



The Sandra Davenport CHARGE Syndrome Fellowship Program

The Fellows program was established in 2015 to facilitate mentoring of the next generation of CHARGE professionals by bringing them to Conference and encouraging them to become involved with the greater CHARGE community. The 2015 and 2017 classes of Fellows came from a broad variety of backgrounds – graduate students and young professionals in psychology, genetics, medicine teaching. They were all nominated by mentors – professionals who have been active in the CHARGE community for a long time, in some cases decades. This year, we invited some previous Fellows to return, in part to help run the program. We hope this will sustain professional interest in CHARGE for decades to come. For 2019, we have selected 14 young professionals who have demonstrated a growing passion for CHARGE, including two who will run the program.

What Do Fellows Do?

Fellows will attend both Professional Day and the International Conference. Several of them will be presenting posters or in breakout sessions at the conferences. Some will be enrolling subjects in their CHARGE research projects at conference. The Fellows and Mentors will meet daily to get to know one another and talk about what we have learned. Pairs of Fellows will be matched with families so they can begin to understand what it is like to be in a family where someone has CHARGE. Each Fellow will spend a half day as a volunteer in Camp with the child from their family. Fellows will write about their experiences for us and others.

Would You Like To Have Your Family Matched With Fellows?

To be a family match, you must

- 1) have a child with CHARGE who will be in Camp
- 2) be willing to be in contact with your Fellows by email prior to conference
- 3) meet your Fellows at the opening reception Friday evening and
- 4) have at least one meal during conference with your Fellows

Below is a short introduction to each Fellow. We welcome inquiries from ANY family interested in hosting a Davenport Fellow. If you might want to be a Host Family, please use [this form](#) to tell us a bit about your child and your family, where you are from, and if you have a preference to be matched with a particular Fellow.



Megan Schmittle is a School Psychologist at Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, MA and a PhD candidate in school psychology at Central Michigan University (CMU). Her interest in CHARGE began when she attended the 2011 CHARGE conference in Scottsdale and began working with Dr. Tim Hartshorne. While at CMU she was a member of the CMU CHARGE Syndrome Research Lab where she had the opportunity to attend and present at CHARGE conferences nationally and internationally. Currently, Megan is completing research on the development of social play in children with CHARGE, and she co-facilitates social skills groups for students who are deafblind. She is looking forward to meeting with families and individuals with CHARGE syndrome to learn more about their experiences. She will be presenting on teaching social skills and hopes to collaborate with professionals in CHARGE-land to continue to develop comprehensive interventions targeting development of social skills.



Rilla Hammett is a graduate student in the Severe Special Education program at Lesley University in Boston. Rilla currently works at a teaching assistant at Perkins School for the Blind, Deafblind Program, in Watertown, MA. She started as an intern when she was an undergrad. Rilla fell in love with the program and working with individuals with CHARGE syndrome. As a teaching assistant, Rilla has worked with a number of students with CHARGE in both the classroom and in the residential setting. By attending this year's conference, Rilla hopes to gain valuable information that will help her to better serve her students.



Megan Anderson is a PhD candidate in School Psychology at Mississippi State University, where she works in the Bulldog CHARGE Lab under Dr. Kasee Stratton and attended the 2015 CHARGE conference in Orlando and the 2018 Australasian CHARGE conference. At Mississippi State, Megan has worked in a college transition program for adults with disabilities. This experience has helped shape her research interests in CHARGE. She would like to conduct further research on issues commonly experienced by young adults with CHARGE. At the conference, Megan will be presenting on transition to adulthood and she is looking forward to connecting more with young adults with CHARGE and families who have children who are in the process of transitioning into adulthood. She hopes that learning from their experiences will help her to develop additional research questions and interventions.

Dieuwerke Dijk, MD is a physician from the Netherlands specializing in working with children with intellectual disabilities and in the CHARGE Clinic with Dr. Conny van Ravenswaaij-Arts. Dieuwerke was a Fellow at the 2017 conference where she was also enrolling subjects in a project looking at growth in CHARGE. This year she is excited to be returning and is looking forward to having more time to interact with other Fellows and families and attend more of the sessions. She has a presentation on growth in CHARGE from her research to date. She will continue to investigate growth and puberty in children with CHARGE and would like to collaborate more with professionals from varying disciplines to gain a more comprehensive understanding of CHARGE syndrome.



Elaine Ritter, PhD, is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Michigan Medical School in the lab of Dr. Donna Martin. She received her PhD in Cellular and Molecular Neuroscience from Vanderbilt University. Through her work, personal life, and volunteer experiences she has gained a deep compassion for working with individuals with disabilities. Under the guidance of Dr. Martin, she is conducting research on the role of the CHD7 gene in the development of the inner ear to better understand the hearing and balance issues experienced by individuals with CHARGE syndrome. Elaine is looking forward to connecting with other professionals at the conference, and, as a lab researcher, she is particularly looking forward to meeting some of the individuals with CHARGE who may eventually benefit from research and their families.

Sara Espanet is a Special Education Teacher at Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown MA, where she has worked in the Deafblind Program for the past 11 years. Sara earned her Masters Degree in Severe Special Education from Bridgewater State University. Sara's interest in CHARGE syndrome began when her younger cousin was diagnosed with CHARGE. Her desire to learn more about the syndrome and work with students like her cousin led her to her job at Perkins, where she works with students age 3-22 years old, many whom have CHARGE. Sara was invited to be a returning Fellow at the 2019 conference to help mentor new Fellows. She is also looking forward to the opportunity to collaborate with other professionals. Sara will be presenting alongside Sharon Stelzer M.Ed. about sensory strategies and how to implement them into the classroom for individuals with CHARGE Syndrome.



Laura Kreuger is an MD/PhD student at the University of Kentucky. She was first introduced to CHARGE syndrome when working at Cincinnati Children's Hospital, where she heard Dr. Donna Martin speak at a conference. After seeing patients with CHARGE, she became interested in learning more and invited Dr. Donna Martin to give a lecture at the University of Kentucky. Laura's research lab was awarded a CHARGE Syndrome Foundation Scientific Research Grant under the mentorship of Dr. Martin. Laura's current research focus is on the role that SoxC transcription factors play in the pathogenesis of CHARGE syndrome. Through her research she hopes to better understand ocular (eye) malformations commonly associated with CHARGE.

Brianna Ralston is a PhD candidate in Audiology at the University of Wisconsin. Brianna has had the opportunity to work with children with a variety of developmental disabilities through the LEND (Leadership for Education of Neurodevelopmental Disabilities) program. She learned about CHARGE syndrome through her studies but became more interested in CHARGE after meeting Dr. Lori Swanson at a poster presentation at a speech and language association meeting. This sparked an interest in the auditory systems of children with CHARGE. Brianna is looking forward to meeting other professionals with a similar interest in CHARGE and hopes to learn more about current research in CHARGE syndrome. She hopes to expand her professional awareness of CHARGE, including early identification signs and future referrals and is excited to meet families and children with CHARGE.





Hallie Smith, PhD is a Licensed Psychologist II in the Pediatric Feeding Disorder Program at the Kennedy Krieger Institute in Baltimore, MD. Hallie received her Ph.D. from Mississippi State University (MSU) and BCBA-D from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine/Kennedy Krieger Institute. While at MSU, Hallie was an active clinician, researcher and supervising graduate student in the Autism and Developmental Disorders Clinic and the Bulldog CHARGE Syndrome Lab, where she worked with Dr. Kasee Stratton. Hallie's work at the 2015 conference solidified her continued interest CHARGE syndrome. She will be presenting on behavior strategies to address feeding issues in CHARGE. She hopes to connect with families who have children that may have difficulties with feeding .

Ira Padhye is a PhD candidate in Special Education and Disability Policy candidate at the Virginia Commonwealth University. Ira's interest in CHARGE syndrome started when she was a teaching assistant at Perkins School for the Blind in the Deafblind Program's residential program. Ira met a young student with CHARGE who inspired her to do investigate the syndrome to learn how to better serve her student. Ira was a teacher in the Deafblind Program for three years. Currently, she is a Project Coordinator at The Virginia Project for Children and Young Adults with Deaf-Blindness. Attending this year's conference will allow Ira the opportunity to meet other professionals who are interested in continuing educational research related to individuals with CHARGE syndrome and interact with a wide variety of families of children with CHARGE.



Rebecca Darden-Perry is a PhD candidate in Special Education at NorthCentral University, Scottsdale AZ. Currently Rebecca is an elementary Deaf/Blind Teacher at Eastern NC School for the Deaf in Wilson North Carolina. Rebecca's interest in CHARGE syndrome started eight years ago when she taught her first student with CHARGE. From that point on, Rebecca made it her goal to learn as much as possible about CHARGE to better serve her student. She has seen the social growth in this student in the three years she has worked with him. This inspired her to do her doctoral research in the area of social development in individuals with CHARGE syndrome. Rebecca hopes to learn more about this and other aspects of CHARGE at conference.

Sarah Schoffstall, PhD is a School Psychologist at The Learning Center for the Deaf in Framingham, MA. Sarah earned her Ph.D. in Child Clinical Psychology Specialty Emphasis, at the University of Texas at Austin. Sarah first heard of CHARGE syndrome when she was at Boston Children's Hospital for her post-doctoral fellowship. Since then she has sought out resources like the CHARGE Syndrome Foundation website and experts in the field like Pam Ryan to guide her when doing evaluations for individuals with CHARGE. Sarah is particularly excited for the opportunities that this fellowship will allow her to have meeting families and other professionals with a passion for CHARGE.



Julia Morrison is a medical student at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Her first exposure to CHARGE was in 2018, when she attended a lecture given by Dr. Kim Blake. Julia became intrigued about CHARGE and reached out to Dr. Blake to learn more. Julia is now a member of Dr. Blake's research team and will be presenting a poster at this conference. She also is planning to enroll subjects in a research project on POTS (postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome). Julia hopes that being a Fellow will allow her to learn more about CHARGE, connect with other Fellows and meet families and individuals with CHARGE.

Lily Slavin is a PhD candidate in School Psychology at Central Michigan University. Her interest in CHARGE began in 2016 when she began working with Dr. Tim Hartshorne as an undergraduate intern in the CMU CHARGE Syndrome Research Lab and attended the Michigan CHARGE family picnic. After meeting children and families at the picnic, she knew she wanted to steer her research to CHARGE. She has since attended and presented at CHARGE conferences in Germany, Norway, and the United States. Her current research is on educational concerns in children with CHARGE syndrome. Lily is looking forward to spending more time with families and kids at the conference as well as presenting her newly developed Educational Checklist for CHARGE.



Are you interested in hosting a Fellow at Conference? Let us know [here](#).