



Autism Without Limits

2011 Annual Conference
October 21–22 in Burbank, CA

Speaker Biographies (in alphabetical order)

Jordan Ackerson is a 23-year-old man with ASD who lives in Oregon. He currently works part-time at a private fitness club. He sings in the community college choir and takes private voice lessons. With an innate sense of social justice, Jordan has presented at numerous national conferences. He looks forward to being a spokesperson about how it feels to have a diagnostic label and the importance of not underestimating people with challenges. Jordan has written an article published in several national newsletters and has been the subject of several feature articles, both in his school newspaper and the local newspaper. He has also been interviewed by CNN and two local radio talk shows.

Hope Block is a woman with autism who lives in a condo in Newport. She has used FC for many years. It has given her a voice. She finds it difficult to let people know how smart she is. She wants to help others with autism who operate like her and feel trapped inside their bodies. Hope has presented at regional and national conferences on topics related to self-advocacy and facilitated communication. She is engaged to Jacob Pratt and would like to be with him always, but they face many barriers because they live and get supports in different states.

Nancy Brady, EdSP, ATS, is an Inclusion Specialist and an Assistive Technology Specialist in Southern California. She has a Bachelor's degree in Communication Studies and Sociology from the University of California–Santa Barbara, and a Master's degree in Special Education from Chapman University. Nancy earned a certificate in Assistive Technology from California State University–Dominguez Hills and provides assistive technology assessments to clients in Southern California, teaching many nonspeaking individuals with autism how to type to communicate. Nancy completed the Mentorship Project for Communication Partner Support in 2008 through WAPADH and has attended numerous Summer Institutes on Communication and Inclusion in both Syracuse, NY, and Whittier, CA. Nancy is a professional member of RESNA, a parent member of TACA, and a faculty member on www.autismcollege.com where she leads webinars on inclusive education. Nancy lives in San Clemente, CA, with her husband Pete and their three children, Chelsea, Nick and Mia. For more information, contact Nancy at www.supportedtyping.com.

Donald N. Cardinal, Ph.D., is Dean of the College of Educational Studies at Chapman University, Orange, CA, since 2002. Previously, Dr. Cardinal served as Professor and Director of the Center for Educational and Social Equity and Director of Special Education at Chapman University, where he has worked since 1988. Pursuing the goal of a more inclusive society, Don has worked with the most marginalized student populations in our society, those frequently holding the labels of severe emotional disturbance, severe mental retardation, autism, and severe behavior disorders. Above all, Don considers himself a teacher, holding in highest regard the complex and dynamic relationship between student and teacher. Don has authored and co-authored numerous articles, books, and book chapters in a variety of areas including evaluation, measurement of quality, teaching methods in special education, and collaboration. His co-authored books include *Essays on Urban Education: Critical Consciousness, Collaboration and the Self* and *Contested Words, Contested Science: Unraveling the Facilitated Communication Controversy*. Don, with Darlene Hanson and John Wakeham, collaboratively authored the largest single study on the authenticity of facilitated communication.

Dana Commandatore is an advertising director, author, blogger, disability advocate and mother to an autistic boy. Commandatore and her husband, Michael Broderick, started RethinkingAutism.com in 2009 to change the media conversation about autism from causation and cure to improving the quality of life of autistic individuals. In 2006 Dana wrote and published *Michelangelo the Diver*, a book dedicated to parents of children with special needs to always remember to keep dreaming for your children. Commandatore hopes to promote a more positive view of autism and to bring attention to disability rights issues.

Rob Cutler is the first President of AutCom to have autism (1999-2002). Since he began to communicate through FC in 1997, he has presented at numerous conferences including AutCom, Northeast Regional Conference on Autism, Syracuse University, UNH, Fitchburg State College, UMass Medical School, Pennsylvania OMR, MA Dept. of Developmental Services, TASH and MA Advocates Standing Strong. He has been published in *TASH Connections*, *Responding to the Challenge* (Ed. Hank Bersani), *The Communicator* ("Ask Rob" column), and *Sharing Our Wisdom* (Eds. Gillingham & McClennen), addressing issues of communication, movement disorder, various health issues in autism, post-traumatic stress disorder, spirituality, institutionalization, the case against aversives, and community services. Mr. Cutler has sampled the array of services, unfortunately including five years in a state institution. For the past several years he has been mentoring/counseling hundreds of young people in recovery from addiction and social difficulties. He is a strong advocate for social justice and is politically active. He has also served on the State Advisory Council of the Dept. of Developmental Services.

Steven Gersten, J.D., drinkagua@hotmail.com, has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and a Juris Doctor (law) degree. Many years after law school, Steve was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. Although he has faced ignorance as well as discrimination, Steve has been successful when his areas of special interest and expertise are emphasized and when he is not excluded because of challenges. He has worked in the U.S. Senate office of Pete Wilson and currently serves on the staff of Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. In addition, Steve has a true passion for teaching and giving presentations. Steve is currently working to expand his career and is planning to teach political science at the college level. Steve has expressed a commitment to pass onto his students knowledge and critical reasoning skills about the structure of government and also to inspire them to want to participate in and understand their rights in our constitutional system. Steve is dedicated to removing barriers and creating a world in which the civil rights of all individuals on the autism spectrum are fully respected.

Peyton Goddard, B.A., is a writer, presenter, and advocate for inclusion. At the age of six, when she was diagnosed as mentally retarded, Peyton was stripped of hope and worth by a culture preoccupied with identifying deficits and disability. A full sixteen years later, when Peyton finally gained a dependable mode of communication, she was at last recognized as an intelligent woman. She shattered her previous prognosis when she graduated as the Valedictorian of Cuyamaca College in 2002.

Darlene Hanson, M.A., S/LP, is a speech and language specialist with expertise in working with individuals with severe communication impairments. She is the Director of Communication Services with WAPADH in the Los Angeles area. Darlene has been working in this field for over 20 years. Her work focuses on bringing alternate modes of communication to those who do not use speech to communicate effectively. Currently she is focusing on training communication partners to increase communication. At WAPADH she provides speech and language assessments, therapy, and training, as well as services related to augmentative communication. These services are available to families as private clients and to school systems through their Non-Public Agency status. She provides training and coaching locally, throughout California, and out of state. Darlene received her B.A. from Chapman College and her M.A. from Whittier College, both in Communication Disorders. She is also recognized as a Master Trainer in Facilitated Communication, participated in the writing of the *Standards of Best Practice for Facilitated Communication* at Syracuse University and co-authored, with Don Cardinal and John Wakeham, the largest single study on the authenticity of facilitated communication.

Stephen Hinkle, M.A., is a recent graduate from Northern Arizona University with a Master's degree in Disability Policy. Stephen earned a Bachelor's degree in computer science from San Diego State University. Stephen is an individual with autism. When he was very young, his mother was told that she should institutionalize him. She did not. Stephen grew up in the special education system, noting what worked and did not work throughout his journey. He calls this "the hidden curriculum." Currently, Stephen's expertise is sought by those wanting insight into how best to meet the needs of their children and students in academic and social settings. Stephen has been featured in many interviews, articles, and at conferences in many states. Stephen is a national speaker and an advocate for all individuals with disabilities. stphinkle@aol.com

Mike Hoover of Boulder, CO, is a generous person with positive feelings about life and opportunity. He began doing volunteer presentations in 1992 while still in high school. He believes it is his life responsibility to share with and encourage others. He enthusiastically travels near and far to give of his knowledge about disability, getting the life you choose, impacting public policy, living a healthy life, inclusion, and more to everyone he can reach—parents, people with disabilities, professionals, and government leaders. He lobbies the Colorado legislature, representing the Colorado Developmental Disabilities Council. He prepares his testimony ahead of time but answers questions by using FC at the table. He thinks doing this public involvement has been very exciting. He has shown the legislature that people who do not speak have important things to say. He helped pass good bills and stop bad ones. He looks forward to more good bills this coming session. Mike has a job and lives in his own apartment.

Emily Doyle Iland, M.A., is a parent, author, advocate researcher and leader in the autism field. She is the co-author of the award-winning book, *Autism Spectrum Disorders from A to Z*. Emily is a member of numerous task forces, including the Transition Task Force of the California Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism. She has extensive experience training families and offering essential information needed to advocate for children with ASD, as she did for her son Tom.

Steven Kapp, M.A., is a doctoral student in Psychological Studies in Education at the University of California–Los Angeles and a Co-Director of the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network’s UCLA/LA Chapter. As an autistic self-advocate who researches the autism spectrum, Steven’s research interests include self-advocacy and improving the quality of life of autistic people. He has worked as a research assistant on a social skills intervention for fellow autistic young adults and on a research project assessing interactions between the neurodiversity movement and uses of communication. As someone who has navigated between the autism, disability rights, and academic communities, Steven seeks to explore potential for further collaboration among allies.

Lisa A. Lieberman, MSW, LCSW, is an Oregon psychotherapist in private practice with over 30 years experience. She has published numerous articles and wrote a book, *A Stranger among Us*, a comprehensive guide to hiring care providers for children and young adults with ASD (AAPC, 2005). An engaging national speaker, she skillfully and sensitively addresses issues related to living with disability in the family. Most importantly, she and her husband of 32 years enjoy witnessing the journey of their 23-year-old son Jordan Ackerson, who has autism.

Nick Pentzell is a Communication Arts major at Delaware County Community College in suburban Philadelphia. He is determinedly pursuing self-determination and increasingly living a more independent life (with supports). He advocates for himself and others as a workshop/conference presenter and writer. Besides AutCom, he has done presentations for the Society for Disability Studies, Millersville and Temple Universities, Penn Autism Network, Networks for Training and Development, Values Into Action, and Youth Advocate Programs. His recent publications include a lengthy quotation in the "A Question of Sex" section of William Stillman's *Empowered Autism Parenting* (2009).

Lars Perner, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Clinical Marketing at the USC Marshall School of Business, from which he holds a Ph.D. in marketing. Lars received a B.A. in Political Science and Psychology and a M.B.A. from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. His research interests center on consumer behavior, branding, consumer price response, "win-win" deals, non-profit marketing and fundraising, and autism subtypes. Lars became interested in the autism spectrum after being diagnosed with Asperger syndrome at age 31 in 1996.

Jodi Robledo, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Special Education at California State University–San Marcos. Prior to this appointment, she was K-12 Autism Specialist and Education Specialist in an urban multicultural school district. Jodi currently teaches courses with a focus on autism, supporting students with moderate/severe disabilities, and inclusive education. She has had several journal publications and many conference presentations. Jodi also co-founded the USD Autism Institute with Dr. Anne Donnellan and presents there frequently. Her research interests focus on autism, supportive relationships, sensory and movement differences, building self-advocacy skills in youth with ASD, and inclusive education.

Rita Rubin is an advocate for children and adults with disabilities for the past thirty years, serving in leadership positions in the Eastern Los Angeles Regional Center, the Whittier Community Advisory Council, Team of Advocates for Special Kids, and the Autism Society of America. Presently she hosts monthly support group meetings, teaches developmentally disabled adults, children and their parents or care providers to communicate using facilitated communication, and speaks frequently on the subjects of autism, inclusion, and facilitated communication.

Sue Rubin was judged mentally retarded before acquiring an effective communication system. She now holds an academic scholarship at Whittier College. Sue is a dedicated advocate, a facilitated communication consultant, and the recipient of numerous awards. She lives off-campus with support and enjoys an active social life.

DJ Savarese is a graduate of Grinnell Community Senior High School and plans to study creative writing, theatre, and political science at Oberlin College. He is currently collaborating with Rob Rooy on a documentary that shows "how free people with autism can be and yearns to teach teachers how to clearly include kids in Frees' schools." A member of the National Honor Society, DJ is also one of 15 Iowans to win a Herbert Hoover Uncommon Student Award. His work has been published in the book *Reasonable People*, in *Disability Studies Quarterly*, and on the Nancy Lurie Marks Foundation website. Performances of two of his scripts received Outstanding Performance at the state level in 2009 and 2011.

Chris Rials Seitz, M.A., is a therapist at South Bay Center for Counseling. She is Johnny's scripter and liaison to the neurotypical world, a participant on the Decade Committee of Indigenous People at the United Nations, acting as a liaison on behalf of indigenous people, producer of children's programs for Nickelodeon, a published photographer and filmmaker. Chris has a Master's degree in Counseling Psychology and is working on a doctorate. Currently, Chris works as an MFT Intern and is a private Behavior Consultant in Los Angeles.

Johnny Seitz is an educator and an adult with autism. Johnny is a published author, presents at autism conferences, serves as a resident faculty member at the Ryokan College of Psychology teaching his bio-typing technique, and has a private practice as a life coach. Johnny's teaching credentials include Harvard, Princeton and the creation of an eight credit degree program at New York University. Read more about Johnny Seitz in his book, *Bio-Typing: Beyond Body Language* and at autismverse.net or www.biotyping.com.

Jeremy Sicile-Kira: Jeremy was diagnosed as severely autistic and mentally retarded a few years after he was born in 1989. In 2010, he gave a commencement speech at his high school graduation (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8cEtand01w>). Jeremy writes for autism magazines, his college newspaper, and his new website, www.JeremySicile-Kira.com. Jeremy was featured in the *Newsweek* cover story "Growing up with Autism." Jeremy was highlighted on MTV's documentary series *True Life* in the episode, "I Have Autism," which won a 2007 Voice Award. Currently, Jeremy is co-authoring a book, *A Full Life with Autism*, with his mother, to be published by Macmillan in April, 2012, as a guide for parents transitioning young adults on the autism spectrum into meaningful and independent lives.

Kayla Takeuchi is a person with autism who is 20 years of age and nonspeaking. She has used facilitated communication (FC) since April 3, 2007. Kayla graduated with a real high school diploma on June 2, 2011, after being in special classes for 11 years and is now attending a community college with her facilitator. Kayla has made many presentations with Janna Woods, Master Trainer, on FC. She has presented at CalTASH, at TASH in 2010, at California State University-Fresno, and at California Learning Connection. She was a Keynote speaker with Rosemary Crossley at the Summer Institute in Syracuse in 2009. Kayla currently lives with her parents but hopes to live independently with support someday. She is working to become an independent typer and to use her voice to read her words. Kayla's dream is to become a teacher and advocate for her silent brothers and sisters.