

**April 2025**  
**Newsletter**



# **AUTISM ACCEPTANCE MONTH**

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**Happy April!** This will be a busy month for CAN - please join us for upcoming events on Page 4.

Last month, we hosted several fantastic CAN events.

- **Dr. Sandy Magaña** visited from UT-Austin to share her insights related to her role as the Director of the ACT LEND and her research on cultural contexts of families who care for autistic individuals.
- **Trainees met to discuss “Navigating the Hard Stuff”.** This was a trainee-only event, but I heard wonderful things about the conversation and ideas generated from this event. Trainees: keep us posted on other conversations we can host/facilitate.

#### UPCOMING CAN SCIENCE

Wednesdays virtual 8:30-9:15 am

- 4/2 - NO CAN SCIENCE due to AutismConnect 2025
- 4/9 - Dr. Dezhi Wu (Integrated Information Technology Dept.)
- 4/16 - Dr. Christian O'Reilly: Misophonia in ASD
- 4/23 - Dr. Alex Ewing, Prisma Health Data Repository

#### NEW HIRES

- **Education:** Dr. Chad Rose: research on intersection between bullying, disability labels, and special education services
- **Social Work:** Dr. Margaret Janse van Rensburg: research on autistic adult mental health, wellbeing, and inclusion
- **Psychology:** Dr. Zhiqiang Sha: research on neural-genetic underpinnings of autism

#### CAN SAVE-THE-DATES

Additional details to come, but we have selected dates for three key annual CAN events, open to ALL.

- **Research Roundup**, 5/7 10-2 pm
- **CAN Strategic Planning mtg**, 5/22 (all day), 5/23 (9-12)
- **CAN Annual Retreat**, 8/14 (all day)

#### DISCUSSION: PARTICIPANT COMPENSATION

At the March Community Advisory Board meeting (meet CAB on Page 5), we had a fascinating conversation on participant compensation. Here are some take-aways:

- **Consider other forms of compensation.** Think beyond financial incentives / payments. Other ideas included: childcare / respite nights, zoo tickets, toy/prize bin.
- **Opportunities for choice.** This was another common theme. Can participants participate on certain procedures but not others (i.e., opt out from bloodwork).
- **Identify the barriers and make sure to compensate appropriately.** These will likely vary per population. For instance, if compensating for travel, is that all travel (home-school-lab/clinic-home)?
- **Provide needed resources.** Incentives might include locally curated resource guide.

#### HIGHLIGHTS FROM EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- **Autism Awareness Month = April!**
  - We will be at MANY events - please join!
  - Request for Autism's Got Talent participants will be released mid-April with AGT being aired virtually in May.
  - We encourage folks to post to social media and tag us (@canresearchSC).
- **Trainees: We want to offer events and resources geared to you!**
  - Contact Sydney if you have ideas or suggestions for locations for events that are convenient.
  - We are also looking for trainees interested in joining Exec Committee: involves 1 monthly meeting.
- We are in the process of planning **visiting scholars for '25-26**, including the annual SCAND event (held in Columbia in early 2026). Faculty: Contact Caitlin to learn more about the opportunity to host a visiting scholar.



# SCAND 2025 RECAP

Over 90 SCAND Symposium 2025 attendees  
from over 5 South Carolina institutions



## TRAINEE AWARD WINNERS



Laura Friedman, PhD  
Postdoc  
SC Family Experiences Lab



Trevor Moreland  
PhD Student  
Poulain Lab



# Spring 2025 Events

APRIL

## 4/2 AutismConnect 2025

A **FREE** conference for self-advocates, families, caregivers, providers, ANYONE interested in learning more about autism and available resources! Informational flyer included on page 10!

## 4/5 Neurodiversity Among Us

Save the date! An event to celebrate kids with autism and neurodevelopmental disorders will take place at 1800 Gervais Street on April 5th with a "Be Your Own Superhero" theme. Stay tuned for event details!

## 4/25 Discover USC

Discover USC brings the university's research and scholarly community together in a new way, unifying celebrations of undergraduate and graduate student, postdoctoral and medical scholar innovation and scholarship into a single full-day extravaganza. More information to come!

## 4/26 SPARK at USC

Join MUSC's SPARK Team for an event at 1800 Gervais on April 26<sup>th</sup>. More details to come!

MAY

## 5/7 Research Roundup

Join CAN faculty and trainees (undergraduate and graduate students, staff, post-docs) in an event to showcase our research and learn from one another! Review posters from throughout the year and listen to flashtalks from faculty and trainees. More details to come!

## 5/8-5/10 Commencement

CANgratulations grads! We are SO proud and excited for you!

## 5/22-5/23 CAN Strategic Planning

CAN's Strategic Planning meeting is dedicated time for the Executive Committee to identify the Center's priorities and initiatives for the upcoming year. Interested in attending? Let Sydney know!

CAN in the Community

In March, CAN has tabled at Disability Celebration Day, Disability Advocacy Day, and SPARK in the Park! See photos below:





# Meet Our Community Advisory Board (CAB)

The CAN CAB is a group of community members who meet with our researchers, with the goal of gathering input about the alignment of our research and community outreach activities with the needs and values of the community.



**Anja Wilson** is a Special Education Advocate/IEP Consultant. She is also a single parent to her son Cortland, who was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder at the age of three. An alumna of the University of Tennessee, her passion for advocating for autism was born from Cortland's journey. This passion is built on a foundation of advocacy, where she aims to be a powerful and strong voice for those who cannot advocate for themselves by promoting the embodiment of advocacy, empowerment, education, commitment, and community.

**Brianna Ash** is a person with disabilities, social worker, and disability advocate. She graduated with her Master of Social Work (MSW) in 2021 from the University of South Carolina.



**Camerun Washington** is a certified genetic counselor. He has worked with hundreds of families navigating the genetic testing process for autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders. He is currently pursuing a fellowship in community engagement and outreach education with the American Society of Human Genetics and National Human Genome Research Institute.


**Dallas Nicholson** is a mental health therapist at Moonbug Therapy, in which she uses an ecological systems perspectives and has experience working with children and families.



**Kamania Wynter-Hoyte** is an Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at USC and has a son who is autistic.

# Meet Our Community Advisory Board (CAB)

**Kris Beard** is a stay-at-home mother of two children, one of whom is autistic with high support needs. Before starting her family and journey into neurodiversity support and advocacy, she was a researcher and college instructor at Clemson and earned her PhD in Genetics in 2014.



**Nikki Happe** is the Early Intervention Services Director at Epworth Early Intervention Center where she oversees the home-based program and their early intervention preschool program. She serves on the Safe Babies Court Active Community Team and is passionate about connecting families to local resources.

**Stephanie Turner** is the Autism Division Director of the South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs (DDSN). She has worked in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy, and she is personally connected to neurodevelopment through her sister-in-law, who was diagnosed with autism as an adult.



## Want CAB feedback?

Interested in presenting to the CAB for feedback on a grant proposal, potential community event, incentive ideas, etc.? Here are some things to know:

- The CAB meets quarterly! Our next meeting is June 6, 1:00-2:30 via Zoom.
- The agenda is **first come, first serve** and fills up fast! If you know you want to present something on behalf of your lab, email Sydney at [sydneya@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:sydneya@mailbox.sc.edu) as soon as possible and she can let you know what the schedule looks like.
- Do you have materials the CAB will need to review to prepare for your presentation? Sydney will need them **AT LEAST** one week in advance.
- CAB members include self-advocates, caregivers and family members, and service providers.



# GRANT RESOURCES

CAN Research Center has a variety of resources that you can utilize for your upcoming grant submission.

<http://>  [resource link](#)

## SPECIFIC AIMS REVIEW

**Have your specific aims reviewed by CAN experts!** Contact us at **LEAST 4 weeks** before you want to schedule your review. You will need to submit your 1-page aims one week ahead of the review. Open to all CAN Research Center members, including trainees.

## GRANT TEMPLATES

**CAN templates** are available to use for certain sponsors (e.g., NIH Facilities). Contact [Caitlin](#) to use or to request additional templates that CAN can solicit.

## FULL PANEL REVIEW

Occasionally, we will host a full **"mock" grant review** in which senior CAN members will review, score, and discuss an application (e.g., Aims + Research Strategy). Early career scientists will be prioritized. Advanced notice is required to schedule but application is not required until closer to review date. Contact [Caitlin](#) if you are interested.

## LETTER OF SUPPORT

Planning on using CAN resources (e.g., Neurodevelopmental Research Registry)? Need to emphasize interdisciplinary support? **CAN Research Center can write you a letter of support!** Email [Sydney](#) and [Caitlin](#) to request.

# BEYOND COMMON FEDERAL FUNDING

We are currently curating a (growing) list of alternatives to common federal funding mechanisms. Let us know of other funding we can recommend to CAN members!

- [Administration](#) for Community Living (National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, NIDILRR)
- [PCORI Engagement Award](#)
- [John Templeton Foundation](#)
- [Russell Sage Foundation](#)
- [Spencer Foundation](#)
- [Huo Family Foundation](#)
- [William T Grant Foundation](#)
- [Arnold Ventures](#)
- [Mellon Foundation](#)
- [Human Frontiers Science Program](#)
- [Sloan Foundation \(example RFP\)](#)
- [The American Speech-Language-Hearing Foundation](#)
- [Gerber Foundation](#)
- [AAUW \[for students and postdocs\]](#)
- [Sleep Research Society Foundation](#)
- [ASHFoundation](#)
- [Caplan Foundation for Early Childhood](#)
- [Jacobs Foundation](#)
- [Cultural Evolution Society](#)





Join us for our annual event that celebrates the unique workings of our brains! All ages are welcomed.

Enjoy these activities and more!



**Saturday April 5, 2025  
2:00 PM - 5:00 PM**

**Institute for Mind and Brain  
1800 Gervais Street, Columbia, SC 29201**

**Register at [www.akomacares.org/events-1](http://www.akomacares.org/events-1)**

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**CAROLINA  
AUTISM & NEURODEVELOPMENT  
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# CAN Research Roundup

**May 7**

🕒 10 AM - 1 PM

📍 Close-Hipp



Light  
refreshments +  
lunch provided



## This event will include

Updates from CAN leadership



Updates from CAN workgroups

Flash talks from CAN research labs

Small group/open conversation  
about CAN's future objectives/goals



RSVP to reserve  
your lunch!



UNIVERSITY OF  
**South Carolina**



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*Do you want help managing your child's difficult behaviors or teaching them life skills?*

## Family Training and Support Services Study



### Why participate?

- Learn strategies for supporting your loved one.
- Receive 1:1 guidance from a trained interventionist for 12 weeks.
  - 1-3 sessions per week, 1-3 hours per session
  - Number and length of sessions based on your preference and needs!
- We'll come to you! **No travel required.**
- Earn up to \$150 for participating.

### You may be eligible if you:

- Care for an **individual ages 6-21** with autism, intellectual disability, or developmental delay.
- Are not currently receiving ABA services or Behavior Support services.
- Live within 45 minutes of Columbia.

For more info, email us at [FTSS@sc.edu](mailto:FTSS@sc.edu) or scan:

