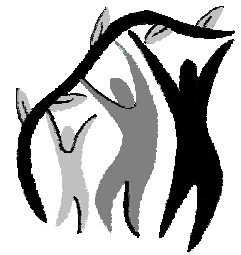


STAART Child and Family Project
Studies to Advance Autism Research and Treatment
Boston University School of Medicine
http://www.bu.edu/autism
Spring 2004



PROJECT NEWS

We are thrilled to be up and running with the **Child and Family Project!** As you may know, we are very interested in learning more about the development of young children with autism and how raising a child with autism is impacting families. We began conducting parent interviews and child assessments this past December. To date, we have had 25 families involved in the study!

Our project is one of four projects at the Boston University (BU) Studies to Advance Autism Research and Treatment (STAART) Research Center of Excellence. The BU STAART Center is one of eight new autism research centers supported by the National Institute of Mental Health. These centers are located throughout the United States.

Our Center encompasses projects with several other universities, which will investigate:

- the brain's anatomy (Boston University and Tufts/New England Medical Center)
- how the brains of individuals with autism respond to social and nonsocial information (Waisman Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison)
- the effects of a new medication on the symptoms of autism in children (Dartmouth University)

As we learn more about young children with autism and their families, we will share the important information we are learning at scientific meetings and conferences, and we hope to publish our findings in scientific journals. We will also be using our newsletter to share our work with families' early intervention providers, and other health professionals who are helping us in our work.

ENROLLMENT

Enrollment in the **Child and Family Project** is up and running! Thus far, we have presented information about the project to many of the Massachusetts Specialty Service Providers. These include Building Blocks, BEACON Services, the May Institute, Horace Mann, Children Making Strides, Lipton Early Assistance Program, New England Center for Children and Educational Consultants of New England.

We have also been in touch with other early intervention providers around the state who work with young children with autism to tell them about the project. We are spreading the word about the project through Massachusetts' Autism Support Centers and conferences for parents and professionals.

It was great to see some of you at recent conferences, including: Children Making Strides/Doug Flutie Jr. Foundation, the Community Resources for People with Autism, the Autism Support Center at North Shore ARC in Danvers, the Massachusetts EI Consortium and the Parents of Autistic Children of Massachusetts (POAC).

Several families have encouraged other families with young children with autism to contact us about participating. We greatly appreciate your enthusiasm and help to make this project a success! We continue to work towards our goal of enrolling 300 families in the project over the next three years.

We are **currently enrolling children with autism spectrum disorders, age 18-33 months, and their families.** To learn more about this research or to be considered for participation in the project, please contact: **Gretchen Shuman, M.Ed., Family Coordinator, at (617) 414-2358 or at gshuman@bu.edu.**

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This spring, researchers from the **Child and Family Project** were invited to present their initial findings at the International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR) in Sacramento, CA. This opportunity allowed us to share our research with the more than 600 scientists in the field of autism research who attended this conference.

Before beginning the **Child and Family Project**, we conducted a study to evaluate several new questionnaires. We were interested in creating new questionnaires that would help us to better understand the experience of families who are raising children with autism.

Findings from this early work suggest that new questionnaires that address parents' relationships with their service providers are useful tools for understanding the family experience and by using these questionnaires in the **Child and Family Project**, we will be able to identify family needs and provide more supportive services.

DARTMOUTH TREATMENT STUDY

Every STAART Research Center of Excellence includes a research project specifically designed to develop a new, innovative treatment technique for autism and its symptoms. Bryan King, M.D., a researcher at Dartmouth Medical School in Lebanon, NH, is conducting a research project investigating a new drug therapy in collaboration with Boston University's STAART Center.

Dr. King's study is a clinical trial to test the effectiveness of citalopram, a newly developed medication that inhibits the body's reabsorption of

serotonin, a neurotransmitter that can regulate mood and behavior. Psychiatric medications of this type are called serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SRIs) and are given for many different types of disorders that can affect mood and behavior, including autism. However, before now, no clinical trials have ever been completed to test the effectiveness of these types of medication in treating autism. Dr. King's study also has the goals of identifying factors that may make certain children more or less sensitive to SRI-type medications and learning more about conducting clinical trials with children with autism.

Research is just getting underway in this exciting new treatment study, so stay tuned for new findings!

OTHER ONGOING STUDIES

We are currently enrolling children **ages 7-16** in another study in the Lab, the Language and Social Communication Research Program. Children with **autism, children with language-based learning difficulties**, and **typically developing children** are invited to participate. This program investigates how children process language and social information that they read from another person's face. It also examines the brain structures involved in language- and face-processing.

Participation involves 2-3 visits to Boston University School of Medicine. Parents receive full written evaluations of standardized testing, and children receive a choice of a gift certificate (e.g., to movies, Amazon.com, Omni Theater). Travel reimbursement is offered, and the cost of parking is covered.

For more information about this study, please contact **Kelley Larrow, Ed.M., Family Coordinator**, at **617-414-1304** or via e-mail at **klarrow@bu.edu**.

PROJECT STAFF

We are pleased to welcome **Amy Gower, B.A.**, to the **Child & Family Project** as a Research Assistant! Amy graduated from Wellesley College and gained extensive research experience working on studies with preschool children.

Alice Carter, Ph.D., Principal Investigator
Helen Tager-Flusberg, Ph.D., Director of STAART Center
Mary Beth Kadlec, Sc.D., OTR/L, Project Manager
Gretchen Shuman, M.Ed., Family Coordinator
Naomi Ornstein Davis, M.A., Assistant Family Coordinator
Anneliese Bass, B.A., Research Assistant
Amy Gower, B.A., Research Assistant
Tamar Remz, Lab Assistant