

Mariah George

Founder, The SPATA Foundation | Parent, SPATA5L1 Child

Mariah George is the mother of 4-year-old Luca, who was diagnosed with SPATA5L1 Related Disorder at 16 months old. Determined to find a treatment for Luca, Mariah and Nicholas George founded The SPATA Foundation for all those affected by SPATA5 and SPATA5L1 Disorders.

Aside from The SPATA Foundation, Mariah works from home full-time, enjoys her two dogs and two cats, loves to read, and does freelance graphic design.

Burju Sari, M.Ed., TVI

Licensed Teacher of the Visually Impaired | CVI Certified

Burju Sari, M.Ed., TVI, is an experienced Teacher of the Visually Impaired, international speaker and trainer, and the founder of BrightSight Education and Consulting and CVI Turkiye. A graduate of UMass Boston's Master's Program in Education for Teachers

of the Visually Impaired, she has dedicated her career to supporting children and young adults with visual and multiple disabilities.

Burju worked for more than 12 years at Perkins School for the Blind, serving students aged 0–21 before continuing her work as an independent consultant. She holds an Executive MBA degree from Salem State University and a CVI Graduate Certificate from UMass Boston. During her three years at the Perkins CVI Center, she contributed to the development of the Perkins CVI Protocol and taught graduate-level courses at Fitchburg State University.

Her work is deeply inspired by her son, who has special needs and a CVI diagnosis. As the founder of CVI Turkiye, established in 2015, Burju has led professional training and student evaluations in various cities, promoting CVI awareness and best practices internationally.

Tapas Mukherjee, PhD

Postdoctoral Fellow | University of Toronto, Dept. of Immunology

Tapas Mukherjee is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Immunology at the University of Toronto, focusing on research interests that include inflammation, cell signaling, and its role in diseases like inflammatory bowel disease. He was the winner of the 2024 BD Biosciences Immunology Postdoctoral Award.

Tapas works in the Philpott/Girardin Lab directly under Dana Philpott.

Michael Kruer, MD

Program Director Pediatric Movement Disorders | Barrow Neurological Institute Phoenix Children's Hospital

When Dr. Michael Kruer was in medical school, he knew he wanted to work with children. But his advisors cautioned him against specializing in neurology. They told him it was one of the most difficult fields to practice—and that he may never be able to look a patient in the eye and tell them he could take away what ails them.

Kruer took this as a challenge. With advancements in gene therapy opening up incredible opportunities in neuroscience, he realized he could be a part of something much bigger than himself—an effort to take an entire field of medicine into uncharted territory, and give children affected by movement disorders hope that didn't seem possible just a few years ago.

Today, working with a consortium of physicians and researchers from around the world, Kruer is using cutting-edge technology to discover the genes that lead to cerebral palsy—a disabling, incurable brain disorder that affects thousands of children in the U.S. every year. This work has the potential to remove some of the mystery that comes with a cerebral palsy diagnosis, by giving families greater insights into the nature of their child's illness and helping doctors prevent complications before they arise.

Richard Novak, PhD

CEO + Co-Founder | Unravel Biosciences

Richard Novak, Ph.D. is a Termeer Fellow, bioengineer and entrepreneur dedicated to solving unanswerable questions through technology innovation. Prior to Unravel Bio, he was a

Lead Engineer at the Wyss Institute for Biologically Inspired Engineering at Harvard University where he managed fast-paced programs in drug discovery, advanced disease models, human Organ Chips, and integrated automation and sensor systems. He has nearly 20 years of experience in technology and therapeutics development. He is a founder and president of the nonprofit Future Scientist and a founder and director of the sample collection automation company Rhinostics Inc.

Frederic Vigneault, PhD

CSO + Co-Founder | Unravel Biosciences

Frederic Vigneault, Ph.D. is a molecular biologist with a drive to tackle unmet patient needs. Prior to Unravel Bio, his role as Senior Scientist at the Wyss Institute for Biologically Inspired Engineering at Harvard University enabled him to work across teams on multidisciplinary projects, including the initial development of CRISPR gene editing, low-cost diagnostics using synthetic biology, and DNA synthesis and sequencing that led to multiple startup companies. As a scientist at SRI International, he enabled development of systems-level signaling models. He has a background in plant molecular biology.