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**Access to Arts Education via IEP for Autistic Adolescents**  
**Project Description**

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex disorder that affects more and more children each year in the United States of America. For students with ASD, a crucial method of implementing services is the Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) used by their school districts in order to ensure that the child's educational needs are being met. Despite the undeniable significance of IEPs in education of Autistic youth, little is known about the types of services most frequently (or infrequently) provided, nor about any inequities in their implementation.

As coordinator of the "IEP Project," a pilot study conducted through the Crehan Lab, I seek to understand how family IEP satisfaction varies across a broad spectrum of racial, cultural, educational, and community backgrounds. By gathering IEPs and surveying families regarding their demographic information, their satisfaction with multiple areas of services covered by the IEP, and their child's diagnosis and symptoms, we will have the data necessary to evaluate how families of different backgrounds experience education equity or inequity. With the gathered data, we are beginning to code IEPs to assess the quality of services provided, and will be able to compare parents' feelings regarding the success of their child's IEP.

As a Laidlaw scholar, I hope to use the data collection process of the IEP Project to study an issue near to my heart: arts education. This would be accomplished by coding IEPs for any information regarding arts education services, and asking participants specific questions regarding their experience with such services. Because prior studies on arts education practices such as music classes and drama education have demonstrated their potential benefits in cognitive and socioemotional outcomes, it's important that we begin to understand their place in special education. The data I gather would open doors to a new level of knowledge regarding the role of arts education in the lives of Autistic students.

My background as a teaching artist, stage manager, and counselor with arts education outreach programs such as The Drama Studio and the Boston Shakespeare Project has enlightened me to the inner workings of arts education and its power in youth development, particularly in young adolescents. With my connections to these programs, I have firsthand experience providing arts education to neurotypical and Autistic students, relationships with art education providers, and a strong understanding of curriculum development and implementation. My experience as the study coordinator on the IEP project for the past 9 months has given me the insight necessary to improve survey instruments, streamline the participant communication process, and recruit a diverse group of participants to improve our body of data. Furthermore, I have a vision of the many possible ways that the wealth of data obtained in the project could be interpreted: we'll be able to identify whether arts education services are accessed by our sample, how these services relate to the child's symptoms and diagnosis, the level of equity in service access, and how arts education access relates to parent IEP satisfaction. With my analysis, I hope to answer the question "what is the role of art education in IEP-provided services of 10-14 year old Autistic

students, and what are families' feelings towards these services?" In my second year as a Laidlaw scholar, I would use this data to inform an arts education intervention program.

Beyond the academic benefits of this research and the potential data this project could bring to the field, I hope that continuing this project as a Laidlaw Scholar would grant me an opportunity to hone my leadership skills and become a better researcher. Through the many leadership development programs offered to Laidlaw Scholars, I would be better able to serve my team in areas that I currently struggle with (for example, delegating work). These are skills that remain valuable for a lifetime. I also hope that I would learn more techniques for conducting social science research, and gain even further insight on how to improve my current research tactics. It would mean the world to me to gain all these experiences while generating valuable data about the Autistic community and the arts education practices to which I've dedicated so many years of work. Ultimately, my participation as a Laidlaw Scholar would enable me to present valuable data to the field of Autism education while granting me the knowledge necessary to be a successful leader and advocate far beyond the limits of my present work.