prompts to increase self-regulation. Each participant will receive | 51 |

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| | | | a set of visuals to carry over strategies learned during the workshop. | |
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Table 3

Conferences Attended by MAIER Staff

| Date | Conference | Purpose |
|----------------------|--|--|
| October 2018 | <p>Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Orlando, FL</p> <p>Early Start Maine: Parent Coaching Modules, poster session Deborah L. Rooks-Ellis</p> <p>Parent Coaching Modules: Inspiring Positive Adult and Child Interactions in Everyday Routines, poster session Debra Rainey</p> | National dissemination. Poster session attended by researchers, faculty, families, and educators |
| November 2018 | <p>Equity, Access and Inclusion: A World Usability Day Event Orono, ME</p> <p>Breaking Down Classroom Barriers: Supporting Secondary and Postsecondary Students with Autism, breakout session Brooklin R Jones, Sarah Howorth, and Deborah L. Rooks-Ellis</p> | Breakout session attended by researchers, faculty, students, educators, and local professionals |
| November 2018 | OCALICON: Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence Conference Columbus, OH | Networking, professional development |

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| | Early Start Maine resources shared | |
| November 2018 | Virginia Rural Collaborators Conference Lexington, VA | Networking, professional development |
| March 2019 | <p>American Council for Rural Special Education Alexandria, VA</p> <p>Breaking Down Classroom Barriers: Supporting Secondary and Postsecondary Students with Autism, Brooklin R Jones and Deborah L. Rooks-Ellis, poster</p> <p>Development of Statewide Community Supports: Training, Professional Development and Family Events, Brooklin R. Jones and Deborah L. Rooks-Ellis, poster</p> <p>Building Partnerships to Meet the Unique Needs of Rural Special Education Deborah L. Rooks-Ellis, panel</p> <p>Early Start MOST: Outreach Services Through Telehealth Providing Access to Early Intervention in Rural Areas, Deborah L. Rooks-Ellis, presentation</p> | National dissemination. Two poster sessions, one panel, and one breakout session attended by researchers, faculty, and educators. Early Start Maine resources shared |
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PD Archive viewings

The 2016-17 PD workshops (nine) were captured on video and are available free of charge to educators and professionals through the website. Contact hours are provided to those who register and view the offerings.

Between October 1, 2018 through March 8, 2019, 17 professionals viewed 33 MAIER PD Workshops from the MAIER Archives.

MAIER Website Data

Table 4

Activity from October 1 through February 28 (top pages with most activity/not including PD offerings/registration pages)

| Webpage | Web address | Page views | Unique Page views |
|--|---|------------|-------------------|
| Total Page views | | 12,084 | 9,418 |
| Homepage | https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/ | 1,725 | 1,189 |
| Professional Development | https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/trainings/ | 921 | 748 |
| Event Calendar | https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/events/ | 512 | 390 |
| Family Resources | https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/resources/ | 427 | 332 |
| About Us | https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/about-us/ | 380 | 265 |
| Family Partnership | https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/maine-family-partnership/ | 327 | 197 |
| Pathways/Fall 2018 | https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/pathways/fall-2018/ | 259 | 203 |
| MAIER Staff Page | https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/about-us/2016-staff-page/ | 233 | 105 |
| Parent Coaching Modules | https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/parent-coaching-modules/ | 220 | 125 |
| Graduate Certificate | https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/courses/graduate-certificate/ | 205 | 185 |
| Family Resources/Recreation and Camps | https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/resources/maine-family-resources/recreation-and-camps/ | 200 | 177 |
| Early Start Maine | https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/about-us/early-start-maine/ | 194 | 140 |
| Family resources/EI and Educational Services | https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/resources/maine-family-resources/early-intervention-and-educational-services/ | 190 | 172 |

Website link: <https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/>

New publications (PDF copies available to download from website. Hard copies available on request and at family events, conference exhibiting, and for educational purposes.)

Autism Fact Sheet: <https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/wp-content/uploads/sites/150/2019/02/Autism-Fact-SheetPrint.pdf>

Maine Parent Guide to Autism Spectrum Disorders (2nd Edition):
<https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/maine-family-partnership/maine-parent-guide-asd/>

Videos (available on website)

Autism Basics: Three short videos designed to provide an overview and basic understanding of autism and its impact on young children and on school-aged children. Suitable for the general public.

<https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/trainings-2/autism-awareness-training/>

Website Updates

News postings and community events posted to our Event calendar

Staff page updated with new photos and bios, minor updates to Professionals page and Family Partnership pages.

New resources on family pages:

[Center on Secondary Education for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders](#)

“Navigating College: A Handbook on Self Advocacy. Written for Autistic Students from Autistic Adults.” (2013) <https://autisticadvocacy.org/book/navigating-college/>

New resources on professional resource pages:

[Center on Secondary Education for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders:](#)

Cedar Center on Resources on transition: <http://cedar.education.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/transition-planning.pdf>

Communications

Fall 2018 *Pathways*: emailed to those in the Professional and MFP databases with active emails. Hard copies mailed to families upon request.

E-blasts sent to all professionals with active email addresses 1-2x/month with PD offering reminders, research opportunities, and other items of interest.

E-Blast sent to MFP database at least every other month, including event announcements, research opportunities, and other items of interest to families.

Maine Parent Guide to Autism Spectrum Disorders (2018)

In 2018, we gathered a team of professionals, educators, parents, and individuals on the spectrum to review the *Maine Parent Guide to Autism Spectrum Disorders (2015)* with the goal of revising the current volume to reflect updates and to add new content. Over the course of several months, this team worked with MAIER staff to develop the second edition of the Parent Guide, published in October 2018, which has expanded to a four-volume set to encompass new content.

New content includes:

Adjustments and impact to family life, expanded content on speech-language therapy, Early Start Maine program and Parent Coaching Modules (MAIER), accessing adult services and supports, post-secondary education, augmentative and alternative communication, and promoting personal safety. We also added new resource listings and included new photos and narratives from both parents and individuals on the autism spectrum.

In addition to distributing the *Maine Parent Guide to ASD* at family events and autism events, we conducted target mailings to announce and facilitate distribution of the 2018 Parent Guide. Guides were distributed to the Autism Society of Maine, the Maine Parent Federation, the Maine Discovery Museum “My Day to Play” program, CDS sites, pediatric and developmental clinics throughout Maine, and other community partners. In addition, we sent copies to more than 50 Maine libraries, with information how patrons can contact MAIER for personal copies.

We continue to spread the word about the new edition through our website and FB postings, e-blasts to families and professionals, and through our Fall 2018 issue of *Pathways*. As of 3/7/2019, we have distributed more than 1350 sets of the Maine Parent Guide to ASD (2nd ed., 2018).

New/Updated web content:

New publications (PDF copies available to download from website. Hard copies available on request and at family events, conference exhibiting, and for educational purposes.)

Autism Fact Sheet: <https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/wp-content/uploads/sites/150/2019/02/Autism-Fact-SheetPrint.pdf>

Maine Parent Guide to Autism Spectrum Disorders (2nd Edition):
<https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/maine-family-partnership/maine-parent-guide-asd/>

Autism Basics: Three short videos designed to provide an overview and basic understanding of autism and its impact on young children and on school-aged children. Suitable for the general public.

<https://umaine.edu/autisminstitute/trainings-2/autism-awareness-training/>

Current Research and Publications

Please see the Research folder for Internal Review Board approved studies that will directly impact the families, children, students and educational professionals of Maine.

Early Start Maine

Early Start Maine is an initiative of the Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research. The Early Start Maine team is comprised of nationally certified Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) providers. In partnership with Maine Child Development Services, our team provides training, consultation, and ongoing support to early intervention providers statewide who are working with toddlers with autism. As of February 28, 2019, 307 children with autism and their families have received Early Start Maine services, with 58 children and families receiving services currently. See Table 5 for current statistics about Early Start families and children served.

Table 5

Current Early Start Numbers

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| 1 | Early Start Report - Time frame: February 1, 2019 - February 28, 2019 | |
| 2 | | |
| 3 | # children reported in February 2019 | 54 |
| 4 | # children entered February 1, 2019 - February 28, 2019 | 10 |
| 5 | # children exited the program February 1, 2019 - February 28, 2019 | 2 |
| 6 | # children currently active | 63 |
| 7 | # children not currently active | 258 |
| 8 | # children served to date* | 311 |
| 9 | | |

Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research Faculty and Staff

Deborah Rooks-Ellis, Ph.D.

Director, Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research
Assistant Professor Special Education, Program Coordinator
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Bio: Deborah L. Rooks-Ellis is an assistant professor of special education at the University of Maine College of Education and Human Development and director of the Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research.

Deborah's education, experience and research interests focus on evidence-based practices to support very young children with disabilities and their families. individuals with low incidence disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder. This includes research focused on personnel preparation and professional development to support educators working in the field of special education. Deborah has been awarded two Office of Special Education federal personnel preparation grants, as both principal investigator and co-PI, totaling \$3 million. Additionally, Deborah has been awarded \$1 million in cooperative agreements with the state of Maine to focus on providing professional development to support to children and adolescents with autism and their families.

Donna Doherty, M.S.

MAIER Family Partnership Director/Research Associate
Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research
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Bio: Donna Doherty's education, experience, and research interests focus on children's health and developmental disabilities, and their impact on family life. Past work includes research, program development and support for families affected by disorders of the corpus callosum for the Agenesis of the Corpus Callosum (ACC) Network at the University of Maine and for the National Organization for Disorders of the Corpus Callosum (NODCC) in Yorba Linda, Calif.

Donna is currently the Director of the MAIER Family Partnership (MFP) at the Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research. The MFP works with individuals and families affected by autism spectrum disorders to promote greater awareness, education, support and research. Donna served as project coordinator and co-editor of the "Maine Parent Guide to Autism Spectrum Disorders" booklets. She works to enhance community partnerships with Maine agencies and organizations dedicated to autism spectrum disorders, and partners with UMaine students and faculty to support student experiences in the field of autism.

As a research associate, Donna leads and collaborates in scientific and educational program evaluations. Specific skills include the development of research protocols, online survey data collection, conducting interviews and focus groups, data analysis,

and report writing. Recent projects include course and program evaluations for a nonprofit genomics/genetic laboratory, National Science Foundation-funded summer undergraduate research programs, and a U.S. Department of Education funded teacher training program to improve classroom instruction for English Language Learners in Maine.

Sarah Howorth, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Special Education, University of Maine

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Bio: Sarah K. Howorth is an assistant professor of special education in the School of Learning and Teaching, part of the University of Maine College of Education and Human Development. Her research interests include assistive technology, augmented reality, reading comprehensions, positive behavior interventions and supports, and improving employment and transition outcomes for individuals with autism and intellectual disabilities.

Sarah is a board-certified behavior analyst, and has 18 years of experience in special education. She has taught as a classroom teacher in Michigan, Pennsylvania, New York, and Shanghai (China). In 2015 she received the Herb Prehm Student Research Award from the Division of Autism and Developmental Disabilities. She was a research partner on a Pennsylvania Early Literacy Grant. In addition, she has taught the professional development seminar: “EMS and Autism: What Do First Responders Need to know?” Her leadership positions in professional organizations include serving as Children’s Advocacy Network Coordinator for Council for Exceptional Children’s Innovations in Special Education Technology Division (CEC-ISET); board member of the Northwest Pennsylvania Autism Society, 2015-2018.

Graduate Assistants

Brooklin R. Jones, B.A.

Graduate Assistant, MAIER

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Brooklin Renae Jones is currently a graduate assistant for Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research at the University of Maine. Brooklin began her career at the University of Oklahoma with a Bachelor’s of Arts in International Studies and continued her education at the University of Maine with the College of Social Work in 2017. She is currently assisting on research about high-quality professional development, literacy, and early interventions. Brooklin loves to travel and has been to 27 countries.

Ella J. Sulinski, B.A.

Graduate Assistant, MAIER

Ella J. Sulinski is currently a graduate assistant for Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research at the University of Maine. Ella received her Bachelor’s of Arts in Psychology from the University of Maine and continued her education the university seeking a Master’s in Social Work. She has previously researched neurobiological

matters and infant/parent attachment. She is currently assisting on research about evidence-based social interventions for middle schoolers and young adults with autism spectrum disorder.

Early Start Maine Research Associates

Susane Boulette, M.Ed.

Early Start Maine (ESM) Research Associate

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Bio: Susane Boulette, M.Ed., is a research associate with the Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research (MAIER). She holds a Masters in Early Childhood Special Education, specializing in early intervention. Sue has worked with young children and their families for the last 12 years in a variety of environments as a case manager, developmental therapist and early interventionist. Prior to that she was the owner, operator and teacher of Sunny Start Nursery School.

Brooke Getchell

Early Start Maine (ESM) Research Associate

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Bio: Brooke Getchell, is a research associate with MAIER. She began her journey with early intervention in 2015 working in a center-based program for toddlers who required individualized supports. In 2016, she began her work with the Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) as a primary service provider supporting toddlers with autism as well as their families. She has an educational background in social work, working towards a MSW from The University of New England.

Shilo Goodhue, M.Ed.

Early Start Maine (ESM) Research Associate

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Bio: Shilo Goodhue started her career in early childhood education as owner and teacher of a high quality inclusive childcare and preschool program. Prior to becoming an ESDM research associate, she worked in early intervention, where she supported children with disabilities and their families in the home setting. Shilo has three years of experience implementing the Early Start Denver Model with children.

Jill Hamm, B.A.

Early Start Maine (ESM) Research Associate

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Bio: Jill Hamm is an Early Start Denver Model research associate at the University of Maine. She earned a B.A. in Communication Sciences and Disorders and Child Development and Family Relations and will complete the Early Childhood Special Education Master's program at the University of Maine in summer 2019. Jill is an Early Start Denver Model primary service provider working with toddlers with autism and their families while completing national certification for the Early Start Denver Model.

Bethan Jerome, M.Ed.

Early Start Maine (ESM) Research Associate

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Bio: Bethan Jerome, M.Ed. is a research associate with MAIER. She holds a Masters in Early Childhood Special Education/Autism, and has worked as a home-based early intervention provider with toddlers with ASD, as an itinerant special educator supporting young children with ASD in community preschools, and as the senior lead teacher in an inclusive ABA-based preschool specializing in autism.

Lauren Lantagne, M.Ed.

Early Start Maine (ESM) Research Associate.

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Bio: Lauren Lantagne M.Ed., is a research associate with the Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research (MAIER). Lauren earned her B.S. in Early Childhood Special Education at the University of Maine Farmington and M.Ed at the University of Maine Orono, specializing in Early Intervention. Lauren has worked as a Service Coordinator, Special Educator, and providing Early Start Maine services in Maine's Part C Early Intervention program.

Karen Pratt, M.S., OTR/L

Early Start Maine (ESM) Research Associate

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Bio: Karen Pratt, MS, OTR/L owned and operated a private child care for 20 years before resuming her education and earning a Bachelor's degree in Social and Behavioral Science and a Master's in Occupational Therapy (OT) from the University of Southern Maine. She worked at Child Development Services (CDS) for seven years as an early interventionist supporting children with disabilities and as an Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) primary service provider supporting toddlers diagnosed with autism. She is currently a research associate with the Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research providing consultation and support to CDS therapists who are using the ESDM in their work with toddlers with autism and their families.

Debra Rainey, M.Ed.

Early Start Maine (ESM) Research Associate

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Bio: Deb Rainey, is an Early Childhood Specialist with over 25 years experience in early childhood special education. She earned a B.S. in Early Childhood Special Education from the University of Maine in Farmington and a M.Ed. in Early Intervention from the University of Maine, Orono, with a concentration in autism. In addition, Deb completed certification in the Leadership in Neurodevelopmental Disorders (LEND) program and Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) for teaching young children with autism. She has worked with young children and families in a variety of settings and programs over the years providing special instruction as well as consultation to support the inclusion of all young children and families in community settings.

Most recently in her position with the University of Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research (MAIER), Deb provides training, consultation, and coaching to professionals to build their capacity to implement ESDM throughout the state. Deb is committed to the field of early childhood education/early childhood special education and keeps current with best practice and evidence-based methods to meet the needs of young children with autism and families.

Shannon Smith, M.Ed.

Early Start Maine (ESM) Research Associate
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Bio: Shannon Smith worked for several years providing family support services to young children with disabilities and their families in NH before pursuing and earning a Master's Degree in Education, specializing in Early Intervention. She has worked as a lead teacher in a special purpose preschool, a Special Educator for Part C Early Intervention supporting infants and toddlers, and as an ESDM primary service provider for toddlers experiencing ASD. Shannon has worked as an Early Start Maine Consultant since April 2016.