



ImPrints

Celebrating 100 Years of Child & Family Development in Detroit

FALL
2023



Tough Teen Experiences Spark Research into Adolescence

by Ryan Cunningham, MPSI Project Assistant

In the sitcom "Frasier," Frasier's mentor asks what sparked his interest in psychiatry. Frasier replies, "I was eight. I'd come home crying because one of the older boys had thrown my copy of *The Fountainhead* under a bus. My mother explained it wasn't because he didn't like the way I walked, or because I wore an ascot to school, it was because he didn't like himself. And at that very moment, I became a student of human behavior."

Though Hannah Schacter, PhD,

deals in the very real and serious business of academic research, her spark was much the same. "When I started college as a psychology major, I was blown away that I could empirically investigate all those tough teen experiences that make adolescence quite emotionally taxing for a lot of kids."

Dr. Schacter is an affiliate faculty member at MPSI. She attended Hamilton College in New York as an undergrad, UCLA for her PhD

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Dr. Schacter welcomes teens to Giant Step 2023.

MPSI STRATEGIC PLANNING



SCAN TO
READ OUR
MISSION

Much time, effort and thought is going into planning a five-year path forward for MPSI.

Under the guidance of Director Alissa Huth-Bocks, faculty and staff met regularly in the fall to refine MPSI's mission, vision and values and to outline five strategic directions. The work continues as subcommittees create action plans for each goal and craft the wording for the full Strategic Plan.

1930s Merrill Palmer Treasures Reveal Exquisite Detail

A rare gift was donated to MPSI from board member Seymour Nayer: A collection of papers from the estate of his late uncle that includes student assessments from Uncle Sandy's Merrill Palmer nursery school years.

Sanford "Sandy" Perlis attended MP from 1928 to 1931 and then returned three years later for summer camp and as a camp counselor. The papers are striking in the detail of their observations of Sandy's growth and development. Deemed of superior intellect at age 4, Dr. Perlis went on to become a renowned psychiatrist in Connecticut and a clinical professor at Yale University. The obituary of his death in 1994 was carried in *The New York Times*.

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ACHIEVEMENTS P. 3

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EARLY CHILDHOOD
CENTER P.8

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Nephew Seymour and his sister Susan also attended Merrill Palmer's nursery school. Their mother Corinne (Sandy's older sister) was a strong advocate of the education provided by MP, yet never attended the school herself. By the time her parents discovered the school, Corinne had "aged out," a loss she deeply regretted and later rectified by sending her own children there. Corinne also worked for many years as an administrator at Merrill Palmer.

"Reading through these assessments reinforced how seriously MP took its mission," Seymour said. As an attorney and partner with the Plunkett Cooney law firm, Seymour at times reads reports and assessments by psychologists. He found the MP reports a cut above. "I was very impressed, even a little taken aback by the quality of the observations and the writing," he said. "When we read this, we feel like we really know this little boy. No jargon and so much objective documentation. I am also struck by how the teachers wrote this level of report on every student in the classroom."

Some details are particularly entertaining:

"Sanford was a busy child at school, this being especially so this last year. He never seemed to be in a great hurry but gave the impression of moving quietly and steadily about his business."

"His play was always full of ideas, his activity purposeful. He did not just dig, wheel a wheelbarrow, or ride a bicycle for the activ-



A page from Sanford's detailed assessment (rt) focuses on physical development and diet. Below is a special invite to parents to visit their children at Merrill-Palmer Camp. Sanford drew the illustrations himself.

A 1934 portrait of Merrill Palmer nursery school student Sanford Perlis and his sister Corinne, painted by famous artist and poet Alice Archer Sewall James. The Perlis' secured a sitting with Mrs. James through faculty at Merrill Palmer, part of a now 100-year connection to MPSI.

MERRILL-PALMER SCHOOL
Report to Parents
on
Physical Measurements

Child SANFORD PERLIS

	Last Measurement	This Measurement	Suggestions
Date	10-11-33	2-12-34	
Age	7-9 mos.	8-1 mo.	
Period Covered	6 mos.	4 mos.	
Weight	65- 7/16	68- 2/16	Sanford is about the standard in both height and weight. He is making excellent gains.
Gain	6- 2/16	2-11/16	
Standard	67	61	
Height	49-12/16	51- 1/2	
Gain	1- 9/16	1- 5/16	
Standard	49- 8/16	50	

POSTURE
Miss King reports that Sanford's posture is good

SLEEP & ELIMINATION
Good

DIET
On the whole Sanford's diet is very good. Good variety. However, watch and see that Sanford gets about a quart of milk daily. It is particularly valuable for children who are growing as rapidly as Sanford is. A glass of milk with each meal might take the place of some of the bread he eats now.

*Margaret E. Buckenridge
Charles Wilson*



MERRILL-PALMER CAMP
Dyden, Michigan

PARENTS' VISITING DAY
Thursday, July 6, 1935

TIME:
4:30 to 9:00 P.M. Eastern Standard Time (Detroit Time)

PROGRAM:
4:30-7:00 P.M. - Games
Fishing
Horseback Riding
Nature Lore Exhibits
Hunting
Hunting Exhibits
7:00-7:45 P.M. - Buffet Supper - For visitors, campers and commensals
7:45-9:00 P.M. - Singing
Hickey's Story
Games for Adults and Children
9:00 P.M. - Farewell
YOU ARE cordially invited to attend.

ity itself, but because he was going to plant bulbs, was a workman on a construction job, or was riding in an automobile."

"He is recorded as having 'a sense of humor, not a quick, sharp sense, but rather slow and droll.' When he found humor in a situation, he broke into a delightfully contagious little giggle."

These treasured documents will soon be included in the Merrill Palmer Skillman archives of the Walter Reuther Library at WSU. To



view the papers digitally scan the QR code.

Honors & Achievements

Editor's Choice

MPSI trainee **Emily Pasman** published a commentary in a peer-reviewed journal that was nominated as an Editor's Choice. Emily co-authored *Knowing or Not Knowing: Living as Harm Reductionists in 12-Step Recovery in the Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*.



From left: Shirley Gray, LMSW; Ms. Weathington; Tahira Khalid, LMSW

A Beacon of Light for Detroit Moms and Babies

Beverly Weathington, LMSW, was honored as an "Ambassador of Light" in the lives of mothers and babies by SisterFriends Detroit this summer. SisterFriends is a nationwide volunteer program providing support to women and their families from pregnancy to baby's first birthday, with a mission to reduce maternal and infant mortality. The Detroit chapter is organized through the Detroit Health Department. Ms. Weathington is the community engagement coordinator of the MPSI'S Healthier Urban Families program.

She first worked with SisterFriends in 2018 providing virtual trainings for parents on topics such as self-esteem in children. A year later, she became a mentor, committing to work with one mom through her pregnancy and until the baby was a year old. Ms. Weathington (an experienced midwife) also chose to act as her mentee's doula. The delivery had a few surprises, but mom and baby came through it fine.

The award also came as a surprise. She had no idea she would be honored. "I have such gratitude for SisterFriends," she said. "They've given me so much. Working with them has been enriching for me."

Ms. Weathington knows from experience that pregnant and new moms often also need mental health support and counseling at a deeper level than peer volunteers can be expected to provide. She advocates for this type of support being readily available to parents with babies and young children and has the opportunity to offer it at the Early Child Support Clinic at Wayne Pediatrics, a recent initiative with the WSU School of Social Work to offer in-clinic mental health resources, assessments and referrals.

"The health and happiness of moms and babies depends on quality support at many levels," Ms. Weathington said. The clinic provides relationship-based services to children from birth to five, their parents and caregivers. To learn more about SisterFriends Detroit, call 313-961-BABY.

Trainees Win University Awards



Faiza Bakth won the *Betty Neitzel Memorial Award* for excellence in research and scholarship by a doctoral student in psychology, and also won the *Steven Lewis Memorial Award* for outstanding and creative contributions to research in human psychology.

Nicole Kouri received the *Ben & Brenda Rosen Award* for outstanding teaching and research by a graduate student.



Alexandra Ehrhardt won two awards in 2023: the *Heberlein Endowed Award* for excellence in teaching by a graduate student, and the Department of Psychology's *Graduate Teaching Award*.



Teens from 26 Schools Discover Common Ground and Friendship

What happens when you bring together 189 teens from across metro Detroit for a day of ice-breakers and open discussions?

A little bit of magic.

The Giant Step Teen Conference motto of “Inclusion, Harmony, Acceptance” comes alive. Despite fear and awkwardness – teens get to know each other. Strangers become friends. “Teens see what they have in common. It’s that simple,” said Giant Step volunteer



Clockwise from top left: Students stand for an opening exercise to wake their minds and bodies; discussion digs deep at Table 2; students queue to report to the room on what they learned; teens love posing in the Big Green Foot; the Co-Ette Club of Detroit continues its 40 year support of Giant Step.

Richard Thomas. “Once you get to know a person, you see how much alike you are. That’s how you build respect and friendship.”

In the 39 years since Giant Step began, thousands of ninth and tenth graders from urban, subur-

ban, public, private, charter, parochial, magnet and home schools have attended the free annual conference. Twenty-six schools sent students this year. At check-in, each student is assigned to a discussion table with students

Schacter from page 1

in developmental psychology, and completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Southern California. The community embeddedness, diverse student body, rich culture and history, and collegial focus on social determinants of health embodied by WSU, drew her to the campus and energizes

her today. She was also impressed by MPSI’s Giant Step Teen Conference (see above) and is now faculty advisor to the program.

She teaches undergraduate classes in introductory and developmental psychology. “With the intro course, I love that I get to be many students’ initial gateway into a discipline that I’m so passionate about.” This passion also drives

her research in adolescent peer relationships. In a large, government funded project, she and collaborators Drs. Hilary Marusak and Tanja Jovanovic are studying how bullying can alter adolescents’ physiological functioning and produce mental health difficulties. Dr. Schacter received the 2023 Early Career Award from the Alberti Center for Bullying Abuse Preven-



from other schools. They come face-to-face with different races, cultures, and backgrounds. “The students are wary at first. All those people they don’t know,” said Cheryl Deep, conference coordinator.

Trained facilitators encourage students to talk about topics that matter to them. This year, they covered social media,

bullying, immigration, parents, conflict, friendship and more. As the minutes passed, students became engaged. The energy in the room rose. “Getting to know someone you might not encounter in your everyday school or neighborhood can open attitudes for life,” said Hannah Schacter, PhD, a WSU psychology professor and Giant Step’s

faculty advisor (see p. 1).

Toward the conference end, each table sent a reporter to the microphone to share what the group had learned. Comments included:

“Getting to know people isn’t as tough as you think it will be. Everyone deserves a chance.”

“It really helps to know you aren’t the only person experiencing something hard.”

“Everyone is unique, but we all have things in common. We’re all humans.”

“The bonds we build today will help us build our world tomorrow.”

The event fits well with MPSI’s mission to improve the well-being of children and families. Director Huth-Bocks is proud of the institute’s decades of hosting it at WSU. “We realize a lot is going on around the world right now. It’s hard to take it all in and understand it sometimes,” she said in her opening remarks. “An event like Giant Step gives us an opportunity to build relationships and respectful conversations . . . holding to our motto of Inclusion, Harmony, Acceptance.”

tion at the University of Buffalo.

Currently, her lab is investigating whether daily experiences of social support can promote health in adolescents with asthma, who often face stigma in their peer group. In a newer line of research into hierarchies among friend groups, she is finding that adolescents who feel they’re at the bottom of the pecking order or who get bossed

around by close friends can feel more anxious and depressed for extended periods of time.

Whether it’s carrying an inhaler or reading Ayn Rand as a child, the things that set us apart in adolescence can also be used against us, to the detriment of our future growth and happiness.

Dr. Schacter’s initial spark to question why and how that hap-

pens continues aflame. “The overarching mission of my research is to strengthen adolescents’ peer relationships and reduce the suffering of those facing peer adversity,” she said. “I’m guided by a vision of a world where every adolescent enjoys the developmental benefits of peer relationships that are nurturing.”

An International Landmark of Multicultural Significance

THE FREER HOUSE

The historic 1892 Freer House has proudly served as home to Merrill-Palmer since 1921 and been part of WSU since 1983.



Autumn Focus: Freer and Japan

by William Colburn
Director, Freer House

Our partnerships with the DIA and the metro Detroit Japanese and Asian communities continue to grow and expand. Fall programs highlighted Freer's pioneering role as a world-renowned collector of Japanese art and the unique contributions of Freer and Detroit to the introduction of Japanese art and culture into the U.S. in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In October, we co-sponsored with the Friends of Asian Arts and Cultures/DIA, a screening of the documentary "Edo Avant Garde" at the Detroit Film Theatre, with



Linda Hoaglund (center) interviewed at the DIA as a slide of Freer in Japan towers over the background.



Frank Feltens, PhD, guest speaker with slide of "Waves at Matsushima"

the filmmaker Linda Hoaglund interviewed live on stage. This beautiful film positions the art of Edo period Japanese screens and scrolls as early precursors of modernism in the West. Freer, whom Ms. Hoaglund referred to as having "an incredible fortune, an incredible eye, and wonderful taste" is featured in the film as are many of the extraordinary works he collected. The film screening attended by over 150 people was followed by a day long Educators' Workshop, co-sponsored with the Center for Teaching about Asia, with 25 instructors learning a K-12 arts curriculum created by Ms. Hoaglund and based on themes in the film.

In November, we continued our focus on Japan with a lecture by Frank Feltens, PhD, curator of Japanese Art, Freer Gallery of Art, Na-

tional Museum of Asian Art, *Still Making Waves: Charles Lang Freer and the Waves at Matsushima*. The lecture was co-sponsored by the Japan America Society of Michigan and Southwestern Ontario, and the Friends of Asian Arts and Cultures/DIA.

More than 225 people attended the lecture followed by a reception for 90 guests at the Freer House to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the opening of the Freer Gallery of Art in D.C., known today as the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art. The reception guests enjoyed Japanese food and beverages with remarks by Consul General of Japan in Detroit, Mr. Yusuke Shindo, commemorating the Freer House and Detroit as the birthplace and origin of America's first national art museum.



Nov. 19 VIP Reception (R-L): Consul General of Japan in Detroit, Yusuke Shindo, offering a toast to Japan-U.S. friendship; Derrick Redding, Chair, Japan America Society of Detroit and Southwestern Ontario; Patrick Lindsey, WSU VP for Government Affairs; David Roden, Honorary Consulate of S. Korea in Detroit.



Detroit Institute of Arts

The Freer House hosted a tour and discussion with 12 Detroit Institute of Arts gallery teachers (above) on the Detroit life and legacy of art collector Charles Lang Freer. This collaboration with the Education and Learning Department, further expands the community engagement between the Freer House and the DIA.



University of Michigan

Deirdre Hennebury (above left), associate director of UM Museum Studies Program, and Brad Taylor,

November event co-sponsors (below L-R): Liseann Gouin, President, Japan America Society of Michigan and Southwest Ontario; David Weinberg, Freer House member and supporter; Katherine Kasdorf, Curator of the Arts of Asia and the Islamic World, DIA; Dr. Feltens, Curator of Japanese Art; Freer Gallery, National Museum of Asian Art; William Colburn, Director, Freer House.



FREER HOUSE MEMBERSHIP

When you join us, you help protect one of Detroit's most important architectural treasures. Membership includes reduced admission to lectures and events and helps raise awareness of Freer's legacy in the cultural history of Detroit and the nation.



Scan QR code to renew or to become a Freer House member today!

past associate director and current Freer House member, visited recently to discuss potential UM "Capstone" student projects this winter. The UM Museum Studies program has been a key educational partner with WSU's Freer House, including two past student projects in 2010 and 2017.



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Our Center is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and has earned a 5-star rating from the Michigan Quality Rating and Improvement System. The Center also offers FREE childcare through the **Great Start Readiness Program** (GSRP) and the **Child Care Access Means Parents in School** (CCAMPIS) grant whose parents are Pell Grant eligible WSU undergraduate students.



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complete our pre-screener form.

PHOTO: Each fall ECC children take a nature walk around our school to collect leaves and make observations about the changes in our outdoor environment. Children sort leaves according to color and then report how many they've collected by using markers to color code their nature graph.