



March 23 & 24, 2023
Speaker Biographies, Photos, and
Speaking Times

Updated 03-22-2023

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ERNIE ELS
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ARTS | LEISURE

March 23, 2023

Panel Participant

2:30-3:30 p.m.

Andrew Blitman, Professional Artist, and Published Author

I am a professional artist and the published author of 14 books, who grew up in Cooper City, Florida, and received a Masters in Marine Conservation Science & Policy from the University of Miami in May 2014. There, I blogged on WordPress. The blog posts evolved into multiple books, including a memoir of my experiences on a 2012 Birthright trip to Israel: "Birthright 2012: A Voyage into the Heart and Soul of Israel". I am also the author and illustrator of the "Wild Writers" series: Three books of poems written from the perspective of animals and plants; as well as the author of a book of original jokes: "The Big Book of Pun-ishment" (2018); the author of five original poetry anthologies; and the author of a new portfolio book that documents more than 300 original paintings for your viewing pleasure: "The Painting Portfolio: A Comprehensive and Current Collection of Visual Art". You can find and buy all of my books through Amazon.com.

I currently work as a tutor and mentor for Firewall Centers - an non-profit organization that provides complimentary homework help and academic tutoring and life skills lessons to students who would otherwise be unable to access these services. I also currently serve on the Els for Autism advisory board, as I have since 2018, and I am also a part of South Florida's autism community.



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Dani Bowman, Founder, and CEO, DaniMation Entertainment

Dani Bowman—who is on the autism spectrum founded her company, DaniMation Entertainment, at age 14 in 2009 and launched DaniMation UK in 2019. She graduated with a BFA in Animation in 2018 and an MBA in Global Strategy and Leadership in 2020. Dani has premiered 11 animated short films, a PSA, and a music at San Diego Comic Con.

Over the next 13 years, Dani has led summer animation camps and around the country, initially with Joey Travolta's Inclusion Films, and then expanding out on her own, adding programs at the University of South Florida and Plymouth University in England, teaching over 2000 youth with autism and other different abilities. In 2020, Dani pivoted to teaching animation from in-person to online with 1-Week Animation Workshops and One-on-One classes.

In addition to teaching animation, Dani works with her students as a role model and mentor, encouraging them to follow their dreams. In 2021, Dani and her team participated in the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge, where she won for “Best Editor” with her film “The Home Office”.

Dani is currently working on getting a Ph.D with thesis on how much the impact her program has had in the autism community.

Websites:

- www.danimationentertainment.com
- www.danibowman.com
- www.journeysbydanibowman.weebly.com

Facebook: DaniMation Entertainment

Twitter: DaniMationEnt

LinkedIn

- Dani Bowman: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/dani-bowman/>
- DaniMationEntertainment: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/10699771/admin/>

ARTS | LEISURE

March 23, 2023

Keynote

1:30-2:30 p.m.



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**HEALTHY LIVING |
WELL-BEING**

March 23, 2023

Panel Participant

9:30-10:30 a.m.

Doreen T. Cammarata, MS, Licensed Mental Health Counselor, Els for Autism Foundation

Doreen T. Cammarata currently works as a Mental Health Counselor at the Els for Autism Foundation. As an adjunct instructor at Hofstra University and Florida Atlantic University, she has experience educating graduate students and professionals on grief counseling issues. As the president of the former Palm Beach ADEC Chapter (Association for Death Education and Counseling), she organized numerous enrichment seminars and networking opportunities for her fellow colleagues. Her career began as a school counselor working with at-risk youth then progressed into her work as a grief and bereavement specialist working with adults and children at a local hospice program. For over the past three decades, her consultant jobs have included counseling stroke survivors and their families as well as working with students and educators within the schools in Palm Beach County. During her work as a board member of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Florida Southeast, she served as a Panelist for the National Suicide Survivors Day Conference and was the recipient of the 2005 Outstanding Professional Award.



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Eric Chessen, MS

Eric Chessen, MS, is the Founder of Autism Fitness. Eric has spent over 20 years developing fitness and adapted PE programs for the ASD/Neurodiverse population. He is the creator of the PAC Profile assessment and the Autism Fitness Certification with hundreds of Certified Pros and parents worldwide. He resides in Charlotte, NC.



SPORTS | FITNESS

March 24, 2023

Panel Participant

3:30-4:30 p.m.



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Greg Connors

Originally from the Philadelphia area, Greg earned his B.A. in English from College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, MA and his M.Ed. in Secondary English and Special Education from Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia, PA. Greg has nearly ten years of instructional experience working with special education students and their families, serving as a writing teacher, case manager, and small group intervention teacher while working at Mastery Charter Thomas in South Philadelphia.

Greg also has experience working at an edtech company in the disability employment space where he was responsible for the teacher training and account management processes for schools and districts utilizing his company's digital literacy and work-readiness curriculum.

Greg understands the significant impact that team sports and recreational activities have played in his own life, helping him to build physical fitness and self-esteem, strengthen social and communication skills, and establish meaningful relationships with teammates and coaches. In addition to having served as captain of his college rowing team at Holy Cross, Greg has a passion for golf, yoga, and nutrition, and he is excited to impact and grow the Recreation Services offerings here at Els for Autism.

During his keynote, Greg will explain how the Ernie Els #GameON Autism® Sports curricula are impacting the lives of individuals with autism and reshaping the perception of recreation as an effective and supplemental therapy for these individuals.

SPORTS | FITNESS

March 24, 2023

Keynote

8:15-9:15 a.m.

Panel Moderator

3:30-4:30 p.m.



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Rachel Costello, C-IAYT, ERYT500, RCYT, RPYT, YACEP, Executive Director, Yo Re Mi, Certified Yoga Therapist

Rachel Costello is a yoga therapist certified by the International Association of Yoga Therapists and the Yoga Alliance. She specializes in yoga and mindfulness for children and families with a focus on prenatal, postpartum, yoga nidra and trauma-informed practices. Rachel trained at the Kripalu School of Integrative Yoga Therapy. She also studied at the The Dharma Yoga Center, Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Dhanwantari Ashram in India, and at Integral Yoga Institute in NYC.

**HEALTHY LIVING |
WELL-BEING**

March 23, 2023

Keynote

8:30-9:30 a.m.

As the Co-Founder and Executive Director of Yo Re Mi, Rachel works with schools, educators and early childhood professionals to bring music, yoga and mindfulness to young children all over the world. She is an artist, singer, and performer and loves incorporating dance, theater and music into her classes. Rachel has been teaching both adults and children since 2005 and, as a mother of two, especially loves sharing the benefits of yoga and mindfulness with women, children and families.



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Joshua Deer

Joshua Deer is a golf professional and enthusiast, certified golf instructor and inaugural Els for Autism Spectrum Award winner. He has led Ernie Els #GameON Autism (R) Golf clinics as an instructor at many venues and in a pilot program at his home club, Iron Horse Golf Course in North Texas, where he also serves as a youth golf instructor. He has been featured on multiple television programs that tell the story of how he inspires others, including PGA Golf professionals with his positive attitude and passionate determination and character. A true sports fan, his other passion is hockey. He serves as the equipment manager for the North American Tier 3 Hockey League Texas Brahmas and assists the Dallas Stars equipment staff with their prospects development camps. "Deersey," as he is also known, has helped raise over \$150,000 for The Els Foundation with his family since he first participated in The Golf Challenge in 2014. He was the first person with autism to play in the annual event. He enjoys encouraging others to be their best through creating character goals based on Biblical principles.

SPORTS | FITNESS

March 24, 2023

Active Demonstration
Golf

10:30-11:45 a.m. &

1:00-2:15 p.m.

Panel Participant

3:30-4:30 p.m.



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Dr. Shannon Dieringer, Professor of Applied Behavior Analysis and Department Chair of Special Education, Ball State University

Shannon Dieringer, Ph.D., BCBA-D, is a Professor of Applied Behavior Analysis and Department Chair of Special Education at Ball State University. She graduated from The Ohio State University with an undergraduate degree in physical education and a master's and doctoral degree in adapted physical education with cognates in research design and motor development. Dr. Dieringer has been practicing ABA since 2007 and has experience in the home, clinical, school, and therapeutic recreation settings. Her area of expertise is utilizing behavioral principles to increase physical activity for autistic individuals. She has published over 28 articles in peer-review journals related to adapted physical activity and applied behavior analysis. She helped create the Ernie Els #GameON Autism® Fitness program and is working with an interdisciplinary team of school counselors, behavior analysts, music therapists, and music educators to develop training and support materials for community-based programs that serve autistic individuals. When she is not working, she enjoys running, biking, and traveling with her family (husband, three boys, and labradoodle) in their RV.

**HEALTHY LIVING |
WELL-BEING**

March 23, 2023

Keynote

11:00-12:00 noon



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HEALTHY LIVING | WELL-BEING

March 23, 2023

Panel Participant

9:30-10:30 a.m.

Merrick Egber

Merrick Egber was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder at the age of 8, which was then called Asperger's Syndrome – a variant which included mild to moderate supports needed. While he didn't learn about his disorder until the age of 18, he had symptoms unlike many other children, including the inability to fold textbook covers, needing help to tie his shoes (which still don't have strong grips and come loose constantly), droopy arms, and an inability to try to depersonalize feedback and know when someone is joking or not. When he was in the tenth grade, in 2001, a multitude of causes rendered his abilities to transition well as he felt powerless and had to seek help for his depression, a condition which exists to this day. He also came up with a coping strategy which allowed him to start up a hobby of creating poetry and song lyrics, and eventually getting them self-published on Amazon.com and Lulu.com which can be found on www.MerrickEgber.com.

After earning a B.A. in Communication Studies at Florida Atlantic University, he went on to join the staff at the Els for Autism Foundation, a few months before the ribbon cutting of the Els Center of Excellence in 2015, as the longest self-advocate working for the Foundation. He is the Secretary of FL APSE and the Chairperson of the Els for Autism Advisory Board. During his tenure, he helped found The Spoken Wheel Society, a Social Group for adults with autism, the Fore Autism Podcast, and the Adults with Autism Mental Health Support Group – which spun off as the Teens 'Connections' Mental Health Support Group too. While he may require mild to moderate supports, his theory supported by the clients he comes into contact with, is that the population with high supports is indistinctive from the population with mild to moderate supports, they just need high mental health supports instead of or including life and communication supports.



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Graziella Gadia

Grazi Gadia is from Brazil. She has a bachelor in communications and marketing, and she is a plastic artist. Fifteen years ago, she moved to Florida. As a keen observer, art naturally flows in her life since she was a child though very expressive paintings in mixed media and acrylic on canvas. During this period in the US, she has participated in several art exhibitions. In the last few years, Grazi was invited to paint, “outside of the canvas”, creating murals for Nicklaus Children's Hospital Dan Marino Center (Weston, FL). She was particularly honored for be invited to paint the “Night and Day Mural at ELS – Autism Center of Excellence.

Grazi has a special ability to connect with people and to understand their nuances, which she expresses in her social project: Eyecontact – Lives shaped by Autism, which her mission is to embrace the Brazilians mothers of autistics and show off their social projects.

Under her social project Eyecontact, she writes life stories about parents that have children with autism and made a difference in their communities all over the world. Grazi promoted more than 4 Festivals of Arts for people with autism. She is a curator of “Autism Without Mask” in partnership with Marcio Amaral that has Suzana Gullo Mion (celebrity in Brazil) as its ambassador. Otherwise, she is part of the organizing committees of several congress about autism in Brazil. During this quarantine, she completed the 40hour course requirement to become an RBT. She accomplished an old dream, she created a company – ARTS & HEARTS that has a goal to develop skills through arts. In September, she organized the first congress about Autism and Arts: TEARTEIRO. The event combined several lectures and arts activities to reinforce that the arts can supplement the ASD treatment and that arts is a tool, in a soft way, to develop skills in kids with autism, such as: eye contact, socialization, flexibility, communication and improve their artistic talents. Grazi believes that Arts is inclusion.

ARTS | LEISURE
March 23, 2023
Panel Participant
2:30-3:30 p.m.



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Erica Lyles, MT-BC, Director, Whole Vibes

Erica, a native of St. Louis, Missouri, pursued her passion of using music to help people as a music therapist. She followed that passion to South Florida as an intern and launched her career in West Palm Beach. After working for a local Hospice for several years, Erica branched out and launched her own private music therapy practice and also worked at a school for Autism in the area. She continued to build her practice that works with kids, teens and adults with special needs and more specifically ASD. Erica's practice, Whole Vibes has grown to a team of 5 including board-certified music therapists and music teachers and serves families in Palm Beach County and on The Treasure Coast. Erica is a new mommy to a beautiful baby boy named Paul. She loves sharing the gift of music with him and is excited to continue to share that gift with the region and eventually the world.

ARTS | LEISURE

March 23, 2023

Panel Participant

2:30-3:30 p.m.



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Dr. Erin Brooker Lozott, BCBA-D, CCC-SLP, Program Director, Els for Autism Foundation

Erin has been working with individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and related disabilities across ages and settings for over 25 years. Erin is a doctoral-level board-certified behavior analyst and a licensed and certified Speech-Language Pathologist. Before joining the Els for Autism Foundation staff, Erin worked for Children's Healthcare of Atlanta-Marcus Autism Center as the Community Interventionist Manager, participating in research and educational outreach community-based projects. Erin has co-authored several publications on autism spectrum disorder topics, and she has presented and consulted extensively on a national and international level. She is an appointed member of both a scientific advisory committee and a clinical excellence committee for international autism organizations. Erin has her doctorate in special education, focusing on applied behavior analysis, from Nova Southeastern University, in Davie, Florida.

Conference Co-Host
HEALTHY LIVING |
WELL-BEING
March 23, 2023
Panel Moderator
9:30-10:30 a.m.

As the Program Director, Erin oversees the development and delivery of all programs and services from birth through adulthood. All Els for Autism therapeutic services are rooted in evidence-based practices and are available to individuals with and without ASD across ages. In addition to overseeing all therapeutic services, Erin is responsible for ensuring the mission of the Foundation in the interaction with the global autism community is maintained through global partnerships, professional observerships, research opportunities, consulting, and training opportunities.



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Jason Miletsky, B.S. CPT, Founder, and President, Exceptional Fitness Foundation

Jason Miletsky earned his B.S. degree from Nova Southeastern University in Behavioral Science. Jason is a certified Exceptional Student Education teacher. Currently, he is an Autism and Behavior Specialist for the Broward School District. Jason has an extensive background in Applied Behavior Analysis, athletics, fitness, recreation management, martial arts, and personal safety, program development, and implementation of developmentally appropriate programs and curriculum for typical individuals as well as those with special needs of all ages.

SPORTS | FITNESS

March 24, 2023

Active Demonstration

Fitness

10:30-11:45 a.m. &

1:00-2:15 p.m.

Panel Participant

3:30-4:30 p.m.

The combination of his experience in Applied Behavior Analysis, autism strategies, recreation, fitness, and coaching sports has provided him with the unique insight to develop the Exceptional Fitness Structured System™.



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Maricarmen Saleta, LGIT, WSIT, AAC, BA Psychology

With over 20 years of experience working with individuals with autism and related disabilities, Maricarmen Saleta works with parents, professionals, and organizations to amplify their knowledge on how to work with them in different recreational areas.

She worked at UM-NSU CARD as an Educational Support Specialist, implementing different programs with her colleagues like Surf Camps, Soccer Camps, Tennis Camps, Swimming Camps, and many others. She then dedicated over 10 years of passionate work to develop strategies, empowering tools, and techniques to teach swimming to individuals with different abilities.

Her Psychology, Behavior, and Education background, together with her Water Safety and Lifeguards certifications, has been the perfect mix to further her passion to positively influence the lives of the individuals and professionals she works with.

She is currently in the Endurance Sports Apparel industry, with the hope to continue making an impact in the world by including all individuals with any ability to all kinds of sports.

SPORTS | FITNESS

March 24, 2023

Co-presentation

9:15-10:15 a.m.

Panel Participant

3:30-4:30 p.m.



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Dr. Jack Scott, Executive Director, Florida Atlantic University Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD)

Jack Scott is the executive director of the Florida Atlantic University Center for Autism and Related Disabilities. He is an associate professor in the Department of Special Education and teaches courses on autism, inclusion, and behavior analysis. Dr. Scott received his doctoral degree from the University of Florida. His most recent book, *Safeguarding your child with autism*, is published by Woodbine and provides a toolkit for parents to reduce risks their child with autism will face.

SPORTS | FITNESS

March 24, 2023

Co-Presentation

9:15-10:15 a.m.

Dr. Scott has research interests in individualized instruction, suicide prevention for autistic people, police training and elopement prevention. He also has several grants examining the rates of participation by African American children in school autism programs. As a behavior analyst, he is active in linking behavioral analysts with emerging issues in safety and autism. He serves on the boards of several charter schools and as chair of the Panel of Professional Advisors and as a board member for the Autism Society of America.



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Dr. Marlene Sotelo, BCBA-D, MT-BC Executive Director, Els for Autism Foundation

Marlene has been working with individuals of all ages with autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disorders for over 25 years. Prior to joining the Els for Autism Foundation staff in 2014, she worked for the University of Miami-Nova Southeastern University Center for Autism and Related Disabilities for 12 years as the Director of Education and Training. She earned her Doctorate in Special Education from Nova Southeastern University where she is an adjunct faculty member. She is a certified special education teacher, board-certified music therapist, and doctoral-level board-certified behavior analyst.

As the Executive Director, Marlene serves on the board of directors for The Learning Center (ages 3-14) and The Learning Academy (ages 14-21) at The Els Center of Excellence campus in Jupiter, Florida and is the liaison between both public charter schools and the Foundation. In addition, she provides operational and programmatic support of the Ernie Els Centre for Autism South Africa and all of the programs and services offered at The Els Center of Excellence campus in Jupiter, Florida. Marlene's work around the world as an international consultant and speaker, along with the Foundation's mission to serve the global community led to the development of the Global Outreach Autism Learning Services (GOALS) at the Center. As a music therapist and professional singer, Marlene also spearheaded the development and roll-out of the 'Reach and Teach through the Arts' program and continues to provide oversight of the program with the Foundation's Recreation Services Coordinator.



Conference Co-Host
ARTS | LEISURE
March 23, 2023
Presentation
3:45-4:45 p.m.



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Tiago Toledo

Autism Spectrum Disorders, Applied Behavior Analysis, Neuromotricity and Psychomotricity graduate, BPhEd, Adapted PE Teacher

Tiago is a physical education teacher, he has been working with fitness programs for people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) for 18 years, he is going to talk about potential challenges that students with ASD may face in sports, teaching strategies, and benefits of sports.

SPORTS | FITNESS

March 24, 2023

Presentation

2:15-3:15 p.m.

Panel Participant

3:30-4:30 p.m.



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Jen Van Horn, DT, MS HS, Holistic Nutritionist

Jen Van Horn, DT, MS HS is a Holistic Nutritionist specializing in personalized nutrition plans for individuals that include cleanses, organic foods, and supplements to heal the body. She has been helping clients locally and internationally for over 22 years, working with hundreds of clients with Weight Management, Autism, Adolescent Health, Athletic Needs, Meal Planning, Gut Health, Pre + Post-Natal Care, Digestive Disorders, Detoxification, and Disease Prevention. She doesn't just tell her clients what to do; she teaches, guides, and encourages them on their personal journey to health.

**HEALTHY LIVING |
WELL-BEING**

March 23, 2023

Panel Participant

9:30-10:30 a.m.

In addition to starting her own practice, Jen Van Horn Health, she is a consulting nutritionist and co-developer for juice cleanse programs, as well as a lecturer, and health writer for various publications.

You can find more information and connect with Jen at www.jenvanhorn.com or on social media at [@jenvanhornhealth](https://www.instagram.com/jenvanhornhealth).



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ARTS | LEISURE
March 23, 2023
Presentation &
Panel Moderator
2:30-3:30 p.m.

Amy Wagenfeld, PhD, OTR/L, SCEM, EDAC, FAOTA, Principal of Amy Wagenfeld | Design

Amy Wagenfeld, Ph.D., OTR/L, SCEM, EDAC, FAOTA is an occupational therapist, therapeutic and universal design consultant, educator, researcher, and author. In addition to her teaching role with the New York Botanical Garden, she is on the faculty of Boston University's Post-Professional Occupational Therapy Doctoral program and the University of Washington's Department of Landscape Architecture, and is Principal of Amy Wagenfeld | Design, a therapeutic design consulting organization. Amy is a Fellow of the American Occupational Therapy Association, holds evidence-based design accreditation and certification (EDAC) through the Center for Health Design, specialty certification in environmental modifications (SCEM) through the American Occupational Therapy Association, and certification in Healthcare Garden Design through the Chicago Botanical Garden. She was recently awarded the American Occupational Therapy Association Recognition of Achievement for her unique blending of occupational therapy and therapeutic design. Amy publishes and presents widely on topics related to nature and health and is co-author of the award-winning book, *Therapeutic Gardens: Design for Healing Spaces* published by Timber Press.



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James A. Williams

James Williams is a gifted piano player originally from London, England, who is self-taught having learned to play by ear. He is a three-time Arts4All Florida Young Performers Program winner who has played for many different audiences, including churches, nursing/retirement/veterans' homes, coffee houses, Chamber of Commerce events, Tampa Yacht Club, and Temple Grandin at the Florida Centers for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD) annual conference in Orlando. James released his first album of interpretations of classical standards, *A Moment with the Classics*, in 2014 followed by *A Moment with The Classics II*. Most recently he has hosted community concerts and talent shows where James raised funds for charities, including those that help people with disabilities and at-risk youth.

ARTS | LEISURE

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Panel Participant

2:30-3:30 p.m.



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