



Dr. Lou Vismara, M.D.

Founding Member, UC Davis MIND Institute

Dr. Vismara is a physician (retired interventional cardiologist) and a parent of four children. Since his son, Mark, was diagnosed with autism in 1995, he has dedicated himself to issues of child development, learning differences, diversity, and access to health care for under-served populations. Lou is a founding member of the [UC Davis MIND Institute](#), the State of California's [First Five Commission](#), and the [Calif. Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism](#) .

From 2000 to 2015, Lou worked as a senior policy consultant for three consecutive leaders (Senators Burton, Perata, & Steinberg) of the California Senate. Dr. Vismara established the [Senate Select Committee on Autism & Related Disorders](#) and spearheaded a variety of healthcare issues, including [California's landmark Autism Insurance Mandate](#) (SB 946 enacted in 2011) which has the State over \$200 million annually. Lou is the recipient of numerous advocacy awards and was honored by the California Senate with a resolution acknowledging his “lifetime achievements and meritorious service to humanity and the people of California.”

Dr. Vismara is currently serving as a consultant for AKT Investments, which with the UC Davis Health Systems, is seeking to establish an integrated, health-focused community for individuals of all abilities across the lifespan. Lou has also been retained by the CA Community College Chancellor's Office to establish an innovative employment/vocational training program for neurodiverse students, which will provide services and supports for older adults. Lou has recently served as a member of the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission; UCD School of Education Advisory Board; Eskaton Senior Living Advisory Board; Friends of Sacramento Arts Board; & Meristem Board of Directors.

Lou is currently employed as a consultant for [AKT Investments, Inc.](#); and as an advisor for the [Sierra College Foundation](#). In addition, he serves as an [Adjunct Professor of medicine at Stanford](#) University; a member of the [UC Davis MIND](#) Emeritus Board; [PRIDE Industries Foundation](#) Advisory Board; [Creative Living Options](#) Board; The [CSUS Center for Health Practice, Policy and Research](#) Advisory Board; & the [California Statewide Education Workgroup on Alternative Pathways to A High School Diploma](#).

Dr. Vismara is the co-author of [“The Autism Full Employment Act,”](#) a recent and highly rated book (Amazon 5 stars) that shows how there can be a place in the job world for the wide range of adults with autism, ADHD, and other learning and mental health differences—many of whom are not employed today.

Lou (who was born in Italy) received a B.A. in Biology from Stanford University (1960) and his M.D. from Baylor College of Medicine in 1968. He is married to his wife Wendy Vismara, a former occupational therapist. They have two children: Mark and Marissa. Lou also has 2 daughters from a prior marriage: Laurie and Nicole Vismara. Lou was an avid runner; having completed 21 marathons (including the Boston Marathon) between 1990 and 2003. In 2014, Lou resumed classical violin studies, which he started as a youngster, and is currently a member of the [Sacramento Camellia Symphony](#), [Camerata Chamber Orchestra](#), and the [Sacramento Chamber Music Workshop](#).



Letizia S. Hendrickson, MS CCC-SLP, ADHD-RSP

Clinical Coordinator and Supervisor - The Learning Grove

Letizia Hendrickson has been a Speech-Language Pathologist working with individuals across the lifespan for nearly two decades in schools, medical, and private practice settings.

Currently, she is the Clinical Coordinator and Supervisor at The Learning Grove private practice overseeing the Speech and Child Development departments and clinical externs from a variety of universities. She is also a part of the Adjunct Faculty at West Coast University, where she teaches clinical methods for communication disorders graduate students. She is the President-Elect of CSHA,

serves on CHADD's National Education Committee and is a member of the MSLP Advisory Pack Board.

As a clinician she is passionate about mentoring the next generation of speech therapists, early intervention, assessment and treatment of neurological disorders, serving individuals with ADHD, advocacy, neurodivergent-inclusive approaches and neuro affirming practice.



Michele Rogers, PhD

Executive Director, Early Learning Institute, Chair: Infant Development Association

Michele Rogers, Ph.D. is the Executive Director and Co-founder of the Early Learning Institute – a nonprofit serving families of very young children in Sonoma County. She also serves as the CDC Ambassador to CA for the Learn The Signs, Act Early program. Dr. Rogers is currently serving as Chair of the Infant Development Association, a state-wide membership organization for those involved with Early Intervention work in California. Locally, Dr. Rogers serves on the First 5 Sonoma Professional Advisory committee and participates in the Child Welfare Partnership Action Team.

Dr. Rogers' educational background includes an MA in Health Education – focused on taking complex issues related to health and life events and breaking them down into understandable, teachable pieces. She spent many years as a lactation specialist and teacher in hospital classrooms, working with couples as they approach birth, and providing group and one-to-one teaching and support for mothers of newborns – lactation issues, newborn care and special needs resources. In 2007, she completed a 14-month Napa Fellowship Program in Infant/Parent/Early Childhood Mental Health and went on to complete a PhD in Psychology, studying neurobiology and attachment. Dr. Rogers is a frequent speaker on early childhood brain development as well as staffing and leadership issues.

Dr. Rogers maintains that her very best teachers remain her eight grandchildren and all the other young children in her life.



Jackie Thu-Huong Wong

Executive Director, First 5 California

Jackie Thu-Huong Wong is a refugee born during the fall of Saigon and the first woman of color is the Executive Director of First 5 California. Ms. Wong brings more than three decades of experience working as an advocate for equity, health and education for children, youth and families in the state. Her formal training and background as a social worker has made it possible for Ms. Wong to share her expertise with diverse communities, specifically helping children thrive to achieve their full potential.

Previously, Ms. Wong served as First 5 California's Chief Deputy Director, helping transform the organization toward its new North Star to create safe, stable, nurturing, relationships and environments for California's youngest children and their families. She also helped families overcome the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, address adverse childhood experiences, remove barriers to equity, and tackle the systemic issues affecting California's families.

Prior to joining First 5 California, Ms. Wong, M.S.W served as the Vice President of Policy and Advocacy for GRACE, an anti-poverty organization that manages the End Child Poverty in California Campaign (ECPCA) aimed at ending deep child poverty and reducing child poverty in the state. Under her leadership, in coalition with several anti-poverty advocates, ECPCA was able to secure over \$4 billion in new funding to address child poverty, with a significant investment in education programs.

She also currently serves as a Trustee for the Washington Unified School Board in West Sacramento and as a professor for Sacramento State's School Nursing Credential program. In the past, she served as the Government Relations Director for the National Center for Youth Law, Principal Policy Consultant to the California Senate President Darrell Steinberg, and Statewide Director for the Foster Youth Service at the California Department of Education.

She is a mom to two school-age children and holds a Bachelor of Arts in Social Welfare and Psychology from University of California, Berkeley, and a Master of Social Work from California State University, Sacramento.



Dr. Lisa D'Angelo, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, CBIS

Associate Professor

Dr. Lisa D'Angelo has been a Speech-Language Pathologist for 36 years in hospitals, clinics, early intervention, and schools. Currently an Associate Professor at CSU Sacramento, she teaches neurological development, disorders, assessment, and treatment. Research focuses include cognitive-communication, TBI/Concussion, Long Covid, and Dysphagia.

She also works for UCD Health NICU, PICU, Acute and rehabilitation for adults, and as a school Dysphagia/Feeding

Specialist. She has presented nationally and internationally, and published about TBI, Dysphagia, and concussion/Mild TBI.



Dr. Deborah Ross-Swain, Ed.D., CCC-SLP, BCS-CL

Early Intervention Committee Summit Chair, California Speech-Language-Hearing Association

Dr. Swain is the CEO of The Swain Center for Listening, Communicating and Learning. She is immediate past VP of ASHA's Government Affairs and Public Policy and a past president of CSHA. She is ASHA, National Academies of Practice and CSHA Fellow and CSHA Honors recipient. Dr. Swain is recognized for her advocacy efforts and accomplishments in Early Intervention, auditory processing and learning differences.

She is the author of numerous standardized tests including the RIPA-2, RIPA-G, RESCA-E, Auditory Processing Disorders: Assessment, Management and Treatment-4th Edition and The Listening Inventory.

Dr. Swain has received numerous awards for leadership, clinical service, advocacy and service to professional organizations.



Virginia Castor Early, MPH

Administrator of the Policy Office, California Department of Education's Early Education Division

Virginia Castor Early has been the Administrator of the Policy Office within the California Department of Education's Early Education Division since 2019. In this role, she is responsible for overseeing a team charged with analyzing the budget for early education, conducting bill analysis and programmatic data analysis and research for policy, developing reimbursement rate policy through collective bargaining with the child care unions, and leading statewide planning efforts and overarching policy development.

Virginia and her team have also been deeply involved in development of guidance and regulations and initial phases of policy implementation on all major policy changes in CA, including implementation of Universal PreK for all four-year-old children in CA, implementation of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), efforts to increase inclusion of children with disabilities, and efforts to reduce suspension and expulsion. Prior to holding this role, Virginia was a Consultant in the Policy Office, and before that, served as the Fiscal and Policy Analyst at the California Legislative Analyst's Office.

Virginia has a Masters of Public Administration (MPA) from the Syracuse University Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs and a Bachelor's in Liberal Arts from St. John's College in Annapolis, MD.



Dr. Swati Shah, OTR/L

Director & Founder, Ascend Rehab Services, Inc.

Swati Shah is an Occupational Therapist with over 28 years of diverse experience in pediatric care, spanning inpatient, home-based, EI, outpatient services, school systems, and clinic-based.

She is the Director and Founder of Ascend Rehab Services, Inc., a multidisciplinary pediatric therapy organization that serves approximately 8,000 families across CA. Swati's biggest mission is always giving back rather than receiving, empowering women, and supporting her staff to become the best version of themselves.



Darsie Fisk, MSPT

Physical Therapist

Darsie Fisk is a highly experienced Physical Therapist, providing Early Intervention in multiple counties in Northern California and the Central Coast over the past 24 years. In her career as a Physical Therapist, Darsie has treated in variety of settings including hospitals, schools, outpatient clinics, home health and NICU.

She is knowledgeable in the IFSP and IEP processes. Darsie has advanced training in Pediatric and Infant Neurodevelopmental Treatment (NDT), Therasuit™ method, Orthotics, and Adaptive Equipment.



Monica Hudnall, EdD, CCC-SLP,

Director, Autism Training, CA Dept. of Developmental Services

Monica Hudnall is the Autism Training Director at the California Department of Developmental Services. She leads statewide ASD education efforts among staff and system partners, provides policy guidance, and technical assistance for communication disability related issues.

As a clinician, her work focused on autism, diverse populations, and complex communication needs. She completed the Leadership

Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (UC-LEND) program at UCLA, served on the American Speech Language Hearing Association's government affairs and policy board, has published research and several media articles. Dr. Hudnall is dedicated to advancing equity and access in disability services.



Michi Gates, Ph.D.,

Chief Deputy Director of Program Services, California Department of Developmental Services

Michi Gates has dedicated herself to the field of developmental services for the past 28 years. She began her career as a Service Coordinator at North Bay Regional Center in Napa, Solano, and Sonoma Counties.

Over her 21 years working there she served in several different positions culminating in the position of Associate Executive Director. In 2018, she became the Executive Director of Kern Regional Center in Kern, Mono,

and Inyo Counties. Working to fulfill the intent of the Lanterman Act, increasing self-direction, community integration and access to supports and services that empower individuals with developmental disabilities and their families is her focus.

In 2024, she became the Chief Deputy Director of Program Services at the California Department of Developmental Disabilities where she can engage with statewide policy issues that sustain and improve California's developmental services system. Michi lives in the wonderful city of Bakersfield with her husband.



Dr. Martha S. Burns, Ph.D., CCC-SLP

Carnegie Learning

Dr. Martha S. Burns consults for Carnegie Learning Corporation and other healthcare organizations. She was an Adjunct Associate Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience at Northwestern University for 40 years and also Director of Neuroscience Education at Scientific Learning Corporation.

Dr. Burns is a Fellow of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and a Distinguished Fellow of the National Academies of Practice. She has authored over 100 book chapters and articles with a recent Plural Publications textbook, Cognitive and Communication Interventions.



Pradeep Gidwani, MD, MPH, FAAP

American Academy of Pediatrics, California Chapter 3

Pradeep Gidwani is a pediatrician who works at American Academy of Pediatrics, California Chapter 3, San Diego and Imperial Counties (AAP-CA3) on a team that provides Countywide Coordination and Support for Healthy Development Services and First Step Home Visiting funded by First 5 San Diego.

Over the last 19 years, these communitywide programs have reached over 362,000 children and their families. He serves on the San Diego Foundation's Board of Governors.