

Debora Harris, BCaBA

When my son Jason was diagnosed with Autism in 2001, I set a personal goal to educate myself to be able to use science based treatment to provide him and my family access to the best possible outcome for a quality life. To that “end” (and, in many ways, to that “beginning”), I underwent formal training in applied behavior analysis (“ABA”), and in June 2005, I became certified as a BCaBA.

Since Jason’s diagnosis, I have dedicated my personal and professional time to practicing and promoting ABA and the importance of certification for professionals who work with individuals with Autism. In 2001, I co-founded the ELIJA (“Empowering Long Island’s Journey through Autism”) Foundation, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to “educate the educators,” including parents, caregivers and instructors. To promote the use of effective ABA in the public schools, the ELIJA Foundation has provided fully funded scholarships to several public school teachers, to enable these instructors to engage in coursework and supervised field work towards Board Certification in behavior analysis. The ELIJA Foundation also holds trainings and presentations by well-known behavior analysts, with the goal of sharing valuable resources, research and talent within the Autism community.

I have been a Board Member to the New York State Association of Behavior Analysis, and also am a member of the national ABA Association. I also volunteered with the Nassau County Department of Health Early Intervention Coordinating Counsel, in an effort to improve the quality of services available for children aged birth to three. Currently, I serve on a committee with the Nassau County Executive and am working towards legislative measures to enhance services for children and adults with Autism.

Through my work (and life) in the field, I know well that there simply are not enough quality schools for students with Autism. Armed with education and leadership in ABA, in 2006 I co-founded the ELIJA School, a not-for-profit treatment center in Levittown, NY. We have 12 learners and a cadre of well-trained professionals who use science base teaching to enable the ELIJA School students (all of whom have moderate to severe Autism) to make progress towards their goals.

I am a committed certificant and have served the BACB on several occasions, for example, by working on the committee regarding Board Certification examination scoring, as well as the Ethical Standards committee. These experiences have been invaluable to me. I also assisted and supported several Universities interested in adding coursework in ABA.

I am interested in actively participating in the effort to increase the number of certificants at the BCaBA level. Often assistants are left unsupervised or unable to find qualified mentors needed to increase these resources. I am also

concerned about the recognition of BCaBAs as qualified professionals in public schools and larger agencies, specifically in the area of Autism. With the growing need to educate children with Autism we have a responsibility to support and mentor the workforce in the applied settings.