

# Center for Autism & Related Disorders

at Kennedy Krieger Institute

## News

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### Events

#### CARD's International Impact

*By Avery Rain, Research Assistant*

The International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR) was held in Baltimore, in May. This annual scientific convention brings leading autism spectrum disorder (ASD) scientists from around the world to exchange interdisciplinary progress in understanding and treating ASD. Dr. Rebecca Landa was the chair of the meeting. Over 2,000 people registered for IMFAR, with over 40 countries represented. Many employees of the Center for Autism and Related Disorders (CARD) at Kennedy Krieger presented at or attended IMFAR. In the week leading up to the conference, CARD demonstrated its role in the global ASD community by hosting tours to international visitors interested in the services and research available at CARD. We also hosted a successful and well-attended IMFAR Pre-Conference. This event, which took place the day before IMFAR, at Towson University, brought some of the most notable scientists in the field to our community to share and exchange



*International visitors to CARD pose with Dr. Rebecca Landa and other CARD staff*

ideas with families, educators, clinicians, members of state and local governments, and individuals with autism. Presenters shared new information on medical research, behavior techniques, technology and application, and delivering autism services. Attendees represented multiple professions from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Bermuda, and across the United States. We thank our community partners who assisted in planning the meeting.

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## Celebrating Autism Awareness Month

April was a busy and exciting month at CARD! We commemorated Autism Awareness Month with many important events, a few of which are recapped below.



**APRIL 1:** Kennedy Krieger representatives joined Baltimore City Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, and Baltimore City Health Commissioner, Dr. Leana Wen, to kick off the month for Light It Up Blue. CARD parent Ozana Papados spoke about the impact CARD has had on her son's life.

**APRIL 30:** The Center for Autism Dream Team raised over \$4,000 for autism research at ROAR for Kids this year! We would like to thank everyone who participated in this beloved annual event. We introduced a new member of the CARD team: Roary the lion! Roary ran in the mascot race and gave many warm high-fives and hugs to children and families at the event.



**APRIL 22:** CARD employees and friends joined together for the 2nd Annual Paint for Autism Night, hosted by Painted Palette Baltimore. Attendees had a blast painting a Baltimore-themed autism awareness scene!



### Free Upcoming STAR Trainings

Toilet Training for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and other Developmental Delays—  
Wednesday, June 29, 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., presented by Stacy Blasko, PhD, NCSP

For more information or to register, visit  
[KennedyKriegerCARD.eventbrite.com](http://KennedyKriegerCARD.eventbrite.com).

### Sensory Friendly Library Visit

The Pikesville Branch of the Baltimore County Public Library is hosting a sensory friendly early opening on Sunday, June 29, at 12:00 p.m. Bring your child for an hour before the library opens to the public! For more information, contact the library at 410-887-1234.





## CARD Joins SPARK, Nation's Largest Autism Study

By Bonnie Van Metre, MEd, BCBA



Thursday, April 21, 2016, CARD helped launch SPARK, an online research initiative designed to speed up research and advance our understanding of autism to help improve lives. This study is sponsored by the Simons Foundation Autism Research Initiative (SFARI) and currently is the largest autism study undertaken in the United States. SPARK will collect information and DNA for genetic analysis from 50,000 individuals with autism and their families in order to give researchers the information they need to improve treatment and achieve scientific advances as rapidly as possible.

CARD is one of a select group of 21 leading national research institutions chosen by SFARI to assist with recruitment. The SPARK effort is being led by Dr. Ericka Wodka, Supervising Neuropsychologist at CARD and Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. "SPARK empowers researchers to make new discoveries that will ultimately lead to the development of new supports and treatments to improve lives, which makes it one of the most insightful research endeavors to date, in addition to being the largest genetic research initiative in the U.S" says Dr. Wodka

Autism is known to have a strong genetic component. While we know that genetic factors contribute to autism, there is still so much we don't know. By studying these genes and how they interact with environmental factors, researchers can better understand the causes and link them to symptoms, skills and challenges of those impacted.

SPARK aims to accelerate autism research by inviting participation from this large and diverse autism community with the goal of including individuals with a professional diagnosis of autism of both sexes and all ages, backgrounds, races, geographic locations and socioeconomic status. SPARK will connect participants to researchers offering them the opportunity to impact the future of autism research and participate in any of the multiple studies offered through SPARK. It is also the goal of SPARK to elicit feedback from individuals and parents of children with autism to develop a robust research agenda that is meaningful to them.

Registering for this first-of-its-kind initiative can be done entirely online in the convenience of one's home and at no cost. DNA will be collected via saliva kits shipped directly to participants. Once the SPARK participant's family has returned their saliva samples and provided some medical and family history information, the SPARK participant will receive a \$50 gift card. SPARK will provide access to online resources and the latest research in autism, which may provide participants and families with valuable information to help address daily challenges.

Anyone interested in learning more about SPARK or in participating can visit [SparkForAutism.org/KKI](http://SparkForAutism.org/KKI), or contact us by phone at 443-923-7598 or email [SPARKstudy@KennedyKrieger.org](mailto:SPARKstudy@KennedyKrieger.org).

## A Word from Our Director

Dear Friends of CARD,



A lot has happened at CARD since we sent out the last newsletter. Among the events that transpired are the International Meeting for Autism Research main conference and the 'pre-IMFAR conference' that we hosted to bring the latest science to the Maryland and surrounding community. At the pre-IMFAR conference, the impact of the stories shared by self-advocates lingers still. We continue to receive emails from people about how much they learned from the perspectives and experiences shared by the self-advocates. At the main IMFAR conference, two threads of research were prominently represented in the presentations. First, was the extent to which scientists from around the world are identifying motor challenges in individuals with ASD across the lifespan. We were the first to document motor delays, though sometimes quite subtle, by 6 months of age in infant siblings of children with ASD who were later identified with ASD or milder social or communication delays. These early delays in motor development may or may not affect sitting or walking on time. Dr. Mostofsky and his group were leaders in identifying the difficulty that

individuals with ASD have in integrating visual and motor information to perform various types of tasks. These motor difficulties seem to be linked to social learning in individuals with ASD. Stay tuned for more on this topic as our research progresses. Another theme at IMFAR was anxiety in individuals with ASD. Scientists from around the world gathered here at CARD the day before IMFAR to share ideas and findings about the underlying biology of anxiety, how to evaluate anxiety symptoms, and how best to treat anxiety in individuals with ASD - that meeting was led by Drs. Amy Keefer and Roma Vasa of CARD. We will continue to pursue scientific inquiry to advance the field's understanding of motor and anxiety-related difficulties in individuals with ASD, and to translate these findings into clinical care.

I hope that you have a safe and enjoyable summer. In our next newsletter, we will start sharing details about our annual conference in October- registration is now open so be an early bird and register now!

Warm regards,

*Rebecca Landa*



*"Love and persistence will create longevity of spirit in your journey with your child"*

*-Laurie Chaikind, MSW, LGSW*

## Staff Spotlight

### Spotlight on Bonnie Van Metre



We welcome Bonnie Van Metre to the CARD team. She is a board certified and licensed behavior analyst. She obtained a master's degree in special education from the University of Nevada, Reno, and her training in behavior analysis from Penn State University. She is a trainer in Youth Mental Health First Aide, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and Social Emotional Foundations In Early Learning (SEFEL). She has been working with teachers and families for the past 15 years through the school system and Infants and Toddlers programs. Prior to coming to CARD, she was the behavioral specialist at the Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Special Education/ Early Intervention. There, her focus was on supporting behavioral system development for children birth to- 21 for the state of Maryland. Bonnie is an adjunct faculty member of the Johns Hopkins University School of Education. Bonnie and her husband, Steve, have three young children and spend their weekends on field hockey and lacrosse fields. Bonnie also teaches fitness classes and recently began loving hot yoga. She is very excited to join the CARD community and contribute to the wonderful supports that the Institute provides to children and families. She will be working with Dr. Wodka on the SPARK research study.

## Tips

### Swimming in the Cool Pool

*By Courtney Fisher, MICC Teacher*

What says summer more than taking a dip at the pool? While swimming is a great summer activity, it's also important to keep safety rules in mind. Make sure your children know the rules, and keep a close eye on them so they stay safe.

#### DO

- Swim with a friend
- Wear pool safety equipment
- Make sure someone in the pool area is trained in CPR
- Wear sun protection
- Take occasional breaks from swimming
- Walk around the pool area
- Drink plenty of water
- Sign up for swimming lessons
- Keep rescue equipment around pool area
- Maintain visual contact with the person in the pool
- Teach children water safety

#### DON'T

- Swim alone
- Swim without pool safety equipment if you need it
- Swim for long periods of time
- Run around the pool perimeters
- Leave children alone in the pool or around the surrounding areas
- Get distracted by electronics
- Use a flotation device that is not approved by the U.S. Coast Guard
- Try to swim without learning first learning how
- Push or dunk anyone in the pool or under the water