



**Children's**<sup>™</sup>  
Healthcare of Atlanta



2024

**MARCUS AUTISM CENTER**  
**DONOR IMPACT REPORT**

## A letter from the Director



As we reflect on the incredible legacy of our namesake, Bernie Marcus, we are more committed than ever to his vision—pushing boundaries, embracing innovation and doing everything possible to serve children with autism and their families. Inspired by Bernie’s passion and driven by our unwavering commitment to transform the landscape of autism diagnosis, treatment and care, Marcus Autism Center has made historic progress and taken bold steps forward this past year in research, clinical care and community collaborations.

Our researchers published a record-breaking 99 studies, including four selected among the top 20 most impactful autism research publications globally by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee. Clinically, our team cared for more than 6,475 unique children and teens across more than 49,175 visits—a 13% increase in clinical volume in just one year—cementing Marcus Autism Center’s status as one of the largest not-for-profit clinical providers of comprehensive autism care in the country.

Thanks to the generous support of so many like Bernie who believe every child deserves the chance to reach their full potential, game-changing technologies are being implemented at locations across Georgia and beyond. This includes innovative tools like EarliPoint™ Evaluation—a first-of-its-kind, biomarker-based eye-tracking technology we developed that facilitates early diagnosis in kids as young as 16 months.

Just one year into our five-year strategic plan (outlined on pages 10-11), I am proud to say we have made great strides in our quest to positively impact the future of autism care and treatment. With your support, I’m confident we can continue to leverage our experience over the coming years to help provide the resources and services proven effective to the kids who need them most. Thank you for standing with us on this journey.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ami Klin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ami Klin, PhD  
Director, Marcus Autism Center  
Division Chief, Autism and Related Disorders, Department of Pediatrics, Emory University School of Medicine  
Georgia Research Alliance Eminent Scholar

# Thanks to programs helping her build skills and confidence, Lynquay is thriving



Lynquay



Until she reached 18 months, Lynquay was hitting all developmental milestones. She was walking, waving goodbye and saying "mom" and "dad."

But in the months

that followed, her parents noticed a change. Instead of building skills, Lynquay was regressing. She couldn't complete tasks she'd been doing readily before. She couldn't wave without assistance. She wasn't responding to loud noises or talking as often.

An audiologist and eye doctor confirmed that Lynquay's hearing and eyesight were normal, so her parents turned to Marcus Autism Center.

At her first appointment, Lynquay had a comprehensive, five-hour assessment by a skilled team of specialists that led to her autism diagnosis. Equipped with the answers they'd been looking for, Lynquay's parents were able to get her the help she needed. They enrolled her in a variety of programs, including Marcus Autism Center's Language and Learning Program, where Lynquay met with registered behavior technicians, speech therapists, behavior analysts and occupational therapists to improve her vocabulary and confidence.

With the support of Marcus Autism Center, a place that embraces each child's individual way of learning, Lynquay's family saw her make incredible strides in her communication and social skills. Today, 6-year-old Lynquay attends school and she's part of a special needs Girl Scout troop.

## Marcus Autism Center at a glance

Our team cared for **more than 6,475** unique children and teens across more than **49,175** visits—a **13%** increase in clinical volume over the last **12** months.

We conducted **more than 335** diagnostic interviews and completed **279** EarliPoint™ Evaluation diagnostic tests in children ages **16** to **30** months.

We served **1,802** children under the age of **3**.

Our Multidisciplinary Feeding Program saw **1,911** unique patients.

Our patients came from **25** different states and **135** counties in Georgia, including **88** rural counties.

Through our **Early Intervention Program**, we saw **283** children ages **3** and younger with diagnosed or suspected autism.

We served **757** unique patients in the **Complex Behavior Support Program**, one of the largest and most comprehensive programs for the treatment of challenging behaviors in the world offering a range of support, from parent training to intensive outpatient services.

Through the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Therapy Services Program, **we served 132** unique children with over **13,522** visits.

Our team **contributed to 99** publications in 2024, bringing the total number of publications to more than **525** since 2019.

## Thanks to philanthropic support

Marcus Autism Center is recognized as one of the **largest** not-for-profit clinical providers of comprehensive autism care in the country.

We provide **comprehensive autism care**, from advanced diagnostics to specialized treatments, including intensive programs such as feeding and complex behavior support.

Marcus Autism Center is recognized as **one of the only centers in the U.S.** that integrates basic, translational and applied research within clinical services.

We've **supported** more children with autism and their families than any other clinical research center in the Southeast.

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## Awards and accomplishments

- EarliPoint™ Evaluation received three of the most prestigious national and international awards in the field of biotech science, including:
  - The silver Edison Award for health, medical and biotech diagnostic technologies
  - Time magazine's 200 Best Inventions of the Year
  - A second place South by Southwest (SXSW) 2024 Innovation Award for health and biotech
- **Director of Marcus Autism Center, Ami Klin, PhD**, was recognized by the Atlanta Business Chronicle as the Innovator of the Year in Research. Emory University School of Medicine honored Dr. Klin as part of the "MilliPub Club" for having a publication with over 1,000 citations, and the Emory University Department of Pediatrics honored Dr. Klin with the Clinical Translational Science Publication of the Year designation.
- Marcus Autism Center faculty received 34 awards and recognitions in 2024, including these and more:
  - Keith A. Wood, PhD, ABPP, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Award in Psychology
  - National Institutes of Health (NIH) Merit Award
  - Alliance for Women in Medicine and Science recognition
  - Basic Science Publication of the Year
  - Applied Behavior Analysis International, Verbal Behavior Section, Paper of the Year
  - Emory University Graduate Program in Neuroscience, Faculty Mentor of the Year
- We recruited 17 new faculty, four of them to lead new research labs. Thirteen of the 17 new faculty are clinicians and clinical investigators. All recruitment and affiliation targets listed in our 2024-2028 strategic plan have been met, some earlier than expected, and all strengthen our relationship with Emory Human Genetics, Rollins School of Public Health, Georgia State University and Georgia Tech.



Warren Jones, PhD, Director of Research at Marcus Autism Center and Norman Nien Distinguished Chair in Autism, was awarded the silver prize in the 2024 Edison Awards Health, Medical and Biotech category.

# Donor support is helping advance early autism diagnosis

Marcus Autism Center made significant progress this past year in its quest to change the landscape of autism treatment by expanding the use of EarliPoint™ Evaluation. A breakthrough diagnostic tool that enables clinicians to diagnose autism at a much earlier age, EarliPoint is the first-of-its-kind, biomarker-based eye-tracking technology. It is used to assess the looking behavior of kids between the ages of 16 to 30 months to detect early signs of autism.

Authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 2023, EarliPoint has helped us provide more children access to timely, accurate diagnoses, facilitating early interventions and bringing hope and clarity to families when they need it most. EarliPoint has now been implemented at:

- Children’s at Forsyth
- Hughes Spalding Hospital
- Marcus Autism Center

In 2024, we completed over 400 early diagnostic evaluations\* at these locations, and **68%** of these were done using EarliPoint Evaluation. Looking ahead, we will be expanding the use of this innovative technology statewide thanks to the support of our donors:

- Funding from the **Matthew Hillman Fisher Foundation** is supporting a pilot program to evaluate the use of EarliPoint in metro Atlanta primary care settings.
- A grant from the **Callaway Foundation** is enabling a pilot in rural Georgia, increasing access to autism diagnosis for underserved families.





With additional funding from generous donors, Marcus Autism Center is taking advanced diagnostic services into the communities that need them most. This is just one example of how we are furthering the legacy of the late Bernie Marcus, who provided philanthropic support to develop innovative tools like these to advance autism care and treatment. EarliPoint, which was called the “Marcus Test” by researchers, was made possible because of his dedication to this important work.

*\*Early diagnostic evaluations refer to evaluations completed before or at 30 months of age.*

# The Decker family is helping change the landscape of autism treatment

Children’s has been a special place for the Decker family for decades. Cathy Decker’s mother, Linda, volunteered at Egleston Hospital and often told stories of her time serving patients and families there. Years later, Cathy’s husband, Ted, got a masterclass in the Children’s Mission from his colleague of 25 years and one of our biggest supporters, Bernie Marcus, a founder of The Home Depot.

When Cathy and Ted began researching organizations in Atlanta that would benefit from their support, Children’s was their No. 1 pick. The Deckers were particularly drawn to the work being done at Marcus Autism Center and decided to make autism research and treatment one focus of their philanthropy. The Deckers also responded to the increasing demand for pediatric behavioral and mental health care by supporting Children’s efforts to provide families the help they need when dealing with mental health crises and severe behavioral concerns.

In addition to a generous annual contribution, the Deckers support Marcus Autism Center at the Season of Hope Gala, attending with friends and co-workers and encouraging the sponsorship of The Home Depot Foundation. As a family, Cathy, Ted and their daughters, Nicole and Zoe, say they are committed to raising awareness about the important work being done at Marcus Autism Center to help children with autism “realize their potential and strive for productive and meaningful lives.”

“We are immensely grateful to be part of the Marcus Autism Center and Children’s family,” says Ted.





The Decker family participated in a ribbon cutting celebrating the opening of the Catherine and Ted Decker Playground at Marcus Autism Center in May 2024.

# Strategic Plan

## Improving access and outcomes for kids in Georgia

Marcus Autism Center is renowned as a hub of scientific discovery and clinical innovation because of our efforts to produce novel solutions to real-world problems affecting children and families impacted by autism. In 2024, Marcus Autism Center launched an ambitious strategic plan dedicated to helping provide children and families access to these novel solutions and the comprehensive care they need. Successful execution of this strategic plan is expected to result in an ecosystem of care that would make Georgia a national model.

### The 2024-2028 strategic plan will advance these priorities:

Provide timely and best-practice early diagnostics and treatment for kids ages **16** to **30** months in the Atlanta area, as well as those in rural communities.

**Increase access** with the expansion of Marcus Autism Center, including new treatment sites.

Enlist **support** from key stakeholders in early brain health to grow capacity and advocacy.

Launch **scholarships** to grow the workforce.

Build our **capacity** and **awareness** for key programs like our Multidisciplinary Feeding and Complex Behavior Programs.



Advance scientific discovery by **expanding** our research portfolio to focus on infant interventions, biomarkers of treatment response and personalized care based on genetic research.

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**It is no longer true that the burdens a child is born with determine the rest of their life. We can detect, diagnose and intervene early so that we offer every child the opportunity to succeed and contribute to society. We can change the fate of the next generation of children with autism.**

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—Ami Klin, PhD  
Director, Marcus Autism Center

Bernie Marcus



Ami Klin and Bernie Marcus



## Thank you for helping us carry on Bernie Marcus' incredible legacy

As an entrepreneur and a philanthropist, Bernie Marcus broke through longstanding roadblocks to launch projects that took risks and altered paradigms. He had a passion for helping vulnerable children and families, and his influence can be felt in moments big and small across Children's.

We were very fortunate to collaborate with Bernie during his lifetime. And we are grateful to have your support as we strive to carry his legacy forward, advancing research and treatment to help maximize the potential of all kids with autism.

**Make a lasting impact on the lives of Georgia's kids**

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