

Local Autism and Neurodevelopmental Evaluations Available at IU School of Education

At the Indiana University School of Education's Learning and Developmental Evaluation Clinic (LDEC), clients of all ages receive high-quality neurodevelopmental evaluations that can lead to life-changing diagnoses for autism, ADHD, mental health, learning differences, and more.

Founded in 2023, LDEC has helped clients from Bloomington and surrounding communities receive diagnoses that pave the way for everything from behavioral support for toddlers to academic accommodations for students and a greater sense of understanding and self-compassion for adults. LDEC Director Maryellen Brunson McClain, a licensed psychologist and associate professor at IU, says the reasons for being evaluated are as varied as the diagnoses themselves, but the goal is always the same: for clients to walk away with peace of mind and a plan for the future.

Although neurodevelopmental evaluations are already available in larger cities like Indianapolis, Louisville, and Cincinnati, McClain says having a clinic in Bloomington allows clients to bypass long waitlists and minimize the time spent on lengthy commutes. "We wanted to provide a service for those families that might not be able to drive to the more urban areas," she says.

To conduct these evaluations, McClain and Clinical Training Director Anna Merrill work alongside graduate students earning their doctorates in school psychology, counseling psychology, or clinical science at IU. For a flat, private-pay fee of \$1,500, these clinicians tailor the assessment process to each individual client. No referral from a primary care provider is needed. "Knowledge is power," says Merrill. "You can go to Google or you can go on social media, but nothing can replace the relationship and the process of actually working with someone who's an expert in the field to help you get your questions answered."

Merrill, also a licensed psychologist and visiting clinical assistant professor, says this supportive environment is part of LDEC's "neuroaffirming" approach, which sets clients up for success in all areas of their lives by viewing them as holistic human beings. "If we're doing a good job, clients should walk away feeling that this process was therapeutic," she explains. "We can now say there's a name for what's going on here. Your brain works differently. That process can be incredibly empowering for a family, for a child, for a teenager, for a young adult."

In addition to children and families, many LDEC clients are IU students seeking academic accommodations through



(l-r) Clinical Director Anna Merrill and Director Maryellen Brunson McClain with the IU School of Education's Learning and Developmental Evaluation Clinic. Photo by Martin Boling

the Accessible Education Services (AES) office. These accommodations might include additional time on tests, recorded lectures, or written rather than verbal instructions for assignments. "The university will work with you to get you those accommodations, but you have to have formal documentation of a diagnosis," says Merrill, who adds that scholarships available through AES have provided funding for evaluations to 10 low-income IU students. "That's what a lot of students are missing."

For select LDEC clients, the clinic's licensed psychologists also offer therapy geared toward neurodiverse individuals. "Our clinicians are trained in that whole neurodevelopmental piece, so we have some students that are coming to our clinic for therapy because it's a better fit than what they might be able to find out in the community," says Merrill.

In the future, Merrill and McClain hope to see LDEC increase access to gender-affirming and LGBTQ+ care, provide more bilingual evaluations and resources, and invest in partnerships with allied professions like speech pathology and social work when providing services. "I want to get to a place where we can reach all the pockets of this community and make them feel like this is a safe place where they can feel heard," says Merrill. "We're in a time right now where mental health awareness and neurodiversity awareness are up, and people want this information."

Visit education.indiana.edu/ldec. —Sophie Bird Murphy