# McPartland Lab

## FALL NEWSLETTER

## DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

Dear McPartland Lab community,

I hope you enjoy this Fall Edition of our newsletter – perhaps you can read it outside, while colorful leaves fall around you! In its pages, you will learn about some of our team members, a new research study we are conducting to understand sound sensitivity, and our views on the importance of understanding all forms of autism. A personally relevant milestone discussed in this issue is the conclusion of data collection for our Autism Biomarkers Consortium for Clinical Trials study. This has been one of the most meaningful undertakings of my life. The study included approximately 900 children and collected data from about 3000 brain scans over the course of more than 10 years. It is the largest and most ambitious neuroscience study undertaken in autism in the United States, and it has led to significant advances. The insights from this study have resulted in two "biomarkers" being accepted into the FDA's Qualification Program; this is literally an unprecedented milestone for the fields of neurodevelopmental conditions and psychiatry. This study also highlights the importance of partnership. Our scientific team could not have learned these things without the active contributions of those 900 children and their families. Thank you for your commitment to learning together. I am confident we will continue to accomplish great things.

In gratitude,
Jamie McPartland

IN THIS ISSUE:

# MEET THE LAB!
# SHIVANI SAWANT

**Introduce yourself! What is your role at Yale?**
Hi everyone! My name is Shivani, and I am a first-year Sparrow Fellow. I grew up in Bethesda, Maryland, and graduated from Smith College with a B.A. in Psychology and English. My favorite part of this job is working with and learning from researchers and clinicians who want to better understand and support our participants and families! Outside of the lab, I like to read, make pottery, and spend time with friends!

**What did you do before you joined the McPartland Lab?**
In college, I worked as an intern for REACH, an early intervention services nonprofit, where I co-led an aquatic occupational therapy group and a play therapy group for infants and toddlers with developmental delays. I also co-led a biweekly executive functioning skills support group at the Smith Accessibility Resource Center, supporting college students with learning disabilities. Outside of Smith, I worked as a research assistant in a school psychology lab at Northeastern, studying school-based assessment for children with social-emotional and learning disabilities.

**What made you interested in working in this field?**
Because my older brother is on the autism spectrum, I have always been passionate about helping the world better understand people like him and his friends, and I am fascinated by developmental differences in how autistic individuals communicate and learn. By working to support neurodivergent children and adults during my time at college, I became curious about brain changes that may explain how certain developmental differences impact some, but not all, autistic individuals. Through my intervention work and research, I discovered a passion for this field and hope to translate this into a career in clinical psychology or neuropsychology!

***Meet another new Sparrow Fellow on the next page!***

# FAREWELL ABC-CT

While we welcome new faces in the lab, we also say goodbye to a long-lived study. Summer 2025 marked the celebratory, yet bittersweet conclusion of data collection for the Autism Biomarkers Consortium for Clinical Trials (ABC-CT) study, a 10-year, multi-site research study spanning Boston Children's Hospital, Children's Hospital of Los Angeles, Duke University, the University of Washington/Seattle Children's Research Institute, and Yale University. We are proud of the scientific progress this study has supported. Autism is now the first neurodevelopmental condition to have biomarkers under consideration by the FDA!

ABC-CT
Autism Biomarkers Consortium for Clinical Trials

This consortium study would not have been possible without all the collaborators, families, and participants who motivated scientific breakthroughs with curiosity and passion. We share our gratitude to everyone who helped bring data collection across the finish line!

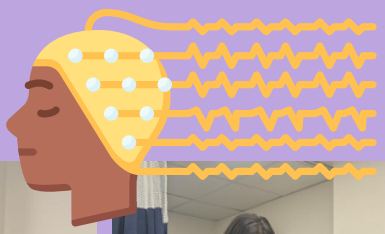
# MEET THE LAB!
# JENNA MCCLELLAND

**Introduce yourself! What is your role at Yale?**
Hi everyone! My name is Jenna, and I am a first-year Sparrow Fellow. I grew up in the Chicago suburbs and graduated from Wake Forest University (WFU) with a B.A. in Psychology and triple minors in Linguistics, Neuroscience, and Health & Human Services. My favorite part of this job is interacting with the kids and adults that participate in our studies. I've already learned so much from all of them and everyone who works here in the lab! Outside of the lab, I love traveling, reading, going to museums, and trying out new restaurants!

**What did you do before you joined the McPartland Lab?**
During college, I got involved in research and explored my interest in psychology and neuroscience in two labs on WFU's campus. The CARE Lab focuses on understanding and addressing race and gender biases in children, while the EmoLab explores emotion and stress regulation from a neural and psycho-physiological perspective. These two labs informed the research interests I have now! Outside of research, I participated in other organizations at WFU, such as the Program for Leadership and Character. With its focus on virtue ethics and community service, I owe a lot of my personal development to this program!

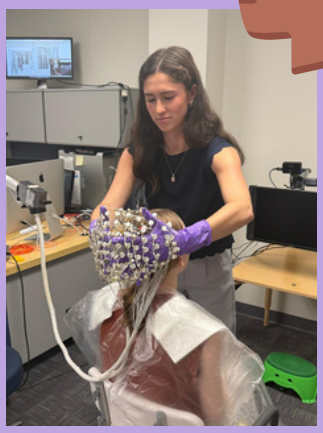
**What made you interested in working in this field?**
I have always felt called to work with individuals with developmental differences. I was very active in programs like Best Buddies and H.O.P.E. (Helping Overcome Physical Expectations) throughout high school and college. I had a Best Buddy in high school who had autism and was non-verbal. Although we experienced life very differently, we developed a strong friendship and found ways to communicate that helped him become successful and independent while feeling supported. He doesn't know it, but he completely changed my life and helped me identify a personal passion that has now become an integral part of who I am and the work I seek to continue throughout my professional and academic career.

# THE SPARROW'S NEST: 1-2-3 E-E-G



Over the past few months, our first-year Sparrow fellows - Emma, Jenna, and Shivani - have been hard at work getting trained by their senior Sparrow colleagues on all things research. One of the skills they have honed is fitting nets for electroencephalography (EEG). EEG is a very safe and non-invasive tool used in the lab to measure activity in the brain. Look at the new fellows practicing their skills with 2nd-year fellow, Casey!

Emma



Jenna

Shivani

# UNDERSTANDING THE FULL SPECTRUM: HONORING ALL EXPERIENCES OF AUTISM

BY JULIE WOLF

In recent years, our understanding of autism has expanded—both scientifically and culturally. As the definition of autism has broadened, so too has the range of experiences and needs among individuals on the spectrum. This growth has enriched our collective understanding, while also reminding us that there is no single "autism experience."

For some, embracing an autistic identity brings connection and self-understanding. The neurodiversity movement has played an important role in challenging stigma, highlighting strengths, and promoting acceptance of difference. This perspective has helped many people and families see autism within the broader landscape of human diversity and experience.

At the same time, families of individuals with more profound forms of autism often face daily challenges that can be complex and difficult to manage. Their experiences remind us that understanding autism also means acknowledging the very real needs for support, compassion, and access to resources. Recognizing these challenges does not conflict with acceptance—it deepens it.

As we continue to broaden our understanding of autism, it's vital to honor the full spectrum: from those who thrive with minimal support to those who require intensive, lifelong care. True inclusion means listening to and responding to everyone's needs, ensuring that all voices within the autism community are heard and valued.

At the McPartland Lab, our work is guided by that principle. Whether through research, clinical care, or community partnerships, we remain committed to fostering a world that recognizes the unique potential and humanity of every individual on the spectrum.

# RECENT DISCOVERY

**Clinician-caregiver informant discrepancy is associated with sex, diagnosis age, and intervention use among autistic children.**

Click here to read the full article!

Autism diagnosis relies on the consideration of both caregiver report and observation by clinicians. However, clinician and caregiver perceptions of a child's behavior don't always align, and it is important to understand when this difference occurs to improve the objectivity of autism diagnosis. This study looked at the differences between what clinicians and caregivers say about a child's autistic traits and behaviors. It focused on the child's sex at birth, age at which they were diagnosed with autism, and how much intervention or therapy they received. Compared to caregivers, clinicians reported higher levels of autistic traits in males and lower levels in females, as well as more autism-related behaviors across both groups of children. Clinicians also reported more autistic features in children who received more intervention compared to caregiver reports. These results highlight the importance of including caregivers in the autism diagnostic processes and the need for more research about how autism manifests in girls.

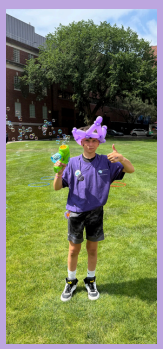
**Read more summaries of recent discoveries on our website under Publications, Article Summaries!**

# HIP HIP HOORAY FOR COMMUNITY DAY!

In July, we hosted our first autism community day, and it was a huge success! The day brought together McPartland Lab members, previous participants and families, and newcomers of all ages. Attendees had the opportunity to play a variety of indoor and outdoor games, make custom buttons, get fairy hair and face paintings, learn about EEG, and eat yummy food, all while completing a scavenger hunt to win a prize.

We had so much fun honoring YOU and celebrating scientific research together. Thank you to all of our participants and community partners, both old and new, who stopped by and made the event so lively. We look forward to making this an annual event and seeing everyone again next year!

***The day was filled with smiles. Catch a glimpse of them below!***


# STUDY SPOTLIGHT
# GAIN STUDY

BY DR. ADAM NAPLES

## What is the GAIN Study?

GAIN (Getting Away from Intrusive Noises) is a study about how the brain processes sounds and why, at times, the same sounds can feel too loud or too quiet. Sometimes people don't hear sounds unless they're very loud, like when we're asleep, and sometimes people hear quiet sounds that can seem very loud, like when we're surprised. We can measure brain activity to better understand how much your brain "changes the volume" on the sounds you hear around you.

## What is the role of auditory processing in autism?

Many autistic people say that sounds are sometimes too loud or too distracting, but scientists don't know what causes this. Also, we know that sometimes the *same* sounds that are too loud one day are okay the next day. This makes it hard for researchers to figure out what is causing sound sensitivities, and it makes everyday life challenging for autistic people if their symptoms change unexpectedly.

## What is the goal of this study?

We hope that this experiment helps us better understand why and when some people experience the volume getting turned up too high or too low. This understanding will help us and other scientists develop strategies that allow people more control over their experience of sound.

## What does a typical study visit look like?

This study will involve a 4-5 hour visit to our laboratory where we will complete some assessments and measure your brain activity while you listen to sounds. You can receive **up to $100** for your participation!

## Who is eligible to participate in this study?

Right now, we are recruiting adolescents and adults between the **ages of 12-40** with and without autism. Our research coordinator is available to provide more information when you contact us. Check out page 9 for ways to get in touch and learn more!

# IN THE COMMUNITY

# CONNECTICUT FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORK

## You Are Not Alone

Connecticut Family Support Network (CTFSN) exists to help families raising children with disabilities and special healthcare needs through the life span.

## What we do

Since 1998, CTFSN has been committed to helping families of individuals with disabilities and special healthcare needs–and the professionals who work with them–find information, resources and supports to improve their lives.

## How we help

We connect **one-to-one** with parents via telephone, email, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. We provide emotional support, advocacy, and guidance in English and Spanish.

We hold **workshops and trainings** across the state for parents and professionals on a wide variety of topics including special education, transition, recreation, self-care, and communication both in English and Spanish.

We **empower** families to become effective and successful advocates. We encourage individuals with disabilities to become successful self-advocates.

We offer many **support groups**, both in-person and online each month. The groups provide parent-to-parent connections, access to resources, and guest speakers, both in English and Spanish.

We **share current information** on disability issues and resources via email, our website, and Facebook so parents can keep informed.

We **collaborate** with local and state agencies, community groups, and other non-profit organizations to provide access to resources and support.

***Save the Date*: CTFSN Annual One Voice Conference April 30, 2026 in North Haven**

https://ctfsn.org

All of our services are **FREE**. We support families in English and Spanish. Contact us at:

(860) 744-4074 www.ctfsn.org www.facebook.com/ctfsn

377 Hubbard Street #1, Glastonbury, CT 06033

# FUN FALL ACTIVITIES IN CONNECTICUT

## Check out the New Haven farmer's market!

***Saturdays at Wooster Square***
511 Chapel St, New Haven, CT
Through November 22nd

***Sundays at Edgewood Park***
Edgewood Ave, New Haven, CT
Through November 23rd

## Try a spooky ghost tour!

***Moonlit Mystic Graveyard Ghost Tours***
Hendel Dr, Mystic, CT
Through November 30th

## Explore the Glow Wild Lantern Festival!

***At Beardsley Zoo***
1875 Noble Ave, Bridgeport, CT
Thurs - Sun | 5:30 - 9:30 PM
Through December 14th

***Click or scan the QR code for even more Connecticut autumnal fun!***

## Enjoy fall foliage while hiking at a state park!

- ***Sleeping Giant State Park***
  - Hamden, CT
- ***Millers Pond State Park***
  - Durham, CT
- ***River Highlands State Park***
  - Cromwell, CT
- ***Chatfield Hollow State Park***
  - Killingworth, CT
- ***Castle Craig Tower at Hubbard Park***
  - Meriden, CT

## Go to the Downtown New Haven Tree Farm!

***At CITA Park***
745 Chapel St, New Haven, CT
Opening dates in November
Through December holidays

# LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR LAB!

*- Click or scan each QR code below -*

## CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE!

## INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING? FILL OUT THIS FORM!

## READ ABOUT OUR LAB'S COLLABORATIVE EXCELLENCE EFFORTS!

## KEEP IN TOUCH!

**X**
@J_McPartland

**Instagram**
@mcpartland.lab

**Facebook**
Yale Autism Program

**Bluesky**
@j-mcpartland.bsky.social

203-737-3439 • autism@yale.edu • mcp-lab.org

## DISCLAIMER

In this newsletter, we use the terms autism, autistic, and on the spectrum to respect different preferences for how people like to talk about autism (Taboas & Zimmerman, 2023). It is our hope that all readers feel included and welcomed in our community through this writing.