

AACAP Mentorship Grants for Medical Students, supported by AACAP's Life Members Fund

Established in 2011, AACAP's Mentorship Grants for Medical Students, supported by AACAP's Life Members Fund, provide medical students the opportunity to receive a formal overview of child and adolescent psychiatry, establish mentor relationships with child and adolescent psychiatrists, and experience the AACAP Annual Meeting. Recipients engage with AACAP Life Members by attending the Life Members Clinical Perspectives and the Life Members Reception. Recipients receive \$1,200 of financial assistance to attend AACAP's Annual Meeting.

Debbie CL Burdinski, BS—Massachusetts Institute of Technology/Harvard University

Jordan S. Carter, BS—Medical University of South Carolina

Shahajahan J. Chowdhury, BE—San Juan Bautista School of Medicine

Greta B. Cutts, BS—University of Minnesota

Karolina Kalata, BS—Medical College of Wisconsin

Andrew R. Kittleson, BA—Vanderbilt University

Angela C. Lu, BS—Touro University California College of Osteopathic Medicine

Timothy Thompson, BA—Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine

Vongai Tizora, BS—Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

AACAP Mentorship Grants for Medical Students

Supported by AACAP's Life Members Fund

You are required to complete **seven programs** during the Annual Meeting. See below.



Check out these committees, AACAP group events & program offerings!

- Presidential Theme Programming
- [Medical Students and Residents \(MSRs\)](#)
- Training and Education Committee

also consider...

- [MSR Roadmap](#)
- Plenary Sessions
- Networking events
- Honors presentations
- CAP@Home programs

1. Choose **one** (of three) [Life Member Sponsored](#) Session(s). Options are:
 - Tues. Oct. 21 **4:45 - 6:15 PM**
[Medical Students, Residents, and Fellows Meet Life Member Mentors at the 2025 AACAP Meeting](#)
 - Thurs. Oct. 23 **10:00 AM - 12:00 PM** | Member Services Forum 9
[Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists Unite: Bridging Intergenerational Gaps for the Future](#)
 - Thurs. Oct. 23 **2:30 - 4:30 PM** | Clinical Perspectives 67
[Life Members Clinical Perspectives: The Development of Psychiatric Careers in Leadership, Teaching/Mentoring, Research, and Clinical Practice](#)
2. Weds. Oct. 22 **8:30 - 10:15 AM** | [Opening Plenary](#)
3. Thurs. Oct. 23 **4:15 - 6:00 PM** | [Mentorship Program for MSR - Part 1](#)
[Free ticketed event. Two sessions: Thurs. Part 1 | Fri. Part 2*]
4. Fri. Oct. 24 **8:00 - 9:30 AM** | [Young Leaders Awards Breakfast](#) (Invite Only)
5. Fri. Oct. 24 **11:30 AM - 1:00 PM** | [Life Members Luncheon](#) (Invite Only)
- Fri. Oct. 24 **4:15 - 6:00 PM** | [Mentorship Program for MSR - Part 2](#)
[Free ticketed event. Two sessions: Thurs. Part 1 | Fri. Part 2*]

Complete **two additional required sessions** based on your individual interest; may include a program that you monitor, or in which you are serving in a chair, discussant or co-presenter role, or other academic/clinical programming of choice from the program schedule.

LEARN MORE!



AACAP's [PsychStream](#)

is your new, go-to destination for expert-led, on-demand content in child and adolescent psychiatry.

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
CHILD & ADOLESCENT
PSYCHIATRY

WWW.AACAP.ORG

AACAP Life Members Committee - Mentorship Grant for Medical Students
Attn: Marilyn B. Benoit, MD and Ellen H. Sholevar, MD
3615 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20016

November 14, 2025

Dear Drs. Benoit and Sholevar,

I am writing to express my gratitude for your generous support through the AACAP Mentorship Grant for Medical Students, which allowed me to attend the 2025 AACAP Annual Meeting. As an MD-PhD student completing my PhD research and preparing to return to clinical training, this opportunity came at an especially meaningful time in my career development.

Over the course of my undergraduate and graduate education, my academic and research interests have evolved toward a focus on adolescent mental health through a combination of coursework, mentorship, and research. College courses in human development first sparked my curiosity about how early life experiences shape mental health across the lifespan. During my preclinical training, I found myself drawn to psychiatry and neuroscience. In my PhD work, I have been investigating the relationship between risk factors, neurobiological markers, and the emergence of psychotic experiences in adolescence, work that I hope will ultimately help to inform early intervention strategies. My interest in child and adolescent psychiatry has also been shaped by my experiences mentoring students as a resident assistant in college dormitories, where I have seen firsthand how timely, consistent support can make a transformative difference in young people's lives. Attending AACAP was a meaningful next step in shaping and affirming my commitment to a career in child and adolescent psychiatry.

As a first-time attendee at AACAP, the mentorship program's thoughtful structure made a large and potentially overwhelming conference feel approachable. The pre-conference Zoom meeting with fellow mentees organized by Ms. Archer provided a sense of community before I even arrived. Throughout the conference, the balance between structured mentorship events and time for independent exploration was perfect for making the most of the meeting and created space to reconnect with fellow mentees while forming meaningful new relationships throughout the conference. The Life Members events were a particular highlight, offering a unique chance to engage with so many leaders in child and adolescent psychiatry. I appreciated hearing from Dr. Borer about collaborative care models, Dr. Fox about navigating career priorities, Dr. Mehlinger about her work in a juvenile detention center, and Dr. Metz about building his clinical practice at UMass. Each conversation reinforced the diversity of paths and passions within the field and underscored the importance of mentorship at every stage.

After several years immersed in PhD research, it was exciting to connect with clinicians and clinical trainees at all stages as I prepare to re-enter the medical school phase of my training program. I particularly enjoyed sessions related to the clinical aspects of my current work on psychotic experiences. I also appreciated the feeling of belonging and community that came from the many events I attended, from mentoring sessions and the bike ride to the student and resident social at the Sports Museum. In addition to making many new

connections that I hope to maintain throughout my career, the conference also provided an avenue to form deeper relationships with current mentors. We are often told as students to “find your people” when choosing medical specialties, and AACAP gave me the strong impression that I have done so.

A final highlight was presenting my research at the poster session. Being able to share my work with clinicians toward the end of my PhD offered a meaningful way to connect my research with clinical practice and to better envision the bridge I hope to build between the two in my career. I was especially inspired by conversations during the early psychosis workgroup, where I met physicians and physician-scientists with similar interests at later stages of their careers, giving me a clearer idea of what my own path might look like. Everyone was so welcoming, making this an especially positive and motivating experience.

I am thankful to the Life Members whose generosity made this experience possible. Your support not only provided financial assistance but also opened doors to mentorship and a sense of belonging in the field I aspire to join. This experience has solidified my desire to continue attending AACAP meetings throughout my training and beyond. I also hope to pay this experience forward. Just as I currently mentor premedical students as a resident assistant, I look forward to one day serving as a mentor for future generations of trainees in child and adolescent psychiatry.

Thank you again for your support of students like me. This conference has had a lasting impact on my career path, and I am sincerely grateful for the opportunity.

Sincerely,

Debbie Burdinski
MD-PhD student at Harvard Medical School and MIT

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D. Burdinski". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

AACAP Life Members Committee - Mentorship Grant for Medical Students
Attn: Marilyn B. Benoit, MD and Ellen H. Sholevar, MD
3615 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20016

November 6, 2025

Dear Drs. Benoit and Sholevar,

I am writing to extend my thanks to you and all the AACAP Life Members for their generous support of the Mentorship Grant for Medical Students program.

This was my first time attending the AACAP Annual Meeting, which was made possible by the financial contributions of the Life Members. However, they did not only provide their financial support. Their willingness to serve as mentors to trainees of all levels at the meeting was really what made this experience so valuable for me. I was fortunate to meet many leaders in the field to learn from their experiences and receive their guidance.

It was because of their commitment to supporting the next generation of child and adolescent psychiatrists that I was able to attend this meeting to help develop my network, learn more about opportunities to be involved with AACAP, and see the community within the field.

I am immensely grateful for their contributions, financial and otherwise, that enabled this experience for me and so many others. For that, all you have done for the field, and all you continue to do: thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jordan Carter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Jordan Carter, MS4
Medical University of South Carolina

AACAP Life Members Committee - Mentorship Grant for Medical Students
Attn: Marilyn B. Benoit, MD and Ellen H. Sholevar, MD
3615 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20016

November 14, 2025

Dear Drs. Benoit and Sholevar,

I wanted to thank you for the incredible experience I had at the 72nd Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP). As an aspiring psychiatrist, it meant the world for me to travel from Puerto Rico to the mainland United States and interact with fellow medical students, residents, and senior members who shared their unique experiences and passions of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (CAP). There were a few distinct instances I find particularly memorable: I remember during the Life Members Luncheon, I asked Dr. Gunnbjorg Lavoll what was uniquely fascinating about dealing with children in psychiatry. She explained to me how minors typically have a social safety system, an environment children can depend on which helps them psychologically and transform by the time they reach adulthood. Whereas for adults, many of whom do not have a social support system, have a lifelong battle in managing their psychiatric illnesses. This demographic comparison shifted my interest toward pursuing CAP since prior to this I never made this connection. I only thought adults would be easier to work with since they are fully mature and able to coherently express themselves, but Dr. Lavoll's explanation enhanced my understanding significantly.

I remember during the Mentorship for Trainees sessions, I found a CAP Fellow at my former alma mater, Stony Brook University. It was my dream to pursue psychiatry residency at my local university hospital, and I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Maxwell Wills where I was able to relate with someone who grew up in the same environment and attended the same undergraduate university while learning more about the culture of the residency program and what they find particularly desirable in applicants. The idea of merely sharing a local delicacy Dr. Wills has not tried or naming a small town only a local would recognize made me feel so warm on the inside as I deeply miss my family and community back in New York.

By far the most intriguing event I attended was the discussion of child and adolescent suicide in the three major Abrahamic faiths, where psychiatrists who were passionate and belonged to these faith traditions, explained the intersectionality between the two. I never imagined I would attend a medical conference, which at face value tends to be secular and less philosophically inclined, and witness a discussion exploring another key facet of the human condition, religion, and how it too can be used as a positive force for good in optimizing psychiatry. This event alone made me realize the appreciation CAP has for the humanities, and I feel more confident knowing I can pursue a medical field where I can feel accepted and encouraged in incorporating my unique experiences as a minority.

I spent so much time attending these events that I actually only realized on my last day that there was the entire lower level of the conference venue reserved for poster presentations and the actual expo. I was only able to do a quick walk around of what I missed, but it was another sign I should return again to fully experience the conference.

Thank you again for enriching my perspective as a third year medical student attending medical school in Puerto Rico. I do not think it would have been possible had I remained on the island simply focusing on my medical studies. I cannot wait to share my experience with the Puerto Ricans I work with, whether it is physicians, fellow medical students, or professors, and I am optimistic CAP will continue to grow with this noble initiative in providing the mentorship grant.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Shahajahan Chowdhury". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Shahajahan Chowdhury
MS3, San Juan Bautista School of Medicine

AACAP Life Members Committee - Mentorship Grant for Medical Students
Attn: Marilyn B. Benoit, MD and Ellen H. Sholevar, MD
3615 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20016

November 24th, 2025

Dear Drs. Benoit and Sholevar,

I would like to express my deep gratitude to you and the entire Life Members Committee for funding the Mentorship Grant for Medical Students. This award was invaluable to my annual meeting experience, as I simply would not have had the means to attend without it. Like many medical students, I am dependent on student loans and live on a tight budget. The grant allowed me to make the necessary travel and lodging arrangements to attend five of the six days of programming without the stress of having to make financial sacrifices in other areas of my life.

I am especially grateful that this award gave me the opportunity to attend the AACAP Annual Meeting for the first time because it allowed me to connect with a wide variety of mentors at many different stages in their careers and with diverse professional interests. I particularly appreciated that this award provided additional time to connect with Life Members in smaller group settings, creating space for deeper conversations about personal experiences and lessons learned over long and meaningful careers. Experiencing the genuine enthusiasm of each mentor for answering questions and offering guidance gave me confidence that I will be well supported as I move forward in my training.

I would like to share two brief anecdotes that highlight the connections I made at the meeting thanks to the Mentorship Grant funded by the Life Members. At the Awards Breakfast on Friday morning, I found myself seated between a past AACAP president (Dr. Benoit, that was you!) and the president-elect, Dr. John Walkup. I had attended Dr. Walkup's inaugural address earlier in the week - attendance was a requirement of the award - and remembered that he mentioned attending medical school at the University of Minnesota. When I told him that I am currently a UMN medical student, he responded with such enthusiasm that I couldn't help but laugh. We spoke about the old medical school building and his favorite study spots, and he encouraged me to email him anytime to talk about career development, noting that he is always happy to make time for a fellow Minnesota medical student.

Another memorable connection occurred later that same day at the Life Members Luncheon. I enjoyed chatting with the Life Members seated next to me about their career paths, and as the lunch went on, one of the Life Members seated across the table began to look familiar. As people stood up to get dessert, I realized that we had sat near each other in a session earlier in the week where I had admired the beautiful colorwork hat that she was knitting while listening to the session. When the seat next to her opened, I introduced myself, sat down, and pulled out my own knitting project to show her. Over dessert, we alternated between conversations about psychiatry and knitting and even exchanged emails to share knitting patterns. It was such a joyful and unexpected way to connect with a new mentor and an honor to be included at the luncheon.

Once again, thank you for your generosity and for intentionally supporting trainees through the Mentorship Grant. Attending the Annual Meeting not only made a lasting impact on my professional development but also solidified my interest in pursuing a career in child and adolescent psychiatry. Your investment in medical students meaningfully shaped my sense of belonging within the field, and I am deeply grateful for your commitment to mentorship. I look forward to carrying these lessons forward as I continue my training.

Sincerely,
Greta Cutts, MS3
University of Minnesota Medical School

AACAP Life Members Committee - Mentorship Grant for Medical Students
Attn: Marilyn B. Benoit, MD and Ellen H. Sholevar, MD
3615 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20016

November 5th, 2025

Dear Drs. Benoit and Sholevar,

I wanted to express my gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the AACAP Life Members Mentorship Program and for your generosity in supporting medical students and trainees like myself at this year's AACAP Annual Meeting. Attending this conference was incredibly meaningful, both personally and professionally, and being able to experience it in the city I was born and raised in, made it even more special.

As someone passionate about child and adolescent psychiatry, attending this conference reaffirmed my excitement and commitment to the field. Through the mentorship program, I had the privilege of connecting with passionate psychiatrists who reminded me why I am drawn to this work, the ability to intervene early, promote resilience, and advocate for youth navigating complex social and developmental challenges especially at times the world seems against our work. I especially appreciated the conversations surrounding trauma-informed care, cultural identity, and treating children of war, which directly resonate with my own research and volunteer experiences with refugee and immigrant youth.

This conference has truly strengthened my sense of purpose and inspired me to continue building a career at the intersection of clinical care, advocacy, and research in child psychiatry. I am deeply grateful to the Life Members Committee for fostering such a welcoming and supportive environment for future child psychiatrists.

Thank you again for your mentorship, generosity, and dedication to inspiring the next generation of psychiatrists.

Sincerely,

Karolina Kalata, MS4, Medical College of Wisconsin

AACAP Life Members Committee - Mentorship Grant for Medical Students
Attn: Marilyn B. Benoit, MD and Ellen H. Shorevar, MD
3615 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20016

November 6, 2025

Dear Drs. Benoit and Shorevar, and the AACAP Life Members Committee,

I write to thank you all for the opportunity to attend the 2025 Annual Meeting via a Mentorship Grant for Medical Students. I was honored to receive this formative award to attend my first AACAP meeting. The experience allowed me to connect with clinical and research mentors, learn about career trajectories within child and adolescent psychiatry, and envision the next stages of my own professional life.

I entered my MD and PhD training with interests in mental health and LGBTQ+ health. During my early clinical training in medical school, I solidified my interest in pursuing psychiatry as a career path. My graduate research in human neuroscience has narrowed the focus of my clinical interest to adolescent psychiatry—specifically, I am passionate about psychotic disorders, serious mental illness in sexual and gender minority populations, and translational psychiatric research using neuroimaging techniques. As I had hoped, I was able to learn more about all of these things, and much more, at the AACAP Annual Meeting in 2025.

The variety of clinical and research symposia at the Annual Meeting allowed me to explore sessions that matched my interests. I attended seminars on treatment-resistant schizophrenia, mental health outcomes in trans and gender-diverse youth, and careers in academic psychiatry. Each taught me how to advance patient care, treatment outcomes, and research questions with the ultimate goal of improving health for everyone.

Beyond the educational content I attended, I was particularly struck by how many meaningful connections I made during networking events, socials, and even the short breaks between sessions. By connecting with other MD and MD/PhD students at similar stages of training, I learned more about planning for clinical electives, securing letters of recommendation, and preparing for residency interviews. From my interactions with research-track residents and fellows, I gleaned insight on research timelines during residency and grant applications for early-career investigators. And, from my conversations with faculty, I heard what skills are important for a career in child and adolescent psychiatry and learned about how to acquire those skills.

The AACAP Annual Meeting was truly everything I had hoped in terms of my personal and professional development and more. Above all, it was a safe, friendly, and fun environment for me to pursue my goal of becoming a leader in academic psychiatry. Attending the meeting left me invigorated. Once again, thank you all for investing in my future as a child and adolescent psychiatrist and the learning that it afforded me!

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew R. Kittleson". The signature is stylized and cursive, with the first name "Andrew" written in a large, bold script.

Andrew R. Kittleson, B.A.
M.D./Ph.D. Candidate, Class of 2027
Medical Scientist Training Program
Vanderbilt University School of Medicine

AACAP Life Members Committee - Mentorship Grant for Medical Students
Attn: Marilyn B. Benoit, MD and Ellen H. Sholevar, MD
3615 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20016

November 14, 2025

Dear Drs. Benoit and Sholevar,

I want to express my sincere gratitude to you and the Life Members Committee for supporting medical students through the Mentorship Grant for Medical Students. Through your generosity, I had the opportunity to attend the 2025 AACAP Annual Meeting in Chicago, IL.

This conference arrived at a pivotal point in my medical education. Engaging with others—from fellow students to distinguished Life Members—helped solidify my decision to pursue Child & Adolescent Psychiatry. I especially appreciated the chance to explore my interest in cultural psychiatry and connect with leaders in the field. I was able to hear about their training paths, learn how they integrate cultural psychiatry into practice, and gain insight into emerging research in the area. Their stories will continue to guide and inspire me as I reflect on the kind of physician I hope to become.

Attending the annual meeting through this grant was a once-in-a-lifetime experience that I believe will help set the trajectory for the rest of my career. Without your support, I would not have had exposure to the knowledge I gained or the meaningful relationships I formed.

Thank you again for investing in medical students and the future of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry.

Sincerely,
Angela Lu, OMS-III
Touro University California College of Osteopathic Medicine

AACAP Life Members Committee - Mentorship Grant for Medical Students
Attn: Marilyn B. Benoit, MD and Ellen H. Sholevar, MD
3615 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20016

November 5, 2025

Dear Drs. Benoit and Sholevar,

I want to express my sincere thanks for both your financial and mentoring support. As a 3rd year medical student at a new osteopathic school, I have no access to a child and adolescent psychiatry department, and our only faculty member is busy managing a robust residency program across the state. Finding the mentorship grants for medical students was an incredible boon for me and my knowledge of CAP. I had an incredible time at the AACAP annual meeting, from meeting other students, early career professionals, and of course, many of the Life Members. I was fortunate to have a few moments of President John Walkup, MD's time, where he impressed upon me the unique insight that CAP training provides for treating children & adolescents, but also better understanding adults. And, Dr. Benoit, I enjoyed hearing you share your wisdom and story of finding a calling in CAP during our personal conversation. I loved attending the intergenerational communication event as well, where I learned about how we can earnestly connect with children without needing to understand all of the latest slang and technology.

I really valued the opportunity that you all provided for us to explore our own interests through the many diverse presentations throughout the conference. It gave me a taste of how I could make my career in CAP my own by pursuing the things that pique my interest. In particular, I had just come from a rotation in pediatric gastroenterology, so the session on disorders of gut brain motility proved accessible and engaging for my experience level. I also loved seeing the diverse perspectives of religious psychiatrists who detailed their cultural and religious perspectives on suicide while providing hope for the future.

In the coming months, I look forward to setting up my first rotation in child and adolescent psychiatry, where I will be able to experience patient care firsthand. I also feel equipped to better research residency program, now that I know that access to a CAP fellowship is a priority for me. The residency fair and the opportunity to speak with current residents gave me insight into how to assess programs and ask good questions during future interviews.

Again, I am so thankful for this chance you have provided me. It answered so many questions that I had, and even some that I was not aware of. I am thrilled to now be a part of the AACAP family, and I look forward to being engaged over the next year and a half as a medical student. I hope to see you all again in the future!

Kindly,
Ross Thompson, OMS-III, Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine

AACAP Life Members Committee – MGMS LM Program
Attn: Marilyn B. Benoit, MD and Ellen H. Sholevar, MD
3615 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20016

November 13th, 2025

Dear Drs. Benoit and Sholevar,

Please accept my sincerest gratitude for this honor. It provided not only meaningful financial relief, but also profound peace of mind knowing that seasoned child psychiatrists such as yourselves see a future for me in this field. This was my first time attending an AACAP conference, and I can confidently say that it far exceeded my expectations. It was an extraordinary experience to have at this stage of my training.

I left the conference encouraged by the genuine curiosity, sincerity, and generosity of the many child psychiatry mentors I encountered. Whether discussing access to mental health care within the foster care system or navigating treatment-resistant schizophrenia in adolescents, every presenter—and equally, every audience member—seemed deeply engaged with the material. I was reminded of the biblical adage, “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few,” and how essential these services are for our most vulnerable youth. The reach of this community—from Dallas, Texas to Auckland, New Zealand—is truly inspiring.

One of my favorite moments came from an unexpected sense of familiarity. Earlier this year, I attended the Triple Board/Post-Pediatric Portal Summit in Cleveland, an experience that planted in me the first seeds of understanding the privilege and responsibility of this unique training pathway. I met many students, residents, and faculty there, and to my delight, I encountered several of them again throughout AACAP. I even helped organize a mini-reunion lunch for peers from the summit. It was meaningful to witness my professional community beginning to take shape right before my eyes.

If this conference taught me anything, it is the immense power of connection as we pursue this noble, and at times daunting, profession. I am eager to continue this journey, and your generosity has played an important role in making it possible. I hope one day to pay forward the kindness you have shown me.

Sincerely,

Vongai Tizora
MS4, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai