

IMFAR Brief Report

The 2011 International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR) in San Diego was my second opportunity to attend this prestigious meeting. Having never been to California before, it was a very different change of scenery, flying from the Detroit Airport to sunny San Diego!

My IMFAR experience began with our poster presentation titled “Children’s Progress Across and Intensive 3-Month *Unity* ABA Training Program” on the Thursday morning, the first day of IMFAR. We got to the conference hotel for 8:00am, where Dr. Marcia Gragg, Munazza Tahir, one of our research assistants, and I presented our findings on the developmental progress of the children in the *Unity* program at the Summit Centre for Preschool Children with Autism. *Unity* is an intensive program that trains parents to teach their children with Applied Behavioural Analysis. We found significant gains in the children’s cognitive and adaptive skills over the 3-month program. It was a pleasure to discuss with researchers from around the world about how effective parents are in teaching their children. Many researchers were impressed with the results and expressed surprise that no parents have dropped out in the four years of this program.

One of the main highlights of the conference for me seeing my classmates and fellow research assistants present their research. My classmate, Brienne Drouillard, an M.A. student in the Child Clinical Psychology program at the University of Windsor, presented some of her honours thesis findings on the advice parents have for professionals. Dr. Gragg, the *Unity* Research Group advisor, presented Debra Barrie’s, a doctoral student in the University of Windsor Child Clinical Psychology program, M.A. thesis findings on factors that assist families to obtain an early diagnosis of ASD. Munazza Tahir, a research assistant, made IMFAR her first academic conference and enthusiastically discussed our results with other researchers. Seeing my classmates present their findings at IMFAR highlighted the research community that I am a part of at the University of Windsor and the wider ASD research field.

IMFAR broadened my horizons by allowing me to see the most recent ASD research. Over the course of this conference, I explored many posters and presentations about a variety of topics, including screening tools, parenting behaviour, choosing treatments, developmental delay and ASD, parent training, gender differences, and emotional development. My main research interests are related to emotional development of children with developmental disabilities, including ASD, assessment, and parent training. IMFAR exposed me to a wide variety of other research in this dynamic field. The amount and range of research on ASD was overwhelming but encouraging to see. It was wonderful to be a part of this conference and it would not have been possible without the support of this Autism Ontario travel bursary.

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