



# ImPrints

## MPSI's Newest Faculty Member Studies Wars' Effects

Military families face tough challenges. A service member's deployment means parenting from halfway around the world, leaving the remaining parent to field family decisions – and face parenting challenges – alone. Service members miss school concerts, teacher conferences, and even the births of their children. Since the beginning of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, 2 million American children have had a parent deployed in military service. What toll does this take on the mental health of children and their parents?

Until recently, research into military life concentrated on children with diagnosed psychological problems. While important, "this is a narrow view," said associate professor Julie Wargo Aikins, Ph.D., the newest member of MPSI's faculty and jointly appointed in Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences. "We should look at whether children are meeting normal developmental milestones. Are preschoolers regulating their emotions? Are older students achieving in school and making friends?" Children who do not meet these milestones have long-term risks for developing psychopathology, she said. "The right interventions could help these children the most by preventing problems in the future."

### Combining Forces

Dr. Wargo Aikins comes to MPSI from the University of Connecticut where she first studied the children of deployed Army members. Her husband, Deane Aikins, Ph.D., was a member of the National Center for PTSD Clinical Neuroscience Division at Yale



*The right interventions could help these children the most by preventing problems in the future.*

– Dr. Wargo Aikins

University studying adult service members suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. They began working together about three years ago when they got funding to conduct an online survey asking Army mothers about the well-being of their 3- to 7-year-olds during fathers' deployment.

"This was just a snapshot, a one-time assessment," said Dr. Wargo Aikins. "But the military was quite interested in this study because we looked at developmental milestones. We translated what we knew from civilian science in child development to benefit this special population." It also inspired Dr. Wargo Aikins and her husband to seek two academic positions under the same university roof. "These are not easy to find," she said, grateful for the opportunity Wayne State offered. Her husband is also on the faculty in Psychiatry and Behavioral

See page 2

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

**Kresge Foundation Supports Wayne State's Work with Detroit Preschools** pg.2

**Bringing Freer's Garden Back to Life** pg. 4



Freer Gallery of Art Archives

**Expert on High-Risk Families Joins Faculty** pg. 7

**Explorations in Development Sept. 19 & 20 "Reducing Infant Mortality"** Back page



## Kresge Foundation Supports Wayne State's Work with Detroit Preschools

The Kresge Foundation gave \$246,000 to MPSI and the College of Education to support the recently formed Woodward Corridor Early Childhood Consortium for the next three years. Coordinated by Dr. Sharon Elliott, associate professor in WSU's College of Education, the Consortium will address the needs of nearby preschool and childcare centers as they strive to improve quality. MPSI is working with the College of Education on the initiative.

One of the Consortium's primary activities is providing professional development training for member center directors and teachers, especially in early childhood education. "Our other main goal is to promote high quality care by helping these centers implement evidence-based best practices," Dr. Elliott said. Beyond the 14 child care centers that are currently members, the Consortium also includes

See page 7



MPSI preschoolers learn about composting.



*Our other main goal is to promote high quality care by helping these centers implement evidence-based best practices.*

- Dr. Elliott



### WARS from page 1

Neurosciences and Detroit's John D. Dingell Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Life is simpler. "We don't have to deal with multiple Internal Review Boards and grant offices," she said. "It streamlines a lot of things."

They like Detroit, too. Husband Deane grew up in Farmington Hills and Dearborn, so their children (an 11-year-old boy and a 7-year-old girl) will now be near their grandparents. Midtown's renaissance is another bright spot, including exceptional restaurants. "We're huge fans of *Slows To*

Go," Dr. Wargo Aikins said.

A benefit to conducting research funded by the military is yearly progress reviews with funders, military stakeholders and scientists. Two additional grants have sprung from these discussions. The first will compare earlier results with groups of civilian single mothers and children, civilian children in dual-parent homes, and children whose parent is deployed to a low-risk military location, to isolate the critical factors in children's mental health. "We're trying to determine the extent to which the children are actually being affected by the mother's

perception of danger versus the father not being in the home."

### What Do We Know?

Their studies have shown that preschool children fare the worst when the father is deployed. Three distinct groups emerge: children who likely have current psychopathology; children at significant risk of developing psychopathology in the next 3 to 5 years, and; a group that remains healthy and resilient for reasons yet unknown.

"We're also finding that the mothers are very depressed and there are few services

## NEWS & HONORS



ONDERSMA

MPSI faculty member **Dr. Steven Ondersma** was named a fellow in the American Psychological Association's Division 37, *The Society for Child and Family Policy and Practice*. Fewer than 100 professionals nationwide hold this honor. The Society applies psychological knowledge to advocacy, service delivery, and public policies affecting children, youth and families. Recent high-focus topics include divorce and custody, child abuse prevention, pediatric AIDS, drug-exposed infants, latchkey children and homelessness. Prof. Ondersma's research tackles maternal substance abuse through brief, low-cost interventions to decrease substance use and improve child well-being.



DEXTER

One of MPSI's first trainees to be named a fellow, **Casey Dexter**, will join Berry College, a private university in Georgia, this fall as an assistant professor of psychology. The soon to be Dr. Dexter was mentored at MPSI by a proud Dr. Ann Stacks.

MPSI graduate student fellow **Amy Loree** won 2nd place in Wayne State University's Graduate Exhibition Day for her research poster, *Child trauma and alcohol-related consequences: the mediating effects of peer drinking*. The work

surveyed WSU undergrads at freshman orientation, mid-year and at the start of sophomore year about alcohol use and factors that might be protective or increase risk. Results suggest that experiencing childhood physical abuse or general traumatic events may lead individuals to seek out alcohol-using peers which may, in



LOREE

turn, increase the risk of personal alcohol use and consequences. The Graduate Exhibition celebrates graduate student research, scholarship and creative work through poster exhibits, oral presentations, and visual arts displays. Amy is a doctoral student in the Department of Psychology.



GOLDWIRE

**Amy Loree** received additional honors when she and MPSI fellow **Travis Goldwire** won the Graduate School's highly competitive *Thomas C. Rumble Fellowship* award for 2013-14. The fellowship provides a generous tuition stipend for doctoral students and helps them achieve expected outcomes as they complete their degree.

An alum of the MPSI undergraduate training program won 1st place in the Wayne State psychology department's research poster competition. **Erin Mason** trained at MPSI for two years and is mentored by MPSI faculty member **Dr. Valerie Simon**. Erin, who is now a second year clinical psychology graduate student, won for her poster titled, *Youth's Perceptions of Change Subsequent to Child Sexual Abuse and Associations with Psychosocial Functioning*.



MASON



SIMON

available to support them," she said. "This could be a potent contributor to how children adjust to their father's deployment." The Army's reaction? Dr. Wargo Aikins sees clear progress in their response. "The Army knows that a healthy family is one factor that allows soldiers to continue to perform their jobs well," she said. "Thirty percent of future service members are children of current service members. It's a legacy."

### Other Tough Teen Transitions

Dr. Wargo Aikins also studies civilian

adolescents, especially during transitions to middle school, high school and college. "How does teen attachment to parents affect maturity? What role does peer rejection play in social problems, drop-out rates and criminal conduct? What triggers or protects against depression?" she asked. "I'm interested in all of this." Her research points to the role of social supports in healthy adjustments to teen changes. "Positive social relationships make life full," she said.

For now, though, military research is at the forefront for Dr. Wargo Aikins, a career focus she would not have predicted 10

years ago – before the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. "We are able to meet with policy groups in Washington, and with folks who make decisions about intervention support. There is enthusiastic support for promoting services for military families "

She reflects for a moment on the essence of her work. "These families have sacrificed a tremendous amount in the service of our country," she said softly. "We owe it to them as a country to support them."

**FREER HOUSE** *is home to MPSI faculty, administrative offices and meeting rooms*

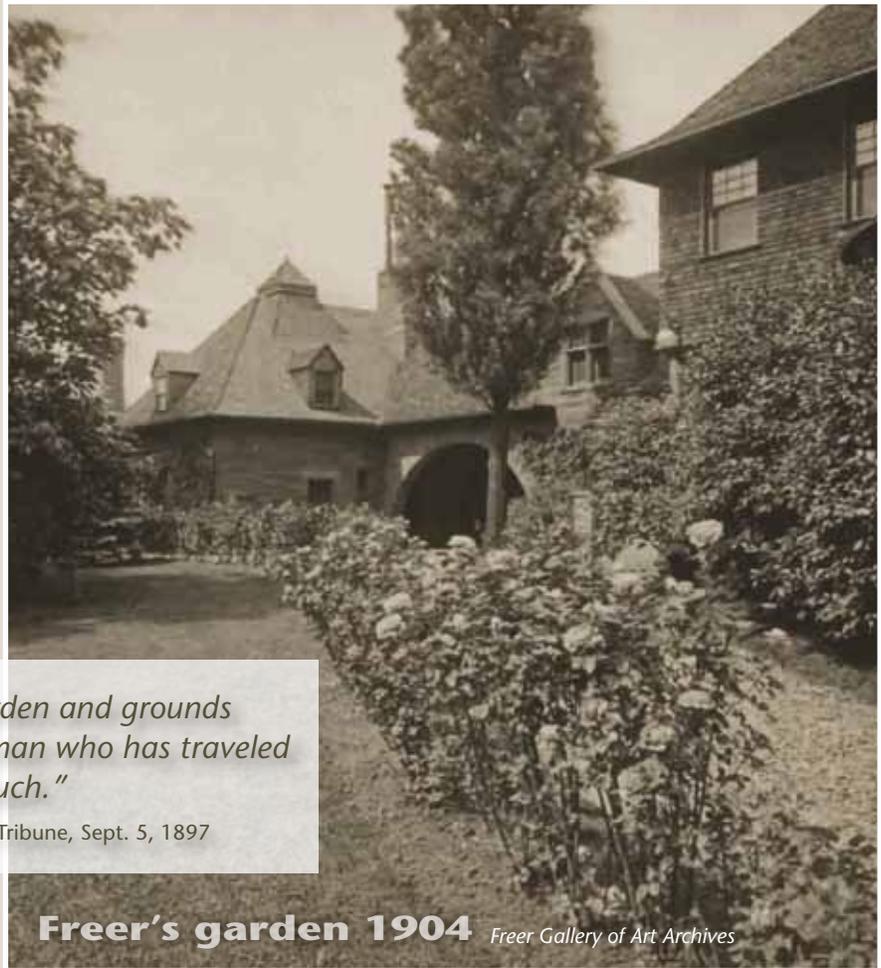
## Bringing Freer's Garden Back to Life

Charles Lang Freer (1854-1919) made his fortune manufacturing railroad freight cars in Detroit, but he made his mark in the art world as a revered collector of Asian and Middle Eastern art who also generously supported American masters like Whistler, Dewing and Tryon. He built his remarkable shingle-style home on East Ferry Avenue in 1892 to house this large collection and designed the exterior landscape as the perfect frame to his home.

After construction of his house was completed in 1892, Freer designed the gardens with careful attention

to detail. He consulted his architect, Wilson Eyre, and several artist friends from New York, including Thomas W. Dewing, to help him attain a garden of quiet beauty and harmonious character. On a deeper level, the gardens mirrored the attention to detail and blend of Asian and Western cultures so evident on the interior of his home. He used Asian and Western plant varieties. An Asian stone lantern, a 1906 gift from S. Yamanaka of Yamanaka and Co., a leading Asian antiquities dealer, became a focal point of the garden.

Today the Freer House contains the offices of Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute's faculty and staff. In the decades since Freer occupied the home, the courtyard garden underwent many changes. After Merrill Palmer School purchased the home in 1920, the garden became a playground complete with sandbox, swings and sliding board. In 1958, the playground moved to its current



*"Mr. Freer's garden and grounds are those of a man who has traveled far and seen much."*

Detroit Sunday News Tribune, Sept. 5, 1897

**Freer's garden 1904** *Freer Gallery of Art Archives*

Knapp building location. A new minimalist green garden design by Eleanor Roche was installed in 1966. This has since deteriorated with only a few hardy plants surviving.

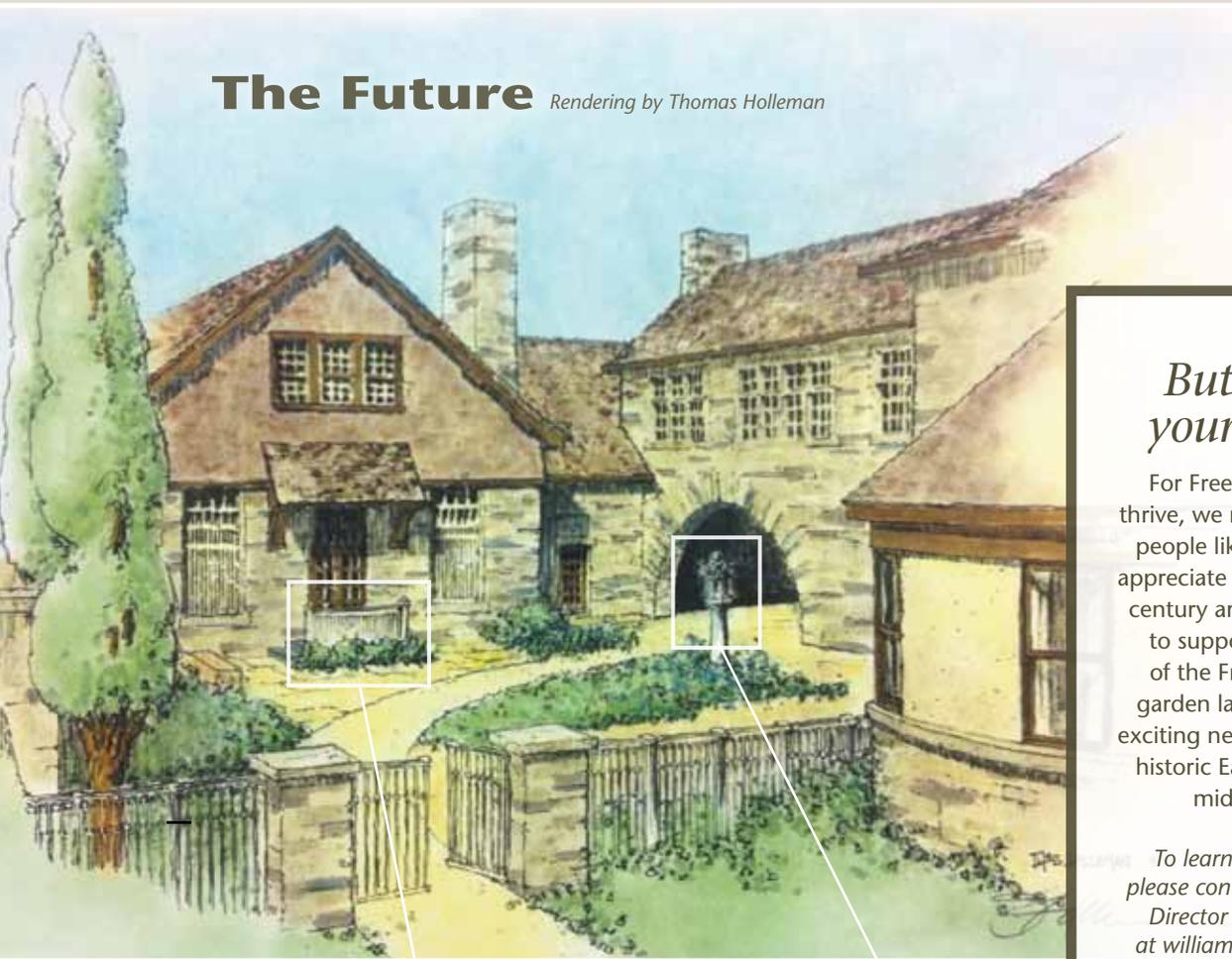
The Freer Garden Campaign will restore this secluded spot in Detroit's midtown to an outdoor space that reflects Charles Freer's original aesthetic vision while providing an inviting courtyard equally suited to small gatherings or solitary reflection. In addition, the project goal is to create a revitalized garden landscape this is low maintenance and environmentally sustainable.

### Planting the Seeds of Success

Progress is already being made on the garden project. The recently formed Garden Restoration Committee has identified

historically appropriate plantings through the advice and research of members David Michener, Ph.D., U-M Matthaei Botanical Gardens curator, and historian Thomas W. Brunk, Ph.D, author of *The Charles Lang Freer Residence: the Original Freer Gallery of Art*, The Americana Foundation funded a detailed garden plan created by K.C. Runci-man Landscapes (see watercolor). Plans include replicating the missing railings on the steps to the Peacock Room and appropriate new perimeter fencing. Before the garden plan can be undertaken, drainage system repairs and grading of the site are required. Efforts are underway to address these immediate concerns, with Wayne State University and the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute continuing to provide generous staffing and administrative support.

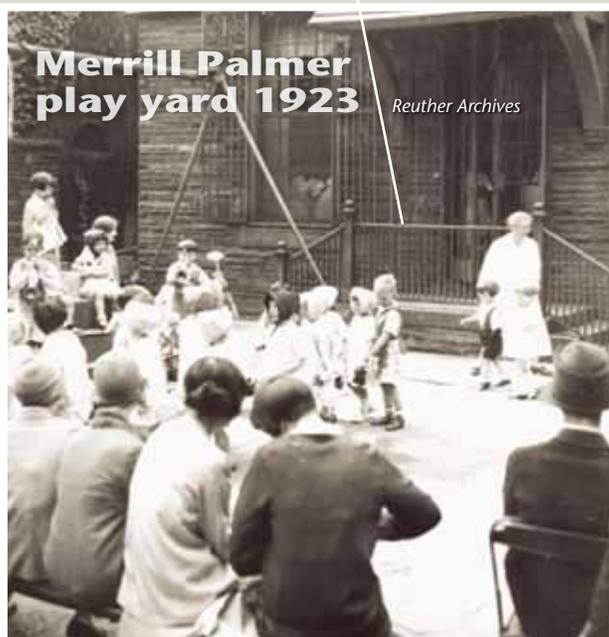
## The Future Rendering by Thomas Holleman



### *But we need your help, too*

For Freer's garden to truly thrive, we need donations from people like you, people who appreciate Detroit's turn-of-the-century architecture and wish to support the restoration of the Freer House and its garden landscape. This is an exciting next step in revitalizing historic East Ferry Street and midtown Detroit.

To learn how you can help please contact William Colburn, Director of the Freer House, at [williamcolburn@wayne.edu](mailto:williamcolburn@wayne.edu) or 313-664-2500.



**Merrill Palmer play yard 1923** Reuther Archives



*Replication of the Peacock Room wrought iron railing and original Asian stone lantern, located today outside the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., are priority goals in the Freer Garden Campaign.*

## MEMORY LANE

### *Four-Year-Olds Try a Little Misbehavin'*

Dear Editor of Imprints,

From 1942 to 1944, I was a preschooler at Merrill Palmer. I am blessed with vivid recall of many details of the days I spent there – very happy days.

I was one of a tight-knit group of four children who played together constantly, much to the consternation of the grownups who tried for months to get us to “play with the other children, dear.” Our group was Dickie, David, Carole and me, also called Carol. We girls were eventually known as the Terrible Carols, a distinction we rather enjoyed!

As I understood it from my mother, my class was the second – normative – group of children “studied” by Dr. Arnold Gesell (a psychologist and pediatrician who helped to form the field of child development), theoretically proving that his documented definition of the normal preschooler was valid and reliable. I don’t know how he defined and documented the first study. I do know how things were “documented” about our group.

We carried notes back and forth from home to MP and from MP to home. The notes from home originally contained true facts about what I ate for breakfast, lunch and dinner and how much I pooped, etc. After my mother learned I might be expelled, because I did not eat a “normal” diet or poop a “normal” amount, she panicked and asked another mother what she should do. The woman stared at her for a minute, and then said, “You lie!”

#### **Who Is Hiding in the Wall?**

Not only did the four of us stick together, we usually occupied half of the Problem Eaters Table – by choice. We’d figured out that by being sent to the Problem Eaters Table (until we cleaned our plates or the grownups gave up), we could avoid taking naps and have unstructured play time instead. One day while we sat at the table, I heard noises in the wall. It sounded like people. They whispered and rattled papers. Sometimes they laughed a lot.

I asked my mother about it and she said they were students learning how to be teachers, like my Daddy. To be good teachers, they had to understand how children acted. They watched us through small windows in a special room upstairs, writing it all down in a report. They were not supposed to make any noise, because we should never know they are there. If we heard them, that was a bad mistake on their part.

The next day, I told Carole, Dickie and David all of that. We found the small “gunport” windows. We talked about strategy. Mind you, we were four-year olds! We quickly realized that if we looked up and acted like we knew they were there, the jig was up. But we couldn’t resist a captive audience. I’m (not really) ashamed to admit it, but we “acted out” as much as we dared. It had the desired result, too. Audible laughter increased. Pencils dropped and papers rattled. Eventually our audience settled down, and then so did we.

I hope you got a good chuckle from my little anecdotes. Those were among the milder ones. We gave the folks a good ride, but it was a lovely time! It does my heart good to know that Merrill Palmer (Skillman) Institute is still there and doing well.

Carolyn Cybele Sieradzki  
(Carol Lou Siera at Merrill Palmer)

Thank you, Carolyn, for this beautiful, honest and funny recollection. It is sure to strike a chord with many readers. - The Editor



## MPSI Welcomes Expert on High-Risk Families

Infants, children and families are the target of Dr. Carolyn Dayton's extensive research and clinical experience. As a new faculty member in WSU's School of Social Work, Dr. Dayton works to identify biological and psychosocial interventions to prevent or treat early signs of psychopathology, with special attention to children exposed to violence and poverty from birth to age five. She has clinical experience working with high-risk families at various settings such as home, centers and hospitals.

Dr. Dayton completed a postdoctoral fellowship in the University of Michigan's department of psychiatry. She was attracted to the School of Social Work because of the close partnership she could also have with MPSI. Her research laboratory is located in the MPSI complex, next to the Infant Mental Health labs of close colleague Dr. Ann Stacks. Dr. Dayton's extensive training in the interdisciplinary field of infant mental health further strengthens her connection to the work of MPSI.



DR. DAYTON

### Research Interests:

- Infant Mental Health
- Domestic violence in pregnancy and early childhood
- Influence of fathering on early child development

## Giant Step Teen Conference Celebrates BIG 3-0

Cut the cake and light the candles cause Michigan's longest running teen conference on inclusion is about to turn 30 years old. From humble beginnings as the inspiration of Detroit social worker Mary Agnes Miller Davis, the former Metro Detroit Teen Conference has changed its name and updated its focus throughout the years to stay current.

But one thing hasn't changed: Local teenagers still need opportunities to meet teens from different backgrounds, neighborhoods, ethnicities and cultures. Today Giant Step hosts 275-325 students a year at the free conference organized through MPSI. Trained facilitators lead small groups of students, who have never met each other before, in discussions to uncover what they have in common. They enter as strangers and leave as friends.

This year's conference moves to a new venue – The Greater Grace Conference Center on 7 Mile Road in Detroit. We start at 8:30 am on Tuesday, October 29 and include a free lunch and a special, separate workshop for the counselors and chaperones who accompany the students. Former State House Representative Maureen Stapleton, who attended the very first teen conference in 1983, will give our keynote address.

*Would you like to be part of Giant Step's continued success? Please consider donating \$30 dollars to honor our 30 years. Make your check payable to MPSI Giant Step Conference and mail it to Wayne State University, Beecher House Fund Office, 5475 Woodward Avenue, Detroit, MI 48202. We thank you and our teens thank you. Questions? Contact Trudy Shiemke at [tshiemke@wayne.edu](mailto:tshiemke@wayne.edu).*

## Kresge from page 2

several community groups, especially Midtown Detroit, Vanguard Community Development Corp., Excellent Schools Detroit, and First Children's Finance, Inc., a founding member whose initial funding in 2010 got the Consortium off the ground.

Last October, the Consortium held its first professional development conference at Wayne State University. More than 70 early childhood teachers and staff attended the half-day of presentations on topics such as children's brain development and communicating with families. The child care center directors were par-

ticularly interested in learning about the new Michigan-mandated Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) designed to assess program effectiveness and eventually allow parents to compare centers. The Consortium will help centers prepare for the QRIS reporting and measurement requirements. The Kresge Foundation grant supports the annual professional development conference, helps teachers implement what they learn with one-on-one mentoring, and allows the Consortium to expand its membership and community impact.

Dr. John Hannigan, deputy director of MPSI, and Anna Miller, executive director

of WSU's two Early Childhood Centers, are co-leaders of the Consortium. According to Anna, high quality early education can be especially beneficial to children raised in poverty. "It can improve their health, increase the likelihood of graduation from high school and lessen their chances of emotional disturbance and committing a crime as a juvenile," she said. "We are pleased to be in a position to help these centers make a positive difference with every child who walks through their doors."



MERRILL PALMER SKILLMAN INSTITUTE *for Child & Family Development*

## REGISTRATION

### Early Bird Registration

(Until August 1)

\$60 per day

\$110 both days

Students: \$25 per day

### Regular Registration

\$75 per day

\$140 both days

Students: \$35 per day

### ALL walk-in registrations

\$100 per day

Registration includes  
continental breakfast, CEs  
and incredible speakers!

#### For more info:

Beverly Weathington at  
313-664-2526 or  
ac8787@wayne.edu

OR

Trudy Shiemke  
313-664-2527 or  
tshiemke@wayne.edu



# SAVE THE DATE Sept. 19 & 20

## 2013 Explorations in Development

*Reducing Infant Mortality: Emerging Trends  
in Prevention & Developmentally Informed Care*

**LOCATION:** Michigan First Credit Union, 27000 Evergreen,  
Lathrup Village, MI 48076

### Thursday, Sept 19, 9:30 am - 4:30 pm

Renee Canady, PhD, MPA

Michelle (Mickey) Sperlich, MA, CPM

Janine Bieda, Ph.D., MS, CNM, WSU School of Medicine

### Friday, Sept 20, 9:30 am - 4:30 pm

Jean Powlesland, MS, RN

Jennifer Hofherr, OTR/L, C/NDT, University of Illinois Medical Center at Chicago

*HOSTED BY: The Healthier Urban Families Outreach Program and the Infant Mental Health Program  
of the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute for Child & Family Development at Wayne State University*