



REFLECTIONS

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER | JANUARY 2023 ISSUE

DR. KRISTIN SOHL, ECHO AUTISM COMMUNITIES EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RECENTLY TRAVELED TO VIETNAM TO SHARE AUTISM BEST PRACTICES



Check out what Dr. Kristin Sohl, ECHO Autism Communities Executive Director had to say about her recent travels in Vietnam to share autism best practices.

"Joy in work! What an honor to experience multiple people, places, and ways of life. 10 days and 4 regions in Vietnam. Hundreds of professionals and one powerful topic - Autism Best Practices. We covered many topics - planned and unplanned. We covered the basics of understanding autism characteristics across the lifespan, the development of social communication skills and the power of behavior as communication. We learned about the common contributing conditions that can impact quality of life for autistic people and we emphasized the importance of partnering with families and autistic people to co-produce care and life plans. One of my favorite moments was working with an autistic boy during a big session in Ho Chi Min City. He was a joy. He taught the group more than I ever could about the power of different, but very capable abilities. He demonstrated behavior as communication and we learned that maybe, non-autistics have it all backwards. As most in the audience sat still and quiet as would be expected in an auditorium, we watched him explore the room, explore individuals, help himself to water and very capably connect with us in his own way - we all experienced the beauty

of inclusive thinking. His dad, therapist and I were able to demonstrate how to build a parent+child+professional partnership and think together about how this boy can achieve more in his current school environment. We talked about following his interests and encouraging visual supports and other similar methods to support his active needs and know his boundaries and expectations. While I didn't have autistic children teaching with me at most of the locations, we still experienced the beauty of professionals opening their minds to see the possibilities in all abilities. We focused on learning about what behavior may be trying to communicate and how we can support autistic people in sharing their requests and needs in an effective way. My heart is so full from these experiences.

For those of you who've never been to another country or been in a situation where you can't speak, read, write, or communicate with others in any way beside non-verbal's, let me say, it's an experience. Being in Vietnam humbled me in a way that no other location has. I think it is because the language barrier is so steep and calls on me to rely on those that I'm with and trust in a way that requires the most vulnerable part of me. It also humbles me as it reminds me that many autistic people may feel this communication barrier daily. There were moments when I was scared and had to dig deep to keep my emotions in check. I couldn't meltdown in the immigration line despite wanting to. I couldn't ask about the type of food I was eating or where people were taking me or when we would get there. I couldn't do a lot of things that I do every day by and for myself. Sure, I could use google translate or other electronics, but my internet didn't always work and so trust, and vulnerability was the name of the game. Luckily, I had great support from Y Sa and Dr.Nhung. They were my trusty aids translating for me, guiding me, and helping me navigate when I couldn't communicate. Such a powerful reminder of how important helping others know what is coming, what to expect, and using visuals to support understanding. Sound familiar?

Every day when I'm serving autistic people in clinic or collaborating with professionals as they learn more about autism best practices, I get the joy of thinking and sharing the possible of our human experience. The trip to Vietnam is an extension of these same activities. I simply love seeing global perspectives on autism and disabilities. There is so much more commonality than not. Parents love their children and want the best for each of them. Professionals dedicate their lives to serving and learning how to apply best practices. Communities struggle to understand different abilities and accept the beauty of a diverse way of thinking. There are waitlists everywhere. There are professional territorial tiffs everywhere. There are passionate advocates challenging the status quo for autistic people everywhere. ECHO Autism Communities is about bringing our global communities together to learn more, do better and include always. What an honor it is to have traveled and shared with Vietnamese professionals. I can't wait to see them continue their journey and launch more ECHO Autism programs to empower professionals and enhance the lives of autistic people."

Thank you, Project ECHO, for providing Dr. Sohl with the opportunity to share Autism Best Practices in Vietnam!



SPOTLIGHT ON ECHO AUTISM: EARLY INTERVENTION

Are you a Speech-Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, or BCBA who works with autistic children from birth to eight years old? ECHO Autism: Early Intervention could be a game changer for you and the children you work with!

What is ECHO Autism: Early Intervention? It is a virtual learning program where early intervention professionals who work with young autistic children up to 8 years old learn about strategies and resources to support children with ASD. Early intervention professionals are provided the opportunity to enhance their knowledge about autism best practices and to collaborate with other clinicians. The ECHO Autism Early Intervention hub team includes Michelle Dampf, MA CC-SLP (Speech-Language Pathologist), Brittney Stevenson, MOT, OTR/L (Occupational Therapist), Laura Barnes, MS, BCBA, LBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst), Brett Moore, DO (Family Advocate & Pediatrician), Michelle Haynam, MS, Ed. (ESCE Teacher).

ECHO Autism: Early Intervention sessions take place on zoom the 2nd and 4th Monday of every month from 11:15am-12:45pm. During the sessions, participants experience case-based learning opportunities and knowledge bursts. Case-based learning occurs when clinicians share real-life, deidentified case presentations followed by questions and discussions. Knowledge Bursts consist of a brief didactic presentation from one of the autism and developmental experts on topics such as addressing symptoms and presentation of ASD, determining what interventions are considered an evidence-based practice, understanding sensory processing, behavior modification, and common comorbidities that occur in the ASD population.



If you would like to learn more about ECHO Autism: Early Intervention, contact the program coordinator, Michael Hansen at michaelhansen@health.missouri.edu or register using the program flyer below. Registration instructions can be found [here](#).

Program Flyer can be found [here](#).

SAVE THE DATE!

2023 ECHO AUTISM COMMUNITIES SYMPOSIUM

APRIL 20, 2023

CAREGIVER SKILLS SUPPORT SERIES

During the fall and winter of 2022, ECHO Autism Communities team members, Alicia Brewer Curran, Wendy Cornell, and the newest team member, a visiting scholar from the University of Salamanca in Spain, Clara Alvarez Fernandez, hosted our newly developed “Caregiver Skills Support Series” event in Poplar Bluff, Kirksville, and Springfield, Missouri. The goal of the event was to bring information and resources to autistic people, family members of people who have autism, and professionals who serve children and adults on the spectrum.

Each event focused on the importance of monitoring developmental milestones, basic information about autism spectrum disorder, and best-practice supports and services.

Additionally, printed and digital resources from the [CDC’s Learn the Signs. Act Early. program](#), [Autism Care Network](#), and [ECHO Autism Communities](#) were made available for attendees.

A highlight of this experience was having Clara join the team as they traveled across the state. Clara was instrumental in connecting with families and providing them with best-practice resources. Not only does Clara have great expertise as a clinician, but she is also fluent in Spanish, which was incredibly helpful for the Spanish-speaking families who attended.

“My favorite part of the events was visiting with families after the presentation. Listening to their stories and providing them with trusted information was very meaningful. It was also incredible to see the beauty of rural Missouri.” said Alvarez Fernandez.

Wendy and Alicia are mothers of adult children on the spectrum and educators by training. Their passion to empower people on the spectrum and their families with knowledge, resources, and a sense of community comes from both personal and professional experience.

“When my son was diagnosed, I didn’t know anything about autism. I learned quickly that knowledge is power, and it built confidence in my ability to understand and advocate for my son’s needs,” said Brewer Curran.

Cornell stated, “I have spent two decades of my career providing early educators with best-practice information to ensure children and families have what they need to be successful.” Engaging with communities in this way aligns with Wendy and Alicia’s professional and personal goals, as well as carries out the mission and commitment of ECHO Autism Communities, to build global communities where people see the possibilities in all abilities.

The ECHO Autism Communities Caregiver Support Series events were funded by the [Autism Care Network](#), which is funded by [Autism Speaks](#). The ECHO Autism Communities team is extremely grateful for their investment in communities across Missouri.



REFLECTIONS FROM OUR VISITING SCHOLAR, CLARA J. FERNANDEZ

"My name is Clara J. Fernandez, I am originally from the Dominican Republic, but my academic curiosity has taken me to distinct parts of the world. I completed my undergraduate studies in the United States and then moved to Europe to pursue a master's degree in Neuropsychology. I am currently a Ph.D. Candidate in the Psychology program at the University of Salamanca, Spain. My research is focused on the autism spectrum and the broader autism phenotype.

I learned about ECHO Autism when I attended INSAR 2022 to present my work at the congress. I was captivated by the work presented by Dr. Nanclares-Nogues at the conference, and I knew I wanted to learn more about this program that was having such a positive impact across the US, Latin America, and the world. Part of my Ph.D. program requires that students complete an international research stay, and when the time came for me to choose a center, ECHO Autism Communities was my first choice.

After exchanging correspondence with Dr. Nanclares-Nogues and Dr. Sohl, I was given the opportunity to come to ECHO Autism Missouri to learn more about the program and to assist with the Latin American expansion initiatives. My time here has made a significant impact on my research and future career path, as I see in ECHO Autism the opportunity to share knowledge and resources with those who need it the most, which has always been one of my top priorities as a researcher.

I also see in ECHO Autism a platform to continue to do something that I have been doing with my Ph.D. research, and that is using screening tools to detect ASD cases that may have gone undetected by early detection programs. Every day at ECHO Autism has been an incredible learning experience, as I have not only learned about the different initiatives and the impact the program is having in all the communities it serves, but I have also learned about teamwork, compassion, and dedication from my teammates."

-Clara J. Fernandez

