

Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism
Legislative Report
FY2023

Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism Providers

University of Delaware Center for Disabilities Studies (CDS), DNEA Partner

Autism Delaware (AD), DNEA Partner

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Table of Contents

Who We Are..... 1

Why We Matter..... 2

Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism (DNEA) Activities..... 2

 Training and Technical Assistance 3

 Information Dissemination and Community Outreach..... 10

 Family Supports and Services..... 14

Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism (DNEA) Operations..... 16

 DNEA Staffing..... 16

 DNEA Financial Report..... 17

Summary and Next Steps..... 17

References 18

Who We Are

The Blueprint for Collective Action

In 2013, Delaware published its Strategic Plan to Improve Services and Supports for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder, referred to as the *Blueprint for Collective Action* (“the Blueprint”). The Blueprint is the result of a two-year comprehensive community needs assessment and planning process, with information gathered from and discussed among family members, people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), providers and professionals, and other community members.

The Blueprint outlines important recommendations for the state categorized into seven Improvement Areas. These recommendations are designed to address the ongoing needs of infants, children, youth, and adults with autism and their families living in Delaware.

As a means to accomplish these recommendations, stakeholders collectively endorsed two systemic activities: (1) an autism resource center; and (2) an executive group of state-decision makers and parents.

In 2016, under the leadership of Senator Margaret Rose Henry and Representative Earl Jaques Jr., Delaware Senate Bill 93 (SB93) was passed. It resulted in the creation of the Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism (DNEA) and Interagency Committee on Autism (ICA).

The Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism

The DNEA is the state’s autism training and technical assistance center and is led by the University of Delaware Center for Disabilities Studies (CDS) in partnership with Autism Delaware. The DNEA provides training and support to professionals and organizations, as well as children and adults with autism and their families.

The DNEA leverages interdisciplinary expertise to ensure all Delawareans with autism and their families have access to high-quality services and evidence-based care across the lifespan. The DNEA offers training and support to professionals and families in a variety of ways. For example, the DNEA offers large-scale statewide trainings; tailored workshops and technical assistance to meet specific organizational needs; and targeted support provided through webinars or onsite coaching. CDS mainly oversees the provision of professional training while Autism Delaware addresses family needs through family navigation and parent training; additional outside contractors are utilized, as needed, to execute program goals. Further, the DNEA coordinates its spending plan and programmatic initiatives with the Autism Resource Workgroup (formally Delaware Statewide Autism Programs) within the Delaware Department of Education in order to avoid duplicative programming and ensure improved outcomes for Delawareans with autism and their families.

By establishing a network, the DNEA utilizes additional expertise and resources from ICA members and local, regional, and national experts in order to offer far-reaching, impactful support for all community members.

The Interagency Committee on Autism

The ICA is composed of key stakeholders within the Delaware autism community. It includes 14 different state agencies and community organizations, a parent/caregiver from each county, and a person with autism. The DNEA Principal Investigator - Sarah Mallory - serves as the Administrative Chair of the ICA and facilitates the coordination of ICA meetings, reporting, and activities.

The ICA leverages resources across member organizations and agencies to develop coordinated approaches to implementing improvements outlined in the Blueprint. The ICA identifies gaps or overlaps in services, is available to advise the Delaware General Assembly on recommendations for legislation, and oversees the development of goals and priorities for the DNEA.

Why We Matter

The Centers for Disease Control reports 1 in 36 children is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD; Maenner et al., 2023). Individuals with autism may face difficulties learning, communicating, and managing stress. However, the greater challenge is often living in a world that lacks the awareness and tools to effectively support autistic people and their families. People with autism are more likely to experience additional health and mental health concerns than the general population and often face barriers to accessing employment, transportation, community activities, health care services, and other services that support their day-to-day living needs (Roux, et al., 2017).

The Interagency Committee on Autism (ICA) and the Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism (DNEA) are the only entities of their kind in the state that are working to address roadblocks in providing high-quality care to all Delawareans with autism in an efficient, coordinated, and person-directed manner.

With an increasing prevalence of autism and a clear demonstration of the need for continued support, the DNEA has become a critical provider of large-scale and wide-spread training, technical assistance, coaching, and support for families and professionals in the state of Delaware. The DNEA's work ensures the state is equipped to provide high-quality services and evidence-based care to autistic people and their families by empowering professionals to work with and support children and adults on the spectrum.

Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism (DNEA) Activities

The following section reports on the activities of the Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism (DNEA) between October 1, 2022 and September 30, 2023. **During this contract period, the DNEA touched 10,117 Delaware residents and professionals through its training, technical assistance, and information dissemination activities.**

Overviews of these initiatives are organized into three sections: (1) Training and Technical Assistance; (2) Information Dissemination and Community Outreach; and (3) Family Supports and Services. Each section includes a summary of FY2023 DNEA activities by describing the scope and impact of its initiatives. Associated *Blueprint for Collective Action* improvement area(s) and DNEA network partner(s) and subcontractor(s) associated with the work are noted.

Training and Technical Assistance

The DNEA organizes its work into three tiers of training and technical assistance activities. Its Tier 1 and Tier 2 services focus on providing the community with general training, technical assistance, and resources that benefit most professionals (Tier 1) or a subset of professionals from a given field (Tier 2). Tier 3 services represent those activities that are intensive and tailored to a specific site or setting. The following sections will provide a summary of these three tiers of service.

Tier 1 DNEA Training and Technical Assistance Activities

Tier 1 DNEA Activities are those training and technical assistance activities that are appropriate for families, self-advocates, and professionals from multiple sectors. They offer the community foundational knowledge about autism that is appropriate for all consumers. A total of 1,062 individuals engaged in Tier 1 DNEA activities in FY2023. These activities included statewide training sessions, lunchtime learning sessions, and trainings conducted in partnership with other community organizations.

Statewide Trainings. Statewide trainings are large-scale trainings for professionals and family members who support individuals with autism. They are designed to be inclusive of individuals who work in a wide-range of settings and focus on evidence-based practices that can be implemented across the lifespan. DNEA statewide trainings address *Blueprint for Collective Action* Improvement Area 2 (Training and Technical Assistance) and are developed and led by University of Delaware Center for Disabilities Studies (CDS) DNEA staff.

The DNEA demonstrated significant growth in the number of monthly statewide trainings offered in FY23. Between five and seven statewide trainings focused on general topics such as the characteristics of individuals with autism, evidence-based practices, visual supports, and mental health were offered each month. Additionally, DNEA staff made significant updates to its statewide training library by releasing new content and updating existing content.

Three new trainings were released in FY2023. An abstract of these trainings can be found below.

Understanding Autism and Strategies for Child Care Providers provides participants with an introductory understanding of autism spectrum disorder and how it impacts young children differently. The training provides strategies to support young children with autism in a childcare setting.

Supporting Your Child with Autism During the Holiday Season focuses on holidays and special events, as they can be fun and exciting, but also difficult for youth with autism. This training discusses events and festivities specific to the holiday season and focuses on strategies to help prepare for all the season offers while reducing stress and challenging behaviors.

Supporting Family-led Development Monitoring introduces participants to the importance of developmental monitoring and provides an overview of the state's developmental screener – the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). The training

explains the state’s process for referring children to early intervention services and describes the types of early intervention services available to children of different ages.

Existing statewide trainings were updated to reflect current best practices and advancements in the field. All training content was developed utilizing universal templates (e.g., PowerPoints, handouts, resource guides) that include accessibility features consistent with Section 508 guidance and structural components that align with best practices, such as universal design for learning. In FY2023, 722 individuals attended DNEA statewide trainings. A completing listing of the DNEA statewide trainings and their corresponding evaluations be found in Table 1.

Table 1
DNEA Statewide Trainings Evaluations in FY2023

Training title	Mean Satisfaction
Existing training content	
Introduction to autism spectrum disorder	8.57
Introduction to evidence-based practices for autism spectrum disorder	9.58
Visual supports and autism	9.37
Autism and mental health	8.89
Supporting social skills	8.77
New training content	
Understanding autism and strategies for child care providers	9.04
Supporting family-led development monitoring.	9.35
Supporting your child with autism during the holiday season	9.13

Degree of satisfaction: 10 = Highly Satisfied; 0 = Highly Dissatisfied

Lunchtime Learning Seminars. Lunchtime learning seminars consist of 60-minute virtual sessions featuring topic-specific content delivered by national and regional experts. In FY2023, five seminars were conducted with 202 professionals, self-advocates, and family members in attendance. These workshops were recorded and are housed on the DNEA webpage for on-demand viewing. Hosting expert speakers addresses *Blueprint for Collective Action* Improvement Area 2 (Training and Technical Assistance) and Improvement Area 4 (Self-Determination, Self-advocacy and Social Network Development). Table 2 provides a summary of these seminars.

Table 2*FY2023 Lunchtime Learning Seminars*

Seminar	Attendees
The Birds and The Bees: Learning from the Research on Autism and Human Sexuality (2023, March) Sarah Curtiss, PhD Assistant Professor of Special Education at the University of Delaware	39
Providing Neurodiversity-Affirming Care to Autistic Youth and Families (2023, July) Lily Slavin, PhD, Pediatric Psychology & Kate Vertucci, Behavioral Health Nemours Children's Health	40
Supported Decision-Making: From Justice to Jenny to Justice for All (2023, April) Jonathan Martinis, Esq., JD Director for Law and Policy in the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University	43
Education, Employment, and Independent Living: SDM in Special Education and Vocational Rehabilitation (2023, May) Jonathan Martinis, Esq., JD Director for Law and Policy in the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University	45
Taking Care, Taking the Lead: Supported Decision-Making in Health Care and Life Planning (2023, May) Jonathan Martinis, Esq., JD Director for Law and Policy in the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University	35
Total	202

Participants' satisfaction with these events was strong, with 94% of participants reporting they would be able to use or apply some of the information presented in the webinar; 96% of participants sharing they were satisfied with the presenter's knowledge and effectiveness in communicating with the audience; and 95% of stating that they were overall satisfied with the events.

Participants' anecdotal feedback noted the high-quality nature of the selected speakers, and versatility of the DNEA recordings. For example:

Excellent presentation. While I did already understand the supported decision making and vocational rehabilitation, your passion and experience helped convey other aspects of these topics that I otherwise might not have considered. Thank you.

(Participant from Education, Employment, and Independent Living seminar)

This training far exceeded my initial expectations. I learned a lot. I will re-watch the presentation to be able to master the information.

(Participant from The Birds and The Bees: Learning from the Research on Autism and Human Sexuality)

Partnership Trainings. The DNEA also conducted a number of autism trainings in partnership with community organizations. These included providing different organizations with general background about autism and common evidence-based practices that could be used to support this population. Training activities were conducted in partnership with Trauma Matters Delaware (n= 44); the National Association of Social Workers Conference (n=39); and the Criminal Justice Behavioral Health Summit (n=55).

Tier 2 DNEA Training and Technical Assistance Activities

Tier 2 DNEA Activities are discipline-specific trainings, limited training series, and/or certification events paired with technical assistance and/or case consultation activities. They offer professionals from different sectors discipline-specific knowledge about autism that is appropriate for their unique professional settings. Tier 2 DNEA Activities engaged 1,000 attendees in FY2023. These initiatives included ADOS-2 training, Project ImPACT training, and trainings for first responders, medical providers, dental providers, and family organizations.

ADOS-2 Training. Individuals in Delaware often face long waitlists to receive an autism diagnosis. To increase the number of professionals qualified to offer evaluations, the DNEA provided two autism evaluation training series on best practices for administering the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS-2). The ADOS-2 is an evidence-based tool that clinicians use to diagnose children with autism. During January and June of FY2023, the DNEA organized three-day workshops that served a total of 84 Delaware clinicians. These Delaware professionals were also provided ongoing technical assistance and a full day of advanced ADOS-2 training, with a focus on report writing. The ADOS-2 training activities address *Blueprint for Collective Action* Improvement Area 1 (Identification, Diagnosis, and Classification) and were provided by CDS DNEA staff and a DNEA contracted trainer, Dr. Norman Geller.

Participant feedback noted that the trainings helped their “confidence in administering, scoring, and writing a report for an autism assessment” and ability to serve as “an additional team member in the evaluation process for students with autism.” Table 3 summarizes participants’ training satisfaction with each of the events.

Table 3
ADOS-2 Workshops: Participant Satisfaction (n=73)

Evaluation item	Percent who “agreed” or “strongly agreed”
ADOS-2 Training	
The training covered content that was new to me.	93%
The training enhanced my understanding of the ADOS-2.	99%
Overall, the training will have a positive impact on my work.	99%
The technical information presented on how to administer the modules will be useful to me.	97%
ADOS-2 Advanced Training	
The training covered content that was new to me.	94%
The general information presented about using ADOS-2 findings for report writing will be useful to me.	94%
Overall, the training will have a positive impact on my work.	94%

Project ImPACT Training. To help strengthen Delaware’s capacity to support young children with autism and social communication challenges, the DNEA provided ongoing training and technical assistance to targeted groups of providers in administering the caregiver coaching program, Project ImPACT. Project ImPACT teaches providers how to coach caregivers to use strategies to help their children develop social, communication, imitation, and play skills.

Upon completing the training series, trainees were provided the Project ImPACT curriculum, coaching guide, and manual for caregivers. Additionally, they engaged in ongoing technical assistance with the DNEA and Project ImPACT trainers in order to support their integration of Project ImPACT into their practice. Providers received ongoing consultation to assist with clinical and organizational issues to help with treatment fidelity and sustainability.

This training also allowed the DNEA to develop a statewide roster of trained providers so they could accept referrals from agencies and organizations. This roster was shared via the DNEA website and includes 15 new providers, to date. The Project ImPACT training activities address *Blueprint for Collective Action* Improvement Area 1 (Identification, Diagnosis, and Classification) and were provided by a DNEA-contracted trainer, Katherine Pickard.

First Responders. In FY23, the DNEA partnered with Charles “Chuck” Sawchenko, a retired Delaware State Trooper, social worker, and parent of a child with autism, to provide

training and technical assistance to state troopers and other first responders across the state. These trainings focused on helping first responders understand autism; effective strategies to respond, interact, and de-escalate situations involving autistic people; and strategies to limit liability and mistakes when interacting with individuals with autism. In FY23, over 128 Delaware first responders participated in the training from more than 40 agencies and departments.

Post-training surveys indicated that over 75% of participants reported post-training knowledge gain across all measured topic areas and increased confidence when supporting an autistic person. Anecdotal feedback from these events also indicated a high degree of training satisfaction, with one trainee stating, “I believe that this training should be mandatory for all first responders” and another noting, “I plan to include more resources about autism when working in disaster emergency preparedness in planning.”

Medical and Dental Providers. In FY23, the DNEA continued to work to build the capacity of medical and dental providers to integrate visual supports into their practices. The DNEA provided training and resources related to the book *Communicating Visually in Pediatrics*. Published by the American Academy of Pediatrics, this evidence-based tool explains standard medical procedures to children and young adults with autism who may have complex communication needs. The DNEA created accompanying trainings, videos, and resources guides to support residents, medical professionals, and dental providers in using this tool. Forty-eight copies of the book and associated training resources were distributed during FY2023 and 204 medical and dental providers were provided information about how to use this and other visual support tools in their practices.

Increased coordination and training with medical and dental professionals addresses *Blueprint for Collective Action* Improvement Area 2 (Training and Technical Assistance) and Improvement Area 7 (Systems Coordination); these activities were conducted by CDS DNEA staff and Table 4 provides a summary of these training, presentation, and community engagement activities. Please see “Information Dissemination and Community Outreach” for additional information about material distribution activities to these groups.

Table 4
Medical and Dental Provider Trainings and Presentations

Agency or Event	Total Attendees
Pediatric Grand Rounds: Nemours Children’s Health	165
Del Tech Nursing Students	24
Christiana Care’s Center for Special Health Care Needs	15
Total	204

Family Organizations. The DNEA also responded to a number of training and technical assistance requests from Delaware organizations focused on families and young children. These trainings were tailored to individual settings in response to specific needs share by each

organization. This work addressed *Blueprint for Collective Action* Improvement Area 1 (Training and Technical Assistance) and was carried out by CDS DNEA staff. Table 5 summarizes the training and technical assistance provided to these groups in FY2023.

Table 5

Family Organization Training and Technical Assistance Activities

Agency	Trainings offered	Total attendees
Blossom and Bloom Early Learning Center	1	13
YMCA of Delaware	4	136
Sussex Preschools, Inc.	2	84
PIC - Family Leadership Network	1	10
The Learning Center at Calvary	1	20
Total	9	263

Tier 3 DNEA Training and Technical Assistance Activities

Tier 3 services represent those activities that are intensive and tailored to a specific site or setting. The nature of this work requires additional staffing, a comprehensive needs assessment, multiple training sessions/site visits, highly customized material development, and/or partnerships that target disability groups that include autism and other neurodevelopmental disabilities. Therefore, an additional cost is often associated with this work and any funds received for these activities do not offset the DNEA's day-to-day operating budget funded by the Health Fund.

These capacity-building initiatives addressed *Blueprint for Collective Action* Improvement Area 1 (Training and Technical Assistance), and Area 7 (Systems Coordination) and were executed by CDS DNEA staff.

The Latin American Community Center. In FY2023, the DNEA began work with the Latin American Community Center (LACC) to implement a comprehensive training and technical assistance program designed to systematically improve their capacity to include and support young children with autism in their early learning classrooms. This work was funded, in part, by the Delaware Department of Education Office of Early Learning as this is a population of children and setting that are not supported by the Delaware Department of Education's Autism Resource Workgroup.

LACC's mission is to "empower the Latino community," providing infant, toddler, and preschool education. The majority of the staff speak Spanish as their primary language so all

resources were translated into Spanish, and all training, technical assistance, and coaching activities were conducted in Spanish and English.

Work with LACC launched with a comprehensive needs assessment to understand the training needs of the staff. Next, DNEA led two all-staff trainings attended by 45 staff members. Eight early childhood teachers and two instructional coaches were identified to receive a follow-up intensive training, technical assistance, and coaching package. During FY2023, this group participated eight training and coaching sessions. The remaining three training and coaching sessions will occur in FY24, at which time program evaluation data will be gathered and analyzed.

Anecdotal feedback gathered from the all-staff training noted the quality of the workshops and specific evidence-based strategies staff planned to implement with the children they support:

I've worked with Autistic children previously in Connecticut and then been here in Delaware for almost 6 years. This was a great workshop training to give our teachers some resources they can go and information online, plus the information and visuals.

Work more regularly with visuals, as I think they are a lot of help for children's' transitions, including children who don't have a condition. Note: THANK YOU VERY MUCH for sharing and teaching us all the strategies for equity for all kids, in and out of our environment. Blessings!

Information Dissemination and Community Outreach

In FY2023, DNEA staff continued to conduct outreach to community organizations and leaders in order to increase awareness of the DNEA; gather information about the needs of individuals with autism, their families, and providers; and share available resources and training opportunities. These activities included the development and dissemination of training videos and resource guides, as well as attendance at community outreach events. Through these activities, the DNEA had 5,917 points of contact in FY2023.

Recorded Training Videos and Tutorials

The DNEA continued to expand its library of videos that can be viewed on demand through the DNEA website. This library of recordings includes full length trainings and brief evidence-based practice tutorials that are designed to support individuals who work in a wide range of settings across the lifespan. Eleven new videos were developed in FY2023 and have received over 727 clicks. DNEA training videos and tutorials address *Blueprint for Collective Action* Improvement Area 2 (Training and Technical Assistance) and were developed by CDS DNEA staff. An abstract of the new recordings can be found below.

Introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorder (60 mins) introduces viewers to autism. It is designed to support professionals and family members in understanding autism and how it impacts individuals differently. It includes a review of basic strategies and resources to support autistic people.

Introduction to Evidence-Based Practices for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (30 mins) provides an overview of introductory evidence-based practices that can be used to support individuals with autism across multiple settings. It is designed to support both professionals and family members.

Introduction to Visual Supports (30 mins) is designed to support professionals and family members in using the four types of visual supports. The recording defines when and how each visual support should be used and discusses how to plan, implement, and monitor visual supports across multiple settings.

Designing and Using Reinforcement (40 mins) provides an in-depth review of the evidence-based practice of reinforcement. It is designed to support both professionals and family members, and discusses how to design and use reinforcement to support individuals with autism across multiple settings. It provides an overview of the different types of reinforcement as well as the steps to plan, implement, and monitor a variety of reinforcement schedules and systems.

Providing Neurodiversity-Affirming Care to Autistic Youth and Families Webinar (60 mins) is a recording of a lunchtime learning event conducted in partnership with the Swank Autism Center at Nemours Children's Health. This video addresses considerations in providing neurodiversity-affirming care to autistic individuals and families from an intersectional lens.

Autism and Mental Health (120 mins) provides an introductory understanding of autism and commonly occurring mental health diagnoses. The webinar discusses the core characteristics of autism, its prevalence and presentation, and evidence-based resources that can be used to support individuals with autism who have mental health needs.

Supported Decision-Making: From Justice to Jenny to Justice for All (60 mins) is part one of a three-part speaking series with Jonathan Martinis about supported decision-making. Supported decision-making (SDM) is an alternative to guardianship that allows people with disabilities to get the help they may need to make choices about their life.

Education, Employment, and Independent Living: SDM in Special Education and Vocational Rehabilitation (60 mins) is part two of a three-part speaking series about supported decision-making.

Taking Care, Taking the Lead: Supported Decision-Making in Health Care and Life Planning (60 mins) is part three of a three-part speaking series about supported decisions.

Discussing Disability (8 minutes) is a tutorial about changing perceptions and shifts in the language surrounding disabilities and, specifically, autism.

Delaware Resources and Supports (6 minutes) is a tutorial that provides a brief review of Delaware organizations, resources, and supports for individuals with autism, their families, and the professionals who serve them.

Evidence-based Practice Resource Guides

The DNEA continues to develop and revise evidence-based practice (EBP) resource guides to support families and professionals who work with individuals with autism. Resource guides are designed to align with training topics covered during remote, live, and recorded workshops. They include a wide range of topics that range from introductory to advanced. Some are more general and provide strategies that most families and professionals may find helpful, while others are more technical and target specific groups of professionals. All resource guides were professionally developed by a graphic designer and fully accessible (i.e., 508 compliant) in their digital and paper formats.

Resource guides are housed on the DNEA website and are organized by topic. Delaware residents and professionals can also order paper copies of the guides, free of charge, through the DNEA website; over 3,370 DNEA resource guides were disseminated in FY2023. Resource guides address *Blueprint for Collective Action* Improvement Area 2 (Training and Technical Assistance) and were developed by CDS DNEA staff. An abstract of each new resource guide developed during FY2023 can be found below; the complete library of DNEA resource guides can be found on the DNEA website.

What is Neurodiversity? addresses different terms related to neurodiversity. It discusses disability language preferences and provides useful tips and resources about autism culture. This guide was created in collaboration with the Swank Autism Center at Nemours Children's Health.

Book Club Conversations focuses on the book *We're Not Broken: Changing the Autism Conversation* by Eric Garcia. The guide provides book club discussion questions to aid community members in engaging in meaningful discussions about how society views individuals with autism. It discusses the neurodiversity movement and celebrates the unique experiences and abilities of autistic individuals.

Supported Decision-Making in Delaware explains supported decision-making (SDM) and provides information about how it differs from guardianship. Delaware-specific resource links are provided.

Resources for Teaching Human Sexuality is designed to provide guidance and evidence-based resources about sex education for people with disabilities. This guide was co-created with Sarah Curtiss, PhD, who is an Assistant Professor of Special Education at the University of Delaware.

In addition to these DNEA-developed resources, the DNEA also distributed 48 copies of *Communicating Visually in Pediatrics* book (American Academy of Pediatrics) with an accompanying DNEA informational guide. Please see Tier 2 DNEA Activities for additional

information about this initiative. Table 6 provides a summary the agencies and organizations who received a copy of these resources.

Table 6

Communicating Visually in Pediatrics Book and Resource

Agency	Copies
Bayheath	5
Nemours Children’s Health	18
Tidal Health Nanticoke	11
University of Delaware School of Nursing	5
Del Tech School of Nursing	2
Just Kids Pediatrics	2
SWANK Autism Center	2
Christiana Care	2
Atracare	1
Total	48

Community Outreach

The DNEA engaged in a number of community outreach activities to raise awareness about autism, effective evidence-based supports, and opportunities available through the DNEA. These activities included digital outreach through our website and newsletter, as well in-person outreach by attending local conferences and events. The DNEA’s outreach work addresses *Blueprint for Collective Action* Improvement Area 6 (Family Support and Stakeholder engagement) and Area 2 (Training and Technical Assistance); these activities were carried out by CDS DNEA staff.

DNEA Digital Outreach. The DNEA maintains a website (www.delawareautismnetwork.org) and an email listserv. These digital resources serve as another means to increase awareness about DNEA initiatives and disseminate evidence-based information about autism.

The website highlights DNEA activities and houses the DNEA’s extensive library of digital content. It also offers information about autism and Delaware-specific processes and resources. Visitors can use the website to request training or technical assistance and register for upcoming DNEA events. Because the DNEA supports ICA operations, the website also provides information about the *Blueprint for Collective Action*, ICA meetings, and contact information for other ICA agencies and organizations.

Similar to the website, the DNEA email listserv serves as a mechanism to highlight DNEA activities. The DNEA listserv had 982 subscribers in FY2023. Each month, the DNEA sent a community newsletter highlighting upcoming training opportunities and new DNEA resources.

DNEA Vendor Tables. The DNEA also regularly attended community events to promote its resources and best practices surrounding autism. Table 7 provides a summary of DNEA vendor tables and events that the DNEA attended in FY2023.

Table 7

DNEA Vendor Tables

Event	Attendees
Milford Wellness Village: Village Fest.	250
Easterseals Caregiver Conference	100
Delaware Healthcare Forum	350
Delaware Association of School Psychologists	90
Total	790

Family Supports and Services

Autism Delaware, which receives a portion of DNEA funding, provides direct support to families. Their family support programs serve as the advocacy arm of the DNEA, supporting families of individuals with autism through multiple programs. One such program is its Family Navigation program. Family Navigators respond to requests for information about Delaware supports and available services. Family Navigators are certified to provide family peer supports; three have lived experience parenting an individual with autism and one is bilingual (Spanish/English). In 2023, Autism Delaware's family support services added their first full-time intake coordinator. The combination of the part-time and full-time intake coordinators enabled the program to meet the demand from families requesting support. Intake coordinators collect the requesting family's contact information, create a client record for the family, and schedule them a first appointment with a Family Navigator or other Autism Delaware service or program.

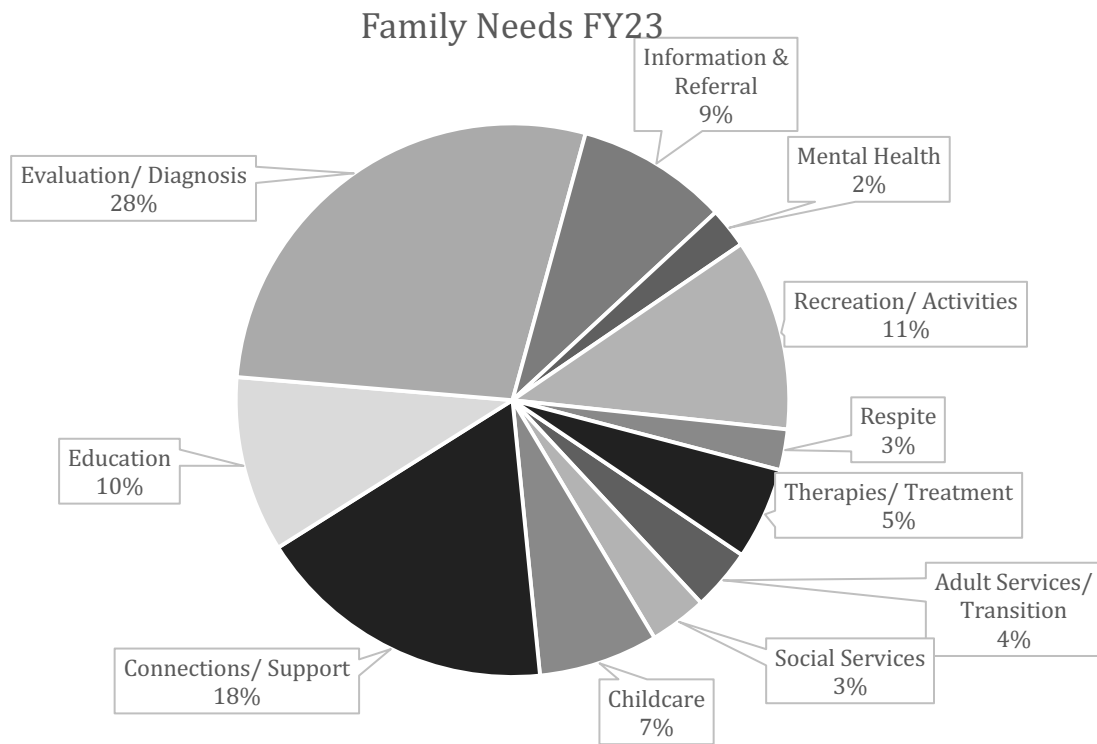
Family Navigators support families in assessing needs and identifying next steps and community resources. They also provide psycho-education around navigating service systems in Delaware. Autism Delaware offers family navigation services on an as-needed basis to families who have a specific question or challenge. Family Navigation supports parents who have children of any age (youth through adult), and can also support other caregivers, relatives, and community members. The Family Navigation program addresses the *Blueprint for Collective Action Improvement Area 6* (Family Support and Stakeholder engagement) and is conducted by Autism Delaware staff.

Family Navigators engaged in 2,482 individual support contacts with families from October 1, 2022 to September 30, 2023. Their Central Intake Department received 955 new requests for family support during this reporting period.

The top needs from families seeking services through family support services in FY2023 were: (1) evaluation and diagnosis; (2) connection and support; (3) recreation activities; and (4) educational issues.

Evaluation and diagnosis was the largest category of need for which families sought support, reflecting a significant change for the first time in many years. *Support and connection*, the next largest category of need, reflects the reported desires and needs of families to increase their support networks within the autism community. FY2023 saw an increase in support needs around identifying recreational activities in the community. Educational issues and questions also continued to be a significant reason for delivery of family peer support. Figure 1 summarizes the different areas of need that families discussed with family peer support staff during service delivery in FY2023.

Figure 1. *Areas of Family Need in FY2023*



Family Navigation remains an integral part of the supports and services provided to the autism community by Autism Delaware. The ongoing commitment to families and individuals with autism in Delaware and to promoting the family voice is foremost in their mission. Autism Delaware’s Family Navigation service is proud to be a trusted resource in the autism community in Delaware.

DNEA Operations

Since re-establishing its funding in FY22, the DNEA was able to re-staff all major positions, relaunch and update its website, re-establish its listserv, and establish a second office location so DNEA had a presence upstate (Newark) and downstate (Milford). The following section will provide an overview of DNEA staffing and program expenses.

DNEA Staffing

Dr. Sarah Mallory (FTE 25.5%) served as the DNEA's principal investigator and provided conceptual leadership to DNEA activities. As a special education faculty member at the University of Delaware, Dr. Mallory also served as the lead on any education-related activities and provided leadership on program evaluation activities.

Ms. Alisha Fletcher (FTE 100%) served as Director of the DNEA. Ms. Fletcher is a clinical social worker by training and provided general, day-to-day leadership to DNEA activities. In collaboration with Dr. Mallory, Ms. Fletcher provided supervision to all DNEA staff, prioritized work plan activities, and served as lead on activities related to mental health and social services.

Ms. Katherine Booze (FTE 100%) started employment as coordinator for the DNEA in May 2023. Ms. Booze brings a rich background in disability studies and supported coordinating all aspects of DNEA's day-to-day activities.

Ms. Emily Curtin (FTE 100%) was also recently hired and began her work with the DNEA in FY2024. She is a school psychologist by training and provides expertise in transition and adult supports for individuals with autism.

DNEA training and technical assistance activities were also supported by several hourly and part-time trainers and coaches. Ms. Ashley Steinbrecher (FTE 32.7%) supported the DNEA as a coach and content developer. Ms. Steinbrecher has a master's degree in health promotion and intellectual and developmental disabilities and she provided leadership to all health promotion-related content. Mr. Charles Sawchenko, a retired state trooper, social worker, and parent of an autistic daughter, was an hourly staff member and supported the development of first responder training initiatives. Ms. Nicole Garrity, a school psychologist, was also an hourly staff member and supported statewide training activities and early childhood initiatives.

In addition to part-time trainers and coaches, the DNEA was also provided part-time administrative support from Ms. Tracy Beird (3.5%) and hourly graphic design support from Ms. Shirlinda "Angel" Tucker in order to ensure all content was professional and accessible.

Finally, the DNEA strategically partners with subcontractors to broaden its collective expertise. These contractors are hired on an as-needed basis and are noted in our reported activities. As described in the original legislation creating the DNEA, Autism Delaware has a subcontract for offering family navigation services.

DNEA Financial Report (FY2023)

In FY2023, the DNEA was awarded \$575,000 via a contract that began on October 1, 2022 and ended on September 30, 2023. All funds were exhausted at the conclusion of the contract. A summary of the FY2023 financial report can be found in Table 8

Table 8

DNEA Financial Report (FY2023)

Account Category	Expenses
Personnel	\$ 272,376
Travel & conferences	\$ 7,618
Training supplies & expenses	\$ 5,155
Advertising	\$ 750
Printing	\$ 20,509
Professional speaker fees	\$ 37,750
Other material & supplies	\$ 35,963
Sub-awards	\$ 89,404
Overhead	\$ 105,475
Total	\$ 575,000

Summary and Next Steps

Autism spectrum disorder remains a critical public health issue, with the CDC recently reporting an increased prevalence rate of 1 in 36. Years of stakeholder discussions in Delaware identified a lack of expertise in autism among almost all professional groups. In response, Senate Bill 93 established the DNEA to enhance Delaware's state- and system-wide capacity to improve outcomes across the lifespan for individuals with autism through high quality, evidence-based technical assistance and training for professionals and families.

In FY2023, the DNEA was able to significantly expand the breadth and depth of its training, technical assistance, and resources available to the community by touching over 10,000 Delawareans and Delaware professionals with its evidence-based supports. This represents more recipients of DNEA supports than any other year since its establishment. The demand for DNEA trainings and resources continues to grow.

Now more than ever, our state needs professionals who understand autism and who can confidently implement scientifically-based interventions. There is more work to be done. The DNEA was refunded in FY2024 and has resubmitted an application to the Health Fund Advisory Council (HFAC) for funding in FY2025. We are eager to continue this important work.

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