This edition of the CUNY Project REACH newsletter covers Spring and Summer 2013, and we have a lot of exciting information to report. Project REACH has now been in existence for 1 year and 9 months, and continues to show steady growth. New things are happening on a regular basis:

Below is a description of some of our ACTIVITIES OVER THE PAST TWO SEMESTERS:

1. **We have been funded again**: I wanted to start the newsletter with some great news. Thanks to the generosity and support of the FAR Fund, Project REACH will be able to continue its groundbreaking work. The FAR Fund announced that our Project REACH program was approved for renewal grant funding for another full year. To have a grant renewed, programs have to demonstrate measurable success. We would like to thank Shirlee Taylor of the FAR Fund for her guidance and support throughout our first year, and we look forward to another successful year for Project REACH.

2. **Project REACH receives award**: This year, Project REACH has received many compliments and accolades for our work; however, there is none bigger than the award we recently received from The Alexander Tognino Foundation. [The Alexander Tognino Foundation is committed to supporting exceptional education, healthcare, and special needs programs.] “On behalf of the foundation, it is a pleasure to support the outstanding work that you are doing.” We are honored that this Foundation considers our work exceptional enough to award us with this contribution. This award solidifies that we are moving in the right direction as a project and assures us that we are on the forefront of providing an innovative approach to helping students on the spectrum succeed. This unsolicited financial contribution was given to Project REACH to acknowledge the excellent strides the project has made in helping students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). We give our thanks to John Tognino and the Alexander Tognino Foundation for this prestigious award and for John’s support and guidance since our Project’s inception. Our work and best practices have
inspired our colleagues to bestow this prestigious award, and we are proud to know that our work is so highly regarded among our peers. We are humbled because we understand that in order to receive even more accolades of this nature, we must continue to work even harder and make even greater strides toward our goals in the years to come.

3. As of January, **Project REACH** has two new employees, each working one day per week. Both of these individuals have strengthened the ability of REACH to move forward. Gregory Bradford is in the office on Tuesdays and Charles Carr is in the office on Thursdays. (John Schiavone continues to work on Mondays and Wednesdays.)

4. **Mini-Grant Update:** As you may remember from our previous newsletter, Project REACH issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) which made funds available to support a Mini-Grant Program so that we could fund the best practices for students on the spectrum from our CUNY campuses and student organizations. This allowed staff, faculty, and student organizations from all of our campuses to submit project ideas so that Project REACH could fund the best practices put forward by our campuses. This was an exciting opportunity for campuses to develop ideas to address the issues and challenges relevant to the population of CUNY students on the spectrum.

We are pleased to report that Project REACH Proposal Committee received over a dozen submissions for funding, covering different aspects of the issues that come with the rising number of students with ASD attending college, and we were able to provide funding to five projects so that they could put their projects into action. Four of them were from specific campuses and one of them was from a CUNY-wide student organization. This is one important way that we can empower our campuses to help students with ASD, because through the hard work of our colleges, more students can have equal opportunities to succeed in our University. We would like to thank everyone who submitted a proposal for all their hard work and dedication to our mission. Below is the list of the funded proposals and a brief description of each. Each of these projects tackled different issues that students on the spectrum face in their daily lives and each took varied approaches in dealing with these issues.

In issuing the RFP for mini-grants, Project REACH is grateful for our partnership with the FAR Fund, for their staunch support of higher education opportunities for individuals on the autism spectrum. We would also like to thank the Office of the University Dean for Health and Human Services, led by Bill Ebenstein, for all of their guidance and additional resources.
• **Brooklyn College:** *Collaborative Autism Spectrum Program:* This program identifies and provides support services for students with ASD, provide training for faculty and administrators, and continues to further the development of a pilot mentoring component established in Spring 2012;

• **Borough of Manhattan Community College:** *Progressing Autism Spectrum Services:* This program focuses on granting students with ASD academic program access through innovative individualized supports and curriculum redevelopment;

• **College of Staten Island:** *Building Bridges Initiative:* This program endeavors to increase the academic, social and professional success of students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) by creating a resource center, building on existing service infrastructure, and developing web-based supports;

• **Kingsborough Community College:** *Transition to College Support:* This program offers year-long, comprehensive assistance through individual and group support services, concrete academic help, education of the college community regarding ASD, and peer mentoring;

• **CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities:** *Project Campus Awareness and Student Engagement (C.A.S.E.):* This program is a cross-campus effort allowing student leaders with disabilities to engage their peers on the spectrum in student leadership and service learning.

The projects will be finishing during the summer and while we are reviewing the final results of these projects, so far, we have seen excellent work from each of these programs. We would like to thank everyone involved in making these projects the successes they have been. Once their impact is measured, these projects can then be shared, expanded and replicated. In the next issue of this newsletter, we will report on the final results, highlights, and what kind of impact these projects have had on our student population on the spectrum.

5. **Training update:** Improving the lives of students with ASD requires that we keep up to date on the latest information about how to better serve our students. To that end, we have attended multiple trainings and educational conferences to increase our knowledge and learn better practices to help the students that we serve.

✓ **ASD College Coaching:** Lisa Pollich completed an ASD College Coaching class given by esteemed professional Dr. Lynda Geller of Spectrum Services / Asperger Center for Education and Training, in January 2013. John Shiavone completed the same course in August 2013. This intensive, five-day training program prepares individuals to support students with Asperger Syndrome and autism spectrum disorders in higher education. (More information about this workshop can be found at: [http://aspergercenter.com/helping.html](http://aspergercenter.com/helping.html))
World Autism Awareness Day: Lisa attended World Autism Awareness Day 2013 on April 2, 2013, at the United Nations Headquarters. There, she participated in the Autism Speaks Kick-off Light it Up Blue Campaign. She also had the opportunity to attend a panel presentation facilitated by the Autism Research Institute featuring speakers such as Dr. Stephen Shore, Dr. Barry Prizant, and Dr. Valerie Paradiz, and a celebration of the ability within autism.

International Autism Conference: Lisa attended the ICare4Autism International Autism Conference on Cutting Edge Research and Promising Approaches on June 5, 2013, at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine. At this conference, cutting edge research was presented from various autism programs, laboratories, medical schools, and institutes. Our participation allowed us to network with leading experts in the autism field and share our ideas.

We were able to learn about new research that could help our students, as well as network with other higher education practitioners and researchers about how other colleges and universities are serving students on the spectrum. Going to these conferences and trainings helped us gather valuable information that we have now brought back and are putting to work for our students who are on the spectrum.

6. Strategic Advisory Meeting: Project REACH celebrated its one-year anniversary by holding its second annual Strategic Advisory Meeting in February. This meeting gathered professionals from the autism spectrum disorder (ASD) community from all around New York to review work done, talk about plans going forward, and get valuable feedback into issues important to ASD students in higher education. Invitations were extended to key stakeholders involved with the project.

Participants were in attendance from the CUNY colleges of Hunter, Brooklyn and Baruch and the College of Staten Island; Queensborough Community College, Borough of Manhattan Community College, Kingsborough Community College; CUNY LEADS, the CUNY School of Professional Studies, CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities (CCSD), Academic Affairs, Office of the Dean of Health and Human Services as well as outside organizations including Fordham University, New York City Department of Education, Asperger Syndrome High Functioning Autism Association, Spectrum Services, and Asperger Syndrome Training Employment Partnership.

University Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, Chris Rosa, explained that the number of students with autism in higher education is rapidly increasing, referring to Project REACH as an “agent of institutional and cultural change.” Lisa Pollich then presented additional
information about the history of Project REACH and an update on what the project as a whole has accomplished overall in the past year and what the project plans to do in the future.

The recipients of Project REACH mini-grant funding presented their campus projects, their overall goals, as well as the progress they made so far this year, and discussed their work’s impact on students with ASD. After this, attendees discussed what kinds of efforts were needed going forward to help students on the spectrum, as well as what kinds of issues and challenges educators and parents faced when dealing with ASD.

The meeting reinvigorated REACH’s commitment to helping students on the spectrum get the most out of their college experience. This meeting helped to further shape the direction of the project, and we would like to thank everyone who participated.

7. **Disability Awareness Month Capstone Event Conference REACH:** Project REACH had the honor of organizing our first CUNY Disability Awareness Month event, “Conference REACH,” at the brand-new Fiterman Hall in The Borough of Manhattan Community College in April 2013. The theme of this educational conference was autism in higher education. The awareness event featured education and training for those in attendance, including CUNY disability service professional, administrators, public safety representatives, behavioral intervention team members, plus guests from outside of CUNY. During the morning, we featured two renowned professional keynote speakers from the forefront of ASD: Dr. Lynda Geller and Dr. Jane Thierfeld-Brown. Dr. Lynda Geller of Spectrum Services/Asperger Training Education Center began the conference with her over 25 years of experience as a consultant for families and individuals on the spectrum. Among the very first topics that she tackled, Dr. Geller detailed the ways a college can support a student with an AS condition. Those in attendance were given new practices to utilize on their campuses, and are now better equipped to accommodate those on the spectrum.

As the event continued, guests were treated to the expertise of Dr. Jane Thierfeld-Brown, Co-Director of Student Services at the University of Connecticut School of Law and a long-time researcher of Asperger’s Syndrome in Higher Education. Dr. Thierfeld-Brown detailed the intricate web of self-advocacy and services that exists in higher education today. She displayed new technology programs, including applications for tablet computers that are easily adaptable for many on the spectrum. In the afternoon, there was a panel that featured the work of Project REACH’s mini-grant projects. The Principal Investigators of each of the mini-grant projects presented on how much progress they have made. Members of the New York City Council came to voice their support of our project and its goals and spoke about as to how important the work of Project REACH is. Project REACH also presented a special award, REACHing for the Stars, given to honor an individual who has shown great
dedication to students on the spectrum. In the inaugural year of the award, the very deserving recipient was Elizabeth Williams, for her efforts on behalf of inclusive education.

We would like to thank The Borough of Manhattan Community College for being a gracious host, MBJ Downtown for catering two wonderful meals for all the attendees, and we would like to thank everyone who attended for making this event the success that it was. We want to extend a special thank you to City Councilman Mark Weprin of District 23 and City Councilwoman Margaret Chin of District 1 for coming to show support and to speaking at our event. Their presence at the event underscores the importance of the work that we are doing and confirms that our elected officials will work with us in order to achieve our goals. This conference garnered praise from many of the attendees, and was extremely insightful according to the conference evaluations.

Many of the individual Mini-Grant campuses also held autism-specific events in conjunction with Disability Awareness Month in April. The Borough of Manhattan Community College had a very successful Disability Awareness Month luncheon event with approximately 140 attendees, including staff, faculty, and students. Attendees had a chance to learn from other organizations like Autism Speaks who were invited to have a table at the event about what kind of services they offer. There were presentations about what ASD is and its effects in the classroom. At Brooklyn College, a campus-wide Disability Awareness Month Professional Development workshop was held with international speaker Dr. Stephen Shore, so that faculty and administrators could better understand the needs of students with ASD and meet those needs in classes or offices. This was an interactive training workshop.

8. **Presentations:** Another function of Project REACH is to help provide training and education to faculty, staff, and students about ASD and the issues that students on the spectrum face. Aside from at the events listed above, Project REACH gave several other presentations on multiple platforms during the spring and summer semesters. These presentations are aimed at increasing awareness of ASD and Project REACH, and they were all well-received. This is one way for us to spread the word about our program in order to ‘reach’ more people.

- **CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities Annual Leadership Retreat:** Project REACH hosted an ASD Workshop at the CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities (CCSD) Annual Leadership Retreat in January 2013. The goal for this presentation was to provide CCSD students with an interactive learning experience that would give them as much knowledge as possible about college students with ASD. Guest presenter Mary Ellen Rooney, assisted by Project REACH staff member John Schiavone, spoke to student leaders about issues
concerning higher education and students on the spectrum. The students asked questions and learned about issues that people on the spectrum face not just in school but outside of school as well. Student leaders were provided with an interactive learning experience so they could gain knowledge about college students with ASD. Our participation allowed us to present our project to students from across all campuses. This event proved to be very affirming because we all came together for project REACH under one common goal: Making a difference for students on the spectrum.

- **CUNY Accessibility Conference:** Lisa Pollich was invited to give a presentation at the 4th Annual CUNY Accessibility Conference on April 5, 2013, to discuss the REACH program and how it increases and supports access for students on the spectrum. Lisa gave two presentations to two different audiences. These presentations demonstrated the various strategies and approaches that Project REACH is using to assist students with ASD gain access to everything that the university has to offer, both academics as well as student activities. We would like to thank Carlos Herrera, Conference Coordinator, for facilitating our inclusion in this event.

- **LEADS Advisors:** The Directors of CUNY LEADS (Linking Employment, Academics and Disability Services) invited Project REACH to present to the LEADS advisors on the topic of ASD and employment because it is important for this group. Lisa Pollich gave a presentation on June 12, 2013, to the LEADS Advisors that included first a brief discussion about Project REACH, followed by an overview of various employment resources for people on the spectrum, and then discussed a series of recent relevant news media articles concerning issues regarding employment and ASD. Thank you to LEADS for inviting us to present this information.

9. **Collaboration:** As a project, we realize that in order to affect the best change in the lives of students on the spectrum, we cannot do it alone. Therefore, we have held meetings with multiple different organizations looking for opportunities to collaborate, and we have had discussions with professionals who could lend their expertise to our project. These meetings have provided us with many opportunities for collaboration and sharing of resources to help better the lives of students on the spectrum. In our non-stop efforts to help forge relationships with these organizations that can provide indirect and direct benefit to our students on the spectrum, we have been talking with many representatives. We have met potential partners and are currently holding collaboration meetings in order to determine if they have resources that we can access to help further our project’s goals. In the next issue
of this newsletter, we will provide more information about the groups and individuals that we have been talking to and what opportunities they can offer to our students.

10. **CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities**: For the past year, we have encouraged all of our Project REACH students to attend and participate in the **CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities** (CCSD) meetings and activities. CCSD is an exciting organization that provides a wonderful opportunity to interact and network with other students who face issues with their disabilities and have found ways to be successful. CCSD organizes and participates in a number of different CUNY-wide activities year-round. Some of the activities that Project REACH students have participated in during spring and summer semesters include: Autism Speaks Walk, ADA Anniversary Barbecue, and Brooklyn Cyclones Night at MCU Park.

Now let us move onto **FUTURE ACTIVITIES OF THE PROJECT**. Our plans going forward are based on the data we have collected from faculty, staff, and students about CUNY’s needs and priorities to better serve students with ASD:

Since we have finished our first full year, we plan to evaluate the results of the mini-grant projects that have been completed and to compile an analysis of the effectiveness of the projects that REACH sponsored. We hope to be able to report to you the results of our analysis in the fall.

We are also plan on moving forward with some of the collaborations we described about earlier. A lot of the organizations and people we have met and spoken to over this year are very excited to contribute their expertise and resources to this project, so we plan on having more to tell you about that in the next issue.

We are also exploring obtaining other forms of funding through other sources and grants. If we can obtain this funding, we will be able to grow Project REACH even bigger so that we can expand to more campuses and provide more services.

We are also planning several events over the next six months so please be sure watch your email to see when Project REACH will be making its next public appearance, so that you can come out and join us. We also will continue to give presentations to educate others about ASD and to spread the word about our project.
Be sure to visit our website www.cuny.edu/projectREACH and take a look at what Project REACH is up to. Since the website’s launch last fall, we have updated it with news, our newsletter, links, information about our mini-grant projects, and some basic resources about ASD. This is a one-stop resource for information about Project REACH and all of our Mini-Grant Projects. We also have news articles about our Project, photos of Project REACH and events and presentations, and some educational materials for faculty, staff, and students to learn more about us and students on the spectrum. We will continue developing our website into a comprehensive web resource. Plans for the near future include adding updates of our recent activities, including more photographs. We are continually adding more resources, including plans for a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section.

Suggestions for future additions and/or comments on the current resources can be sent to: lisa.pollich@mail.cuny.edu

After thoroughly evaluating all of the work we have done over the past year, taking a look at all of the information we have gathered from our mini-grant projects, our meetings with outside organizations, and all of the other information we have gathered from our activities as a project; we will then take the best practices from the year, as well as new innovative ideas, and put them into practice over the next year so that we can have an even better second year going forward. With this evaluation process that we are undertaking, we will be able to move forward and touch the lives of more students in our next year.

We have a lot of ideas in the works, and I look forward to reporting all of the work that Project REACH is doing for our students with ASD in the next issue.

Please call me or send me an email if you need further details about anything within this newsletter. We welcome your feedback to help shape this project. I encourage you to submit information to me that you believe may be relevant. This newsletter highlights our commitment to providing our CUNY family with resources to embrace students with ASD and promote diversity.

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Project REACH is a university-wide project that is funded in part by the FAR Fund and coordinated by the Central Office Division of Student Affairs of the City University of New York (CUNY). The purpose of Project REACH is to enhance CUNY’s capacity to support its growing population of college students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).