

Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders

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Children's National: CASD CHAT

A Fond Farewell to CASD's Laura Anthony

On June 10, 2017, Dr. Laura Anthony, Associate Director of the Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders (CASD), will begin an exciting new phase of her career at the University of Colorado, Denver. Community Outreach Coordinator, Yetta Myrick, sat down with Dr. Anthony to reflect on her eleven years of service at Children's National.

Yetta Myrick: Laura, thanks for sitting down with me today! Let's start by talking about what you most enjoy doing at CASD?

Laura Anthony: I think that's a hard question to answer. I like everything I do here. I think I've developed lasting friendships with my colleagues, which is very important to me because it means that I've fit well. And when I fit well somewhere, I'm more successful.

When I first started here, I was not really an independently funded investigator, and that's what I wanted to do. I did not have that opportunity in my previous job in the way that I wanted to. At CASD, I achieved that, especially because I could focus on clinically-relevant research. And it has been great to see that come to life and grow with the team here. That's something I've always been passionate about.



(Clockwise from top) Laura Anthony, PhD working with child in PCORI Project; (bottom right) Laura Anthony, PhD and CASD's Director, Lauren Kenworthy, PhD at the IMFAR Conference; (bottom center) Sesame Workshop's Jeanette Betancourt, EdD, Autistic Self Advocacy Network's Julia Bascom, Laura Anthony, PhD, and Actress, Author, and Philanthropist, Holly Robinson Peete at the Sesame Street Autism Event; (bottom left) Laura Anthony, PhD and Lauren Kenworthy, PhD promoting their book, "Unstuck and On Target".

YM: What did you learn from working at CASD?

LA: I think the thing that has been most unique about CASD, is that everything that functions here is based on a team. That teamwork across disciplines makes our work better. There are many institutions around the country where teamwork is not rewarded and it is not done. In my new role, I'm not really stepping into an established team, and I hope to bring that team mentality along with me. I also hope to continue to be a member of the team here.

YM: Is there anything that surprised you about this job?

LA: What really surprised me was the fact that we got the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) Addressing Disparities grant on the first try because almost nobody gets funded the first time in. Again, I think that's about the teamwork. When you have a team that can work well, even with differing world views, and be balanced, it makes things better. And honestly, I think I have never had models for the kind of teamwork that Lauren (Kenworthy) has built here.

I think the other thing that has surprised me, is that when we came in we were pretty small. Lauren was working hard to help us grow. As we started to grow our clinical team, and we got better, I really thought we would have enough people to see all the kids. However, no matter how much we grew, we can't meet the demand and we never will.

I did not expect us to be diagnosing half of the kids in our PCORI Study. It should not have surprised me, because I've learned this lesson before. When you do community work, you reach another set of kids and families than if you sit in your office and wait for them to come to you. Not that the kids and families who come to us are not in need, because they are, but the kids who cannot come to us, those are the kids that I worry about. There is so much more work to do.

YM: Is there anything you would like to change about your time here?

LA: It is all unfinished, but there is a whole team of people working to keep on it and they will do well.

YM: What is your favorite memory?

LA: There are certain kids (tearful pause) and certain families that are hard to leave. They have meant so much to me, and they are a part of who I am. I will take the memories of working with them with me.

YM: What will you miss most about working here?

LA: I really think that this team is the best in the country. And I'll miss working with them. I will miss seeing my friends every day. I've seen kids here that I first saw in Baltimore because I was there for 10 years. And I have loved getting to watch these kids grow up. I've been very lucky to see these kids grow up because it informs my work. I can say to families, "I've seen what it looks like 20 years from now" and that's important to families because generally we are asking families of children with autism to do hard work, and it's important to see how they come out on the other side. It gives you a vision for the future. I don't know if families understand how much [hearing] good news means to us as professionals. I love those good news emails.

YM: What's next? Why are you leaving CASD?

LA: We're moving to Denver, where there is less traffic, and less humidity, and you don't even need screens on your porch because there are no bugs. My husband will be Chief Psychologist of Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Colorado, Denver Children's Hospital of Colorado. I will be doing mostly research work and maybe have one day a week or so for clinical work. There are great people there. My hope for going is that I will receive very specific training and support in implementation science. It's not why I'm leaving, but I hope that it will make it feel less hard.

YM: What do you hope to leave behind?

LA: I hope that I have had a lasting effect on at least a couple of kids since I've been here. I know I can't reach them all, but I hope that I made a positive difference to a couple of kids or families. That would mean the most to me. I think, professionally, I brought a real passion for stakeholder involvement. We did our first focus groups for our intervention about a year after I joined CASD and that was powerful work. I think it was good for everyone, including me. There are good reasons for engaging stakeholders, and I'm sure it will be a lasting part of the team.

YM: Thank you so much Laura! I would like to say that it truly has been an honor not only working and collaborating with you over the years, but more importantly developing the relationship that we have shared because of Aidan. You set me on the path to advocate for him. As you and I both know, this has not always been easy. You have been a blessing to our family, and I think I speak for the CASD community when I say that you will be deeply missed. All the best to you and your family as you go on your next adventure.

LA: Thank you, Yetta.

If you would like to wish Dr. Anthony farewell or stay connect with her, please contact her at L.Anthony@ucdenver.edu.

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