

Report by:

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I am currently in the 2nd year of the Master's of Arts Clinical-Developmental Psychology Program at York University. Upon the completion of my M.A. degree, I would like to continue my research at the doctoral level. I hope to become an accredited psychologist with the College of Psychologists of Ontario, so that I can pursue a career in clinical child psychology, with an emphasis on working with individuals with autism. In addition, I intend on becoming affiliated with a university that emphasizes research.

IMFAR is the conference that I look forward to the most because it is always so inspiring to be surrounded by so many people with a common goal: to better understand and assist individuals and families with autism. This year was particularly exciting for me because I presented the data from my Master's thesis. It was an excellent opportunity to get feedback from researchers and parents. This will directly help to prepare me for my thesis defense, because I will be able to anticipate some of the questions that I may be asked. More importantly, it will be excellent preparation for submitting my research for publication.

I attended many fascinating presentations, however, one presentation was of particular interest to me. Laugeson presented outcome results from the UCLA PEERS Program, a new social skills training program. I recall attending her presentation about this

program last year, when the program was still in its early phases, and it sounded like a really interesting program, so I was very excited to see that they were presenting the outcome results this year. This project involved 17 teens with high-functioning Autism or Asperger syndrome. This manualized program focuses on developing friendships through use of concrete lessons, demonstrations, live coaching, practice activities, and parent training. Modules focus developing social skills, including: conversation skills, electronic communication, selection of appropriate peer groups, peer rejection, humour and initiating conversation. Individuals who participated in the program showed significant improvement on a number of measures of social skills including a measure of peer conflict, and quality of get-togethers as rated by both parents and teachers. As an aspiring clinician who works with individuals with Autism and Asperger syndrome these results are very encouraging; I look forward to learning more about the program.

I'd like to thank Autism Ontario for providing me with the opportunity to attend IMFAR and I am looking forward to IMFAR 2009.