



MERRILL PALMER
SKILLMAN INSTITUTE



2023 & 2024
REPORT



Over 100 Years Supporting Child & Family Development



WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY
DETROIT, MI

contents

Pregnancy & Infants	1
Infant Mental Health	2
Baby Court	3
Project LAUNCH	4
The Roots of IMH	6
Early Childhood	8
Early Childhood Center	9
School Age & Adolescents	11
Healthier Urban Families	12
Professional Trainings	12
Giant Step Teen Conference	14
Student Training	16
Grants	20
Freer House	22
Support	25

From the Director

Impactful Work Takes Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute to New Heights

It's been nearly two years since I became director of the Institute, on the heels of the Covid-19 pandemic and a virtual Centennial Celebration highlighting 100 years of serving children and families in Detroit. The Institute has been restored to a vibrant hub of activity with exciting and meaningful work done every day by committed faculty, staff, and students. As has always been the case, MPSI continues to respond to ever-changing community and societal concerns and pursues ground-breaking scientific questions to improve the health and development of families here and across the world.

Our research, training, and programs have grown and strengthened over the last two years. One highlight is a prestigious \$4 million grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) awarded to a MPSI team of seven faculty and staff. This Project LAUNCH (Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children's Health) grant will support extensive services to children birth to 8 years of age, and their parents and caregivers, in pediatric, home-based, and early care and education settings, as well as training and assistance to professionals in multiple child-serving systems.



Dr. Huth-Bocks leads MPSI faculty, students and staff at the historic Freer House, MPSI's home since 1920.

Our training programs have expanded as well, and now include graduate-level trainees from departments never before connected to MPSI, increasing our ability to learn about and conduct multi-disciplinary and team science. I am also proud of our growing connections and collaborations with Detroit-based community agencies, organizations, and coalitions that help inspire and improve the work we do.

It is an exciting time at the Institute! Please visit, reach out and tell others about us, as we continue to raise awareness about our long history of impactful work on behalf of children and families.

All the best,

Alissa Huth-Bocks, PhD
Director, Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute



Mom Eboni Pullins helps medical assistant LaDetra Bridges weigh and measure daughter Olivia at a checkup in the Early Childhood Support Clinic at Wayne Pediatrics. (Kimberly Mitchell, Detroit Free Press)

Pregnancy & Infants

Conception through infancy is a sensitive developmental period. MPSI faculty have studied the impact of stress and environmental risk throughout pregnancy, including how a parent's anxiety and trauma, as well as strengths and knowledge, can affect the fetus. After birth, the Infant Mental Health program guides clinicians to identify and address issues that could impact well-being.

MPSI faculty are co-leading a longitudinal study of inflammation and neurodevelopment from the fetus to age 9. Other faculty are examining the role of fathers, trauma, and interventions that support parenting and child well-being.

COVER: Clockwise from lower left: At the Early Childhood Support Clinic in Detroit, medical assistant LaDetra Bridges speaks with social worker Beverly Weathington about a patient's needs (Kimberly Mitchell, Detroit Free Press) | Hiroshi Kurumisawa (r), vice president of Comerica Bank and Akemi Kurumisawa | Preschoolers at the ECC practice engineering skills | Table discussion engages a participant at the 2024 Giant Step Teen Conference, where teens from across the city meet to get to know each other | April Vollmer (l), a MPSI trainee in developmental science, discusses her research on gender with MPSI Director Huth-Bocks at Lifespan Alliance Research Day | Jessie Fullencamp, LMSW, co-presented a CE session for educators and parents on "Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth in School Settings" at the Giant Step Teen Conference. | Center: Eboni Pullins brings her daughter in for her four-month checkup at the Early Childhood Support Clinic (Kimberly Mitchell, Detroit Free Press).

Infant Mental Health

Relationships during the earliest years of life provide the basis for a child's development and mental health. A child's earliest caregivers provide an understanding of their culture, race, ethnicity, and social identities, which in turn helps the child to develop a sense of themselves and the world around them.

Infant Mental Health (IMH) is a multi-disci-

plinary field focused on social-emotional capacities and children's primary relationships from birth through age 5. IMH professionals recognize the importance of consistent and nurturing relationships with caregivers. They are trained to consider each important relationship: the caregiver-child; the professional-caregiver; and the professional-supervisor.



Moments like this, as Terrence Fulton soothes his 15-day-old daughter, can help babies build resilience for life's challenges ahead. (Bridge photo by Robin Erb)



**Carolyn Dayton, PhD
LP, LMSW, IMH-E®**

Dr. Dayton is the associate director of the Infant Mental Health Dual-Title Program at MPSI and the director of the Early Childhood Support Clinic at Wayne Pediatrics in Detroit, where her team helps young children and parents address developmental and mental health challenges. Her research is interdisciplinary, focusing on fathering in urban settings and identifying biological and psychosocial factors that impact parenting and early child development. She also works on policy reform to support urban fathers. With over 20 years of clinical experience in diverse settings, Dr. Dayton is a licensed clinical social worker and psychologist, and an endorsed Infant Mental Health Mentor in clinical practice and research.



IMH excerpts read excerpts of their contributions to the book, "Honoring Voices within Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health" at the spring book launch. MPSI faculty Dr. Caringi was co-editor.



Ann Stacks, PhD, LMFT, IMH-E®

Dr. Stacks directs MPSI's Infant Mental Health Dual-Title Program. She is a community-engaged scholar who studies dimensions of caregiving that support early childhood social-emotional development. She has been the university partner for Wayne County Baby Court and is the co-evaluator of Michigan's Early Childhood Court Expansion project. In 2024, the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health awarded her the Betty Tableman Award for her work to sustain and expand Michigan's Early Childhood Court Program.

Baby Court **Safe, Nurturing Homes for Young Children**

About one-fourth of children, age 3 and under, who are in Michigan's child welfare system become victims of child abuse or neglect. Baby Court's goal is to change that. Dr. Stacks has served as the university partner for the Wayne County Baby Court since 2009 and trained hundreds of child welfare workers, attorneys and jurists on the model, a way to ensure that young children in the child welfare system grow up in permanent, nurturing homes.

Dr. Stacks' research focuses on caregiving that supports social and emotional development in

early childhood, particularly in families placed at risk, including those coping with poverty and maltreatment.

She has been working with Bryan Victor, PhD, of the School of Social Work to evaluate a \$3.1 million, five-year grant from the federal Health Resources and Services Administration to sustain and expand Michigan's infant-toddler court programs. With funding from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund, she led the development of on-line training for professionals working in infant/toddler court teams.

“*Early childhood courts, like Wayne County Baby Court, ensure that families receive services that are both trauma- and attachment-informed to support parent-child relationships, child development and reunification.*”

- Dr. Stacks

Project LAUNCH



Carla Caringi, PhD, LMSW, IMH-E®

Dr. Caringi is an assistant professor (research) for the Infant Mental Health Dual-Title Program and project director for MPSI Project LAUNCH: Young Child Wellness in Detroit. She works with graduate students enrolled in the IMH Dual-Title Program, teaches a graduate level IMH seminar, engages in research, and provides community trainings on a variety of topics related to professional wellness, home visiting, and diversity-informed reflective supervision/consultation. Dr. Caringi is also co-editor of the 2024 book *Honoring Voices Within Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health: Relationship-Based Stories from the Field*, available through the ZeroToThree.org website.



Help for Young Families and the Professionals Who Serve Them

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) granted \$4 million over five years to a MPSI project to help prevent serious emotional and behavioral problems in Detroit’s young children while promoting healthy development and reducing health disparities. The grant is part of SAMHSA’s Project LAUNCH (Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children’s Health) program.

MPSI Project LAUNCH will educate and support hundreds of parents and other adults who care for young children while increasing access to high-quality infant and early childhood mental health services in multi-sector settings (home visiting, pediatric clinics, classrooms) as well as early childhood education for children ages 0 to 8.

Dr. Carla Caringi, who won the 2024 Selma Fraiberg Award for her contributions to services for

infants, young children and families, is principal investigator. “This funding allows us to strengthen opportunities to support babies, families and professionals in Detroit,” Dr. Caringi said. “From medical professionals to early childhood educators to parents to mental health providers, this project considers all those who are committed to young children in Detroit.”

The needs of many young families in Detroit are high. Thirty percent of Detroiters live below the poverty line, with 21% of children living in extreme poverty. About 40% of Detroit’s children have experienced multiple adverse childhood events. More than half of Detroit’s children have no access to high-quality early education and childcare.

MPSI Project LAUNCH has set ambitious goals to meet these needs and “will work with com-

Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children's Health

munity members to ensure services are relevant to their lived experiences and honors their perspectives," Dr. Caringi said. The grant will provide:

- Culturally appropriate behavioral health screening and assessments of children birth to 8 and their parents/caregivers.
- Infant and early childhood mental health interventions.
- Family and parent training about early child development and culturally appropriate and effective parenting strategies.
- Behavioral health training in primary care settings as part of integrated pediatric primary care.
- Mental health consultation in early care and education settings.
- Creation of a community-based Detroit Young Child Wellness Council.

In addition to Dr. Caringi, who also coordinates clinical training for graduate students in the Infant Mental Health Dual-Title Program at MPSI, the team consists of Carolyn Dayton (Director of Integrated Care); Ann Stacks (Systems Integra-



MPSI faculty and students gather with IMH experts at the Freer House. Clockwise from left: Carla Caringi, Alissa Huth-Bocks, Carolyn Dayton, Bev Weathington, Emilia McLeod, Kimberly Diamond, Lucy McGoron, Amina Ahmed, Ann Stacks.

tion Liaison); Lucy McGoron (Evaluation Lead); Olivenne Skinner (Director of Health Equity); Beverly Weathington (Coordinator of Community Outreach and Engagement); and MPSI Director Huth-Bocks.



Alissa Huth-Bocks, PhD, IMH-E®

MPSI Director Dr. Huth-Bocks conducts longitudinal studies with caregivers during the transition to parenthood to better understand how parental characteristics, as well as psychosocial conditions, affect the adjustment to parenthood and early childhood development. Her studies have examined the impact of several risk factors, such as exposure to interpersonal violence, parental mental health and substance use disorders, and poverty on the parent-child relationship with a focus on mechanisms that help explain the intergenerational transmission of trauma. This research has led to the examination of prevention and early intervention programs aimed at mitigating risks and preventing the onset of early childhood psychopathology.

Dr. Huth-Bocks enjoys collaborative and interdisciplinary team science that helps inform efforts at improving child and family wellness and resilience, especially among diverse families living in urban settings.

Roots of Infant Mental Health Trace Back 100 Years

by Hilary Ratner, PhD, Wayne State Emerita Professor

BELOW: Merrill-Palmer provided Infant Service, starting in 1927. The program helped students and faculty further their knowledge of infant development through home visits, evaluations, and data collection.

“ I wasn’t a very good mother because I was scared and lonely most of the time during the first couple years. . . Every cry I was afraid something terrible was about to happen and I expect I (passed on) that fear. . . although in those days I knew nothing about such things.”

Those words might have come from an exhausted mother visiting today’s Early Childhood Support Clinic, a collaboration between MPSI’s Infant Mental Health (IMH) program and the School of Social Work at Wayne Pediatrics, but they didn’t. My Grandma Peg wrote them to my mother in 1927 about her feelings as a widowed new mother at age 20.

If my grandmother had lived in Detroit, she could have come to Merrill-Palmer’s “Infant Service,” a forerunner of the current Support Clinic and MPSI’s nearly 40-year-old IMH graduate and research program. In the 1920s, Mer-



rill-Palmer’s director, Edna Noble White, noted “no program for young children is complete without a parallel program for their parents.”

Director White understood then, as we do now, that parent and infant health are intertwined and require multi-generation care, as my



Infant Service

In 1927 the Infant Service was begun. How infants were served changed, but infants remained a focus of Merrill-Palmer over the decades.

Photos courtesy of the Walter P. Reuther Library



grandmother came to understand. The stresses parents face may change with time and circumstance, but new parents will always need support.

The concept of White's Infant Service took shape in the 1920s. Young pregnant women, wanting to make sure they were eating well, would visit Mary Sweeney, an expert in nutrition and Merrill-Palmer's associate director, for advice. After the baby was born, the women returned to Merrill-Palmer to understand how best to meet the baby's needs. They returned again and again with further questions, word spread, more women came and the questions increased.

Merrill-Palmer responded by creating the Infant Service in 1927. About once a month mothers (or fathers) could bring their infants to Ferry Street and meet with Merrill-Palmer staff, including a physician, for advice. Merrill-Palmer students participated, too, receiving training in child and family development. Standard information was gathered on the baby's and mother's physical and mental health. The mother's diet was of special interest and contributed important information to scientist Icie Macy Hoobler's pioneering research on the nutritional benefits of breast milk. Records were kept of parent questions so educational programs for parents

could respond to their most pressing needs.

Many of these questions would today be classed as mental health concerns. In 1939, Lois Schulz, a Merrill-Palmer staff member, wrote, "in a great many instances the questions raised during an interview are not of a nature directly related to medical service. Any barriers . . . which the mother may feel are soon overcome, and she is able to discuss her questions with little or no restraint."

Within two years, mothers participating had grown from 4 to 25. By 1961, 70 parents had enrolled. Home visits, a hallmark of the IMH "kitchen table therapy" approach to come, were added to the Institute sessions. No wonder Deborah Weatherston, PhD, national IMH leader and the first director of MPSI's IMH program, said, "Merrill-Palmer was the natural place to start the Infant Mental Health program."

Now with more than a century of know-how behind them, the Infant Mental Health program can be counted on to help struggling parents like my grandmother for generations to come

LEFT: *Merrill-Palmer in Detroit: A Century of Community Making*, exhibit panel. To view the complete exhibit on display in WSU's Knapp building, email ba7808@wayne.edu. Private tours and exhibit visits by appointment only.



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<https://give.wayne.edu/campaigns/37408/donations/new>

Early Childhood



Early childhood usually encompasses ages 2 to 6, when children increase their gross motor skills and body awareness, imaginative play evolves, and they begin to grasp concepts like cause and effect. Language skills progress rapidly and play becomes more interactive. As children's sense of autonomy strengthens, disruptive behaviors can emerge that make parenting more challenging. MPSI faculty research neurotypical and atypical development, family relationships, the impact of life stressors and positive experiences on families and children, and positive accessible interventions to support children and parents placed at risk.



Sarah Raz, PhD

Dr. Raz's area of research is developmental neuropsychology, with a focus on the effects of adverse events during pregnancy and delivery on the cognitive, behavioral, and neuropsychological outcomes of the newborn. Through the study of the influence of birth asphyxia, intrauterine growth retardation, neonatal respiratory distress, and other early insults on outcomes, knowledge is gained about brain vulnerability and resilience during early developmental periods.



Lucy (Kathleen) McGoron, PhD

Dr. McGoron partners with the Detroit community to connect parents with her technology-based parenting program, the Parenting Young Children Checkup (PYCC), through funding from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund. Her recent publications outline how the PYCC was created and initially evaluated, through collaboration with Detroit parents and pediatricians.

Dr. McGoron continues to mentor students through the ReBUILD Detroit program and has worked with three undergraduate students to submit a paper focused on child discipline beliefs of Wayne State students. Dr. McGoron is a member of the MPSI Project LAUNCH team focused on bringing behavioral and mental health care to families and young children in Detroit. She is also completing an article for *The Conversation* on tips for parents related to young children's screentime.



Christopher Trentacosta, PhD

Dr. Trentacosta's research focuses on families from low-income communities and their young children. He has expertise in conducting longitudinal research with low-income families and other populations that face significant life stressors. His research falls into three broad categories:

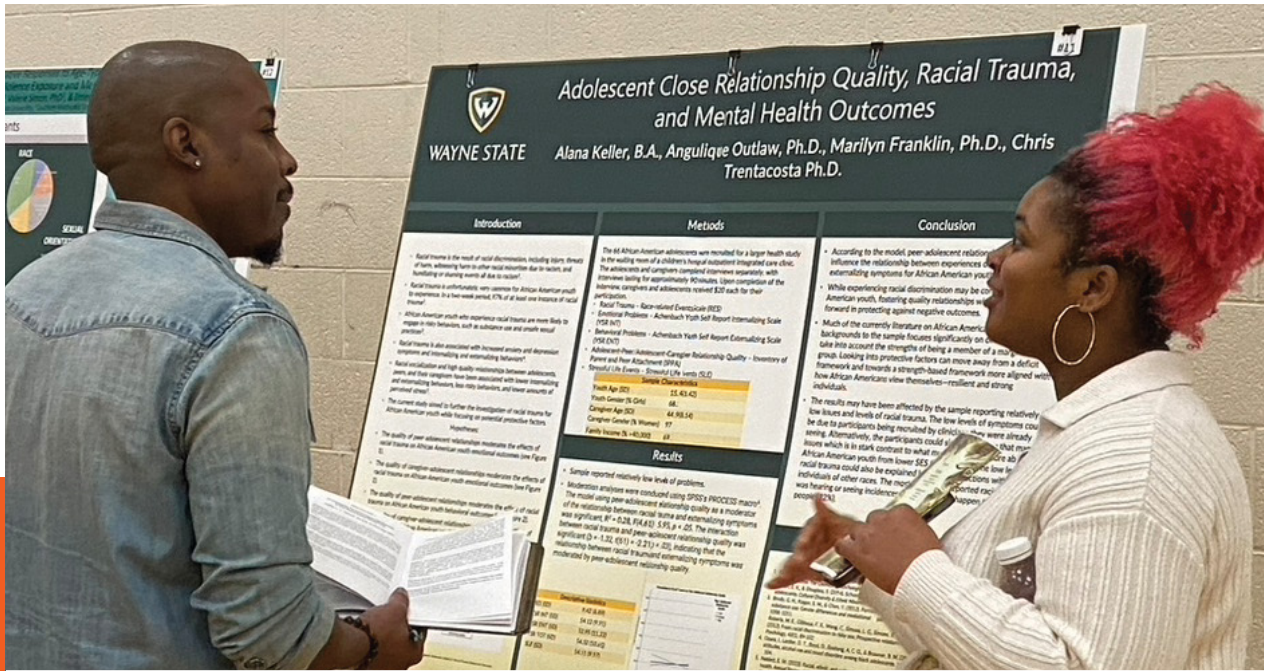
1. Examinations of the correlates and outcomes of children's emotion competence and self-regulation.
2. Investigations of transmission mechanisms (genetic factors, environmental exposures to toxicants, parent-child interaction patterns) that contribute to emotion regulation difficulties and behavior problems.
3. Evaluating programs to promote emotion competence and prevent behavior problems.



MPSI EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER



MPSI's Early Childhood Center was established in 1922 and is nationally known and respected for its research and work in child development. The Center serves the young children of students, faculty, staff and Detroit-area families in a safe, nurturing environment that provides a high-quality education. It is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and has a 5-Star rating in the Michigan Quality Rating and Improvement System. The Early Childhood Center is also a demonstration, observation, and practicum site for WSU students in physical therapy, nutrition, speech and language pathology, and education.

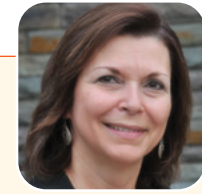


Alana Keller (mentored by Dr. Trentacosta) presents her research to Bakari Wallace, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work (one of our 2024 judges) at Lifespan Alliance Research Day.



Sarah Pellegrino, MA

Sarah Pellegrino is director of the MPSI Early Childhood Center. She has a master's in educational psychology from WSU and a BS in elementary education from Eastern Michigan University where she was inducted into the *Kappa Delta Pi* International Honor Society in Education. Since 2006, Ms. Pellegrino has taught preschool and elementary school, working at MPSI's ECC as a lead teacher since 2011. Her goal as director is "to provide an environment for children that is both educational and fun by helping each child reach their greatest potential and passing on my enthusiasm for learning."



Anna Miller, MEd

As executive director of both Early Childhood Centers at WSU, Ms. Miller has worked with young children and their families for more than 30 years. She serves on several committees related to young children, including the National, Michigan and Metro-Detroit Associations for the Education of Young Children, and provides professional development to early childhood programs. Ms. Miller is a lecturer and undergraduate advisor in the College of Education.

We offer a rich, high quality, NAEYC accredited preschool curriculum that provides many experiences that support social, emotional, linguistic, cognitive, and physical development in young children.

Interested? Use this QR code to fill out our brief pre-screener.





Giant Step Teen Conference helps students from different schools and backgrounds get to know each other through fun ice-breakers and targeted discussion.

School Age & Adolescents

School-age children, age 6 to 12, experience many developmental changes. In addition to continued physical growth, they begin to value friendships and peers. Social skills increase and emotional regulation strengthens. Early adolescence continues this trajectory with the added challenge of puberty. MPSI's faculty investigate factors that impact this development, including parent-child attachment, race, gender, interpersonal violence, and addiction, as they strive to construct interventions that maximize well-being.



Olivenne Skinner, PhD

Dr. Skinner studies academic achievement and gender development in Black youth, including impacts of race and gender on school motivation and family relationships. Her recent papers examine the associations between parental relationship dynamics and child outcomes, including sibling and parent-child relationships in African American families. She also teaches upper-level developmental psychology classes. Dr. Skinner and her colleague, Dr. Vanessa Volpe, received funding from the NIH Emotional Well-being and Stress Measurement Network to examine associations between state-level racial inequities and Black adolescents' obesity risk.



Valerie Simon, PhD

Dr. Simon's research focuses on youth exposure to interpersonal violence. She explores research questions concerning how and for whom violence exposure undermines psychosocial development during adolescence and emerging adulthood.

Dr. Simon uses a multi-method approach that includes questionnaires, interviews, and physiological and virtual

reality measures. She also examines adolescents' romantic and sexual development from a holistic perspective that integrates the risky and rewarding aspects of teens' experiences. She is interested in further elucidating the timing, sequencing, and quality of adolescents' experiences as well as factors that promote or undermine positive development in these key domains.



Stella Resko, MSW, PhD

Dr. Resko is the doctoral program director at the School of Social Work and the co-principal investigator for the evaluation of grants made as part of Michigan's response to the opioid crisis. Dr. Resko's research is focused on drug overdose prevention and substance use treatment, prevention, and recovery activities, especially in families affected by substance use, stigma related to substance use, and issues surrounding cannabis legalization.

Professional Development

MPSI faculty have trained an impressive array of professionals, from medical students and physicians to infant mental health supervisors and breastfeeding mothers.

MPSI hosted a two-day, in-person Assessing Representational Risk training course by Michelle Slead, PhD, senior researcher in the Child Attachment and Psychological Therapies Research Unit at the Anna Freud Centre and University College London. MPSI Director Huth-Bocks and Dr. Dayton presented at pediatric grand rounds in 2024 to about 50 pediatric health professionals on perinatal mental

Healthier Urban Families Builds Community

Service to the community has been part of Merrill Palmer since its creation in 1920. Today's Healthier Urban Families (HUF) programs continue that tradition with strong connections to all facets of the community. Beverly Weathington, LMSW, directs HUF and will play a major role in Project LAUNCH efforts, including oversight of an early childhood consortium of Detroit early care and education centers.

Ms. Weathington also facilitates the Community Advisory Board of ambassadors tasked with building partnerships and reviewing trainings and materials to ensure they meet the community's needs. She has a special interest in community-based participatory research and has spent more than three decades assisting researchers in designing projects based on reciprocity.



Photo Above: Community engagement coordinator Bev Weathington trains volunteer facilitators to guide tables at the Giant Step Teen Conference.

health and the Early Childhood Support Clinic. Dr. Huth-Bocks gave an additional presentation on *Early Relational Health* to the WSU medical student pediatric interest group.

Dr. Caringi teamed with IMH Mentor Karol Wilson to pilot a training that centers race, ethnicity and equity in the implementation of reflective supervision and consultation. "Honoring Equity & Inclusion: Co-creating Relationships for Learning & Growing" provided 24 hours of live and self-paced online learning. Feedback from the 16 participants will tailor the training prior to a broader launch in mid-2025.

MPSI's HUF and Infant Mental Health programs also partnered with the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health on the 2023 Explorations in Development conference. The CE event featured national experts speaking on, "Creating Space for Fathers in Early Childhood Programs & Practices."

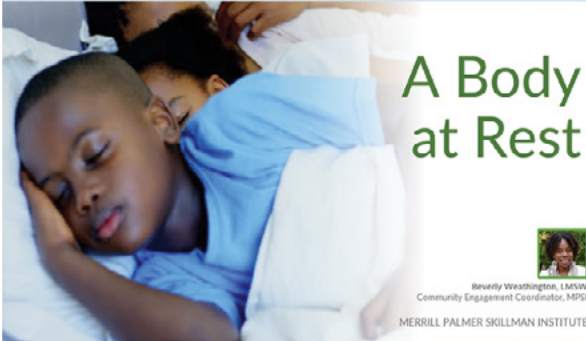
Parenting Moments

presented by Healthier Urban Families at Wayne State University

March 2024



Welcome to the month of March. It's the month of transition from not quite winter to not quite spring. For many families, children may be home for spring/holiday break. Please see our list of family fun activities. This month's PowerPoint focuses on an issue that parents may find challenging throughout the year, establishing a good sleep schedule and routine for their child/ren. Find ways to enjoy our march to spring, and we will see you next month. - [Beverly Weathington, LMSW](#)



[A Body at Rest - Parenting Moments Guide \(pdf\)](#)



[Great Start Readiness - Help and Featured Events](#)

Family Fun



[Easter Egg Hunts](#)

<https://www.oaklandcountymoms.com/easter-events-metro-detroit-24702/>



[Afrofuturism and Costume Design](#)

<https://www.thewright.org/exhibitions/ruth-carter-afrofuturism-costume-design>



[Southfield Winterfest](#)

<https://www.cityofsouthfield.com/news/southfield-parks-recreation-host-winter-fest-march-3>



Beverly Weathington, LMSW

Ms. Weathington coordinates the Healthier Urban Families program. She is committed to providing education, service and research opportunities to vulnerable urban families and the professionals who serve them.

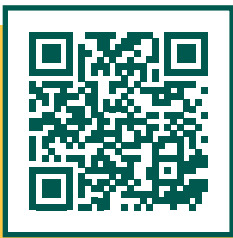
Through combined efforts with the Infant Mental Health Program, MPSI continuing education presentations have reached thousands of professionals, with additional trainings to hundreds of parents and caregivers.

She also helped create and implement clinical support services and assistance with basic needs to families of children from birth to age 5 through a behavioral health collaboration between MPSI, Wayne Pediatrics, and the School of Social Work. That Early Childhood Support Clinic has provided resources

in more than 900 encounters, and given developmental guidance and clinical support to more than 500 families.

When Covid shut down the world in 2020, Ms. Weathington responded by producing the first issue of *Parenting Moments*, a free monthly e-newsletter with timely resources, Detroit-centric events, and tips for educators, social service providers, and parents to engage their children. Five years later, more than 600 subscribers receive *Parenting Moments*. The content evolved from virtual schooling and quarantine activities to how to handle issues like screen-time, bullying and school readiness.

"I am passionate about providing information that addresses the challenges of families placed at-risk," Ms. Weathington said, "while also valuing their strength and resiliency."



View *Parenting Moments* monthly newsletters and subscribe if you like what you see. *We don't share our lists:* <https://mpsi.wayne.edu/mpsiresponsetocovid-19>

“I Liked Connecting with People I Didn’t Know”



For four decades, MPSI's Giant Step Teen Conference has brought together hundreds of ninth and tenth graders each year from every type of Detroit area school to show students what they have in common and to foster unity and respect. This year, about 200 teens from 31 schools met new peers, discussed lighthearted and serious topics, and saw how our similarities can easily outweigh our differences.

From the students:

- “ We learned how to include everyone’s opinions in our discussion. It helped to fully listen to each other when sharing.”
- “ No matter how different we are, we can all find a place to fit in.”
- “ We created bonds in such a short time. We never imagined we’d be talking, laughing and having so much fun.”

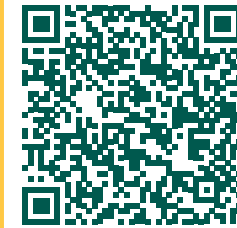
Evaluations from this fall’s conference show that 89% of students said talking with teens from different backgrounds was interesting and educational, 94% said their group leader guided them while letting them express their opinions, 77% felt more confident to make choices for a better future, and 91% said the conference was a positive experience and their school should come back.



Clockwise from above: The early minutes of Giant Step can be awkward as students realize they aren’t sitting at a table with anyone they know. | As the day progresses, facilitators like MPSI Fellow Faizun Bakth, put students at ease with interactive games and crafts. | Giant Step started 40 years ago with support from the Detroit Co-Ette Club and it continues today. From left: Giant Step steering and Co-Ette club members Kay Willingham and Karen Gay, MPSI Director Huth-Bocks, and Co-Ette Student President Haleigh Cameron.



Support and learn more about Giant Step here!



<https://mpsi.wayne.edu/outreach/teen-conference>

“Giant Step promotes inclusivity, acceptance and productive conversation among diverse youth from across Southeast Michigan,” said MPSI Director Huth-Bocks, “It is profoundly moving to hear what these youth learned and will take with them when they describe their experiences at the end of the conference.”

“Students come from different schools, different religions, different backgrounds, and they come in as strangers, but walk out with new friends,” said Richard Thomas, former conference co-chair.

The Co-Ette Club of Detroit, founded in 1941 by Detroit philanthropist and reformer Mary

Agnes Miller Davis, is the lead organization that supports Giant Step. Co-Ette members are high school girls who learn leadership and help the community through volunteerism. They keep the wheels of Giant Step rolling.

Giant Step committee advisor Dianne Robinson credited Davis, who founded Giant Step, for understanding society’s challenges and developing a plan to address them. “Giant Step puts youths in a level of discomfort, because they are separated from their usual peers,” Ms. Robinson said. “That forces them to sit with a diverse group of people who they join in discussions. This seemingly simple activity makes it possible to meet and talk and understand others.”

The student event is held in conjunction with a free concurrent continuing education workshop for the teachers, counselors and parents who bring them. This year’s topic was *Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth in Schools*.



Harold Ellis (seated) has volunteered to facilitate at Giant Step for more than a decade. Students lucky enough to sit at his table rave about his ability to get them to open up and connect deeply. “We love Mr. Ellis!”

Student Training

25

National presentations of student research, from San Diego to Atlanta

11

Academic Awards & Scholarships

12

First Authored Publications

9

Co-authored Publications & 14 Under Review



Trainees from MPSI and its sister institute, the Institute of Gerontology, share an orientation for the upcoming academic year. Standing (l) is MPSI Training Director Julie Wargo Aikins and MPSI Director Huth-Bocks.

Strong Research & Writing Mark MPSI Class

MPSI faculty are proud to mentor more than a dozen trainees and fellows from a wide range of WSU departments. Graduate students join MPSI to deepen their learning on issues related to child and family development. The cohort over the past two years majored in developmental psychology, clinical psychology, translational and clinical neuroscience, social work, anthropology, and speech and language pathology.

Trainees & Fellows 2023 & 2024



Faizun Bakth



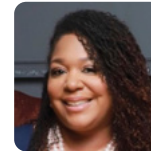
Georgina Drury



Alexandra Ehrhardt



John France



Ajene Gailliard



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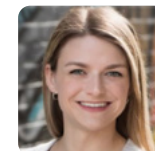
Je'Nae Johnson



Alana Keller



Nicole Kouri



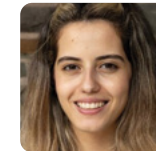
Emily Pasman



Manessa Riser



Anna Rushing



Sadaf Salehi



April Vollmer



Kathryn Wright



Fellow Awards . . .

Faizun Bakth

- Betty Neitzel Summer Funding Fellowship, 2023
- Steven Lewis Memorial Award, 2023
- Graduate Student Poster Day Award in Psychology, 2024
- Ross & Margaret Stagner Memorial Award for Research & Teaching, 2024

Georgina Drury

- Al Pizzica Scholar Award, 2024
- Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health Scholarship, 2024
- National Perinatal Association Conference Presentation Honor Invite, 2024

Alexandra Ehrhardt

- WSU Psychology Department Graduate Teaching Award, 2023
- Heberlein University-Wide Teaching Award, 2023

John France

- WSU School of Medicine Grant, 2024
- University of Michigan Visiting Scholar Grant, 2024

Nicole Kouri

- Rosen Teaching & Research Award, 2023

Emily Pasman

- Editor's Choice Nomination, *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 2024



Julie Wargo Aikins, PhD, Training Director

The role of parents in shaping children's social and emotional lives begins in pregnancy and influences how individuals experience and view their world throughout the life course. Much of Dr. Wargo Aikins' career has focused on parent-child attachment, trauma, and the clinical application of attachment theory and measurement. She is collaborating with Dr. Huth-Bocks to examine mothers' caregiving representations across the perinatal period and their associations with maternal caregiving behavior and child adaptation. Dr. Wargo Aikins also trains researchers and clinicians on the use of the Adult Attachment Projective Picture System, drawing on the empirical work and theory contained in her recently published book, *Working with Attachment Trauma*.

Dr. Wargo Aikins directs the MPSI graduate training program. Graduate students from across the university with interests in child and family research apply to the program to augment their work in their home departments. Selected trainees and fellows learn about research and community engagement, participate in colloquia, meet with diverse scholars, and receive professional development, writing help, and faculty support to reach their educational goals.

Infant Mental Health Dual-Title Program

Graduate students in social work, psychology or nursing can add coursework through MPSI's Infant Mental Health curriculum to receive an IMH Dual-Title Degree. Infant mental health theory, assessment, and treatment are fully integrated into each dual-title student's major area of study. Master's and doctoral students then graduate as research-informed clinicians trained to effectively address the needs of diverse children and caregivers. Dual-title graduates understand the complexities of the field and are better able to ask research questions and advo-

IMH Specialist Dr. Carla Caringi (back row, 2nd from rt) with the program's 2024 IMH Dual-Title Degree students.



cate for policy and practices on behalf of very young children, their families, and caregivers.

For information, contact Director Ann Stacks at 313-664-2500 or amstacks@wayne.edu.

The program has now graduated dozens of master's students in social work as well as doctoral students in psychology, social work and nursing. Scholarship monies are available to offset the cost of additional credits."

- Dr. Stacks



Ms. Weathington and Drs. Dayton and Caringi show their support for their spring 2023 graduating Dual-Title students. These graduates combined their Master's in Social Work with extensive IMH training.

Faculty share why connecting with MPSI matters . . .

Affiliate Faculty

With strong programs in research that complement MPSI's mission, these affiliated faculty bring an array of perspectives and assets. They attend faculty meetings, assist with strategic planning, connect MPSI to other colleges and departments and generally broaden the impact of its work.



“When I first joined the faculty of Wayne State's Psychology Department, I was delighted to be invited to become an adjunct faculty at MPSI. I was especially drawn by MPSI's contributions to child development as an historic child study center, its welcoming faculty, its stimulating bi-weekly colloquia in developmental science, its stellar graduate student training program, and myriad opportunities for collaborating on interdisciplinary research projects.”

– **Marjorie Beeghly, PhD**, Prof., Psychology, Developmental Science



“As a graduate of the MPSI trainee and fellowship program, I can confidently say that MPSI has played a pivotal role in shaping my career, which is why I was thrilled to maintain an ongoing affiliation. Trained as a developmental neuroscientist, I deeply value MPSI's unique interdisciplinary environment, collaborative spirit, and wealth of community resources. With a legacy spanning over 100 years, MPSI remains dedicated to improving the lives of families in the Detroit area – a mission that continues to inspire my work.”

– **Hilary Marusak, PhD**, Assoc. Prof., Psychiatry & Behavioral Neurosciences, School of Medicine



“I chose to affiliate with MPSI because its mission to advance child and family well-being aligns closely with my research on adolescent social-emotional development and health. I value MPSI's community-centered approach, exemplified by initiatives like the Giant Step Teen Conference, which fosters inclusion and connection among diverse youth. MPSI also offers invaluable opportunities to collaborate with Wayne State faculty and staff, learn from colloquia speakers, and engage my graduate students in its training program.”

– **Hannah Schacter, PhD**, Asst. Prof., Psychology, Developmental Science

Tanja Jovanovic, PhD, Prof., Psychiatry & Behavioral Neurosciences, School of Medicine

Robert Ty Partridge, PhD, Assoc. Prof., Psychology, Developmental Science

Christine Rabinak, PhD, MBA, Assoc. Prof., College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences

Elizabeth Towner, PhD, Asst. Prof., Family Medicine & Public Health Sciences

Sasha Zhou, PhD, Asst. Prof., Public Health

Grants 2023 & 2024 Annual Grant Income by Fiscal Years

Project LAUNCH: Promoting Young Child Wellness in Detroit – Carla Caringi, PI. This five-year, \$3,993,580 grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) will educate and support hundreds of parents and other adults who care for young children while increasing access to high-quality infant and early childhood mental health services.

Examining Prenatal Inflammation & Neurodevelopment from Fetal to Age 9 – Chris Trentacosta, multi-PI. The New York University School of Medicine is a shared site for this three-year grant of \$3,645,056 to conduct longitudinal imaging studies of brain changes in young children.

From the Womb to the Classroom: Linking Perinatal Micronutrients and Toxicants to Neural and Behavioral Development In Utero and in Childhood – Chris Trentacosta, multi-PI. A grant of \$2,578,629 over five years from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

Child Care Access Means Parents in School – Anna Miller, PI. The U.S. Department of Education awarded \$789,297 over four years to MPSI’s Early Childhood Center to provide tuition for preschoolers of low-income parents attending Wayne State University.

An Early Childhood System of Care Approach to Integrating and Expanding Michigan’s Baby Courts – Ann Stacks, Co-Eval. The Health

Resources Services Administration granted \$771,674 over five years to sustain and expand Infant-Toddler Court Programs, also known as Baby Court, in three Michigan counties to help children under age four in the child welfare system grow up in permanent, nurturing homes.

Promoting Resilience among Maltreated Young Children: Creating a Collaborative Court Team Workforce using Technology-Based Cross Training – Ann Stacks, PI. A three-year, \$499,788 grant from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund to create and sustain a collaborative court team workforce, as in the Baby Court project.

Great Start Readiness Program – Anna Miller, PI. These yearly grants from the Michigan

Department of Education support both Early Childhood Centers on campus. MPSI’s Center received \$291,000 over two years to provide free tuition for qualified four-year-olds placed at risk of school failure.

Treating Pregnant and Postpartum Women Pilot – Stella Resko, PI. A \$265,036 grant from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to assist with Michigan’s federally funded response to the opioid crisis, prevent overdose deaths, and evaluate interventions.

Providing Technical Assistance to Communities in Michigan on Opioid Remediation – Stella Resko, PI. A one-year, \$120,470 grant from the Community Health Workers Academy.



Early Childhood Support Clinic – Carolyn Dayton, PI. A two-year grant of \$150,000 from the Total Health Care Foundation to establish a behavioral health services clinic for young children and their parents struggling with developmental concerns and mental health issues. The clinic is co-located at Wayne Pediatrics in Detroit to provide integrated care.

Evaluating and Implementing the Parenting Young Children Check-up in Detroit to Promote

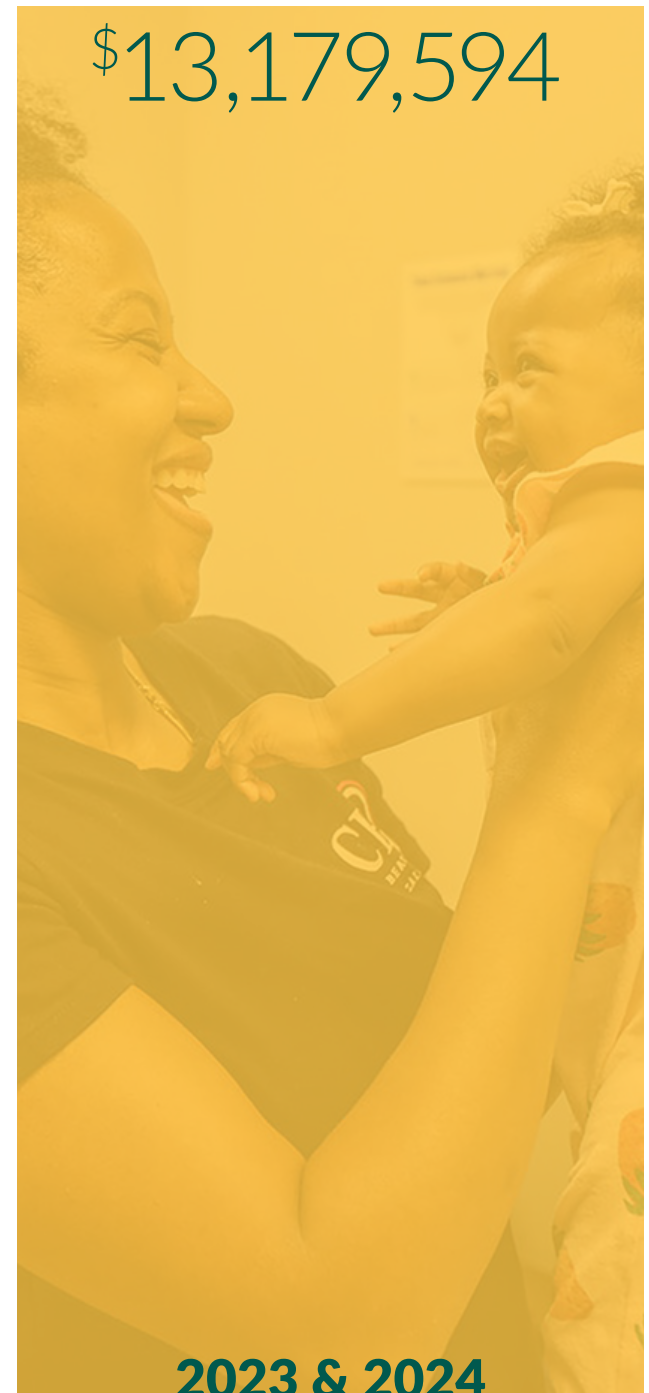
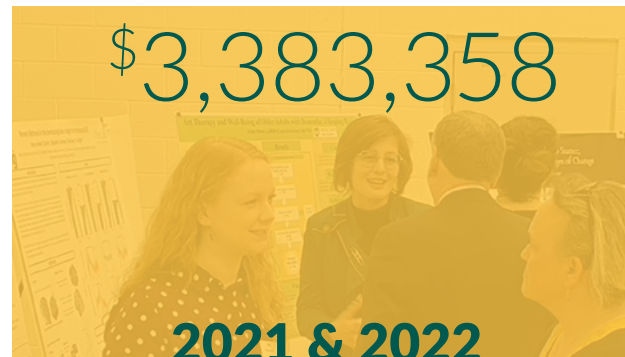


Young Children’s Behavioral Health – Lucy McGoron, PI. A two-year, \$99,941 grant from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund to expand and evaluate Dr. McGoron’s Parenting Young Children Check-Up website and texted trainings to ease disruptive behaviors in children.

Early Childhood Support Clinic: Improving Access to Maternal-Infant Mental Health Care through Integrated Pediatric Care - Carolyn Dayton, PI. A \$75,000 grant from the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan for clinical services at the clinic.

Building Capacity for Mother-Infant Mental Health Services in a Pediatric Setting – Carolyn Dayton, PI. The Ethel and James Flinn Foundation awarded \$50,000 over one year to support the Early Childhood Support Clinic services at Wayne Pediatrics.

Early Childhood Support Clinic: Increasing Access to Maternal Mental Health Services in a Pediatric Setting – Carolyn Dayton, PI. A special \$35,000 grant from the Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of Michigan to advance maternal health equity in Detroit.





Engaging with Detroit & the World

The Freer House welcomed a diverse range of communities, organizations and audiences over the past two years, to share the house's history, the legacy of Charles Lang Freer, and the multi-cultural heritage of East Ferry Street.

by William Colburn, Freer House Director



JOIN US! Become a Freer House Member Today at: <https://give.wayne.edu/campaigns/37260/donations/new>



Notable visitors to the Freer House included curators from the Tokyo and Kyoto National Museums of Japan, curators and staff from the Freer Gallery of Art, National Museum of Asian Art, and new WSU students, faculty and staff.

Program partners and co-sponsors included:

- Association of Chinese Americans
- Detroit Film Theater, Detroit Institute of Arts
- Freer Gallery of Art/National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian
- Friends of Asian Arts and Cultures, DIA
- Japan America Society of Michigan & Southwestern Ontario
- Lieberthal - Rogel Center for Chinese Studies, U-M
- Rising Voices – Asian American Arts & Culture
- WSU Center for Gender & Sexuality Studies
- WSU Division of Government & Community Affairs
- Underwriting support from the Erb Family Foundation



2023 EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

FEBRUARY: Co-sponsored with U-M, Dr. Ian Shin's online lecture, *Charles Lang Freer, Chinese Art, and the Making of Global Detroit*.

MARCH: *The Women of Ferry Street*, co-sponsored with the WSU Division of Government and Community Affairs, to celebrate Women's History Month by honoring Detroit women of achievement, past and present.



Photos clockwise from left: Enjoying the Freer Garden last summer are (l-r) Dr. Yoshi Tanaka of the Kyoritsu Women's University; Yumi Takagi of the Tokyo National Museum; Freer House Director Colburn; and Melissa Rinne of the Kyoto National Museum | Wayne State University students admire the Freer House exterior on a class tour | Members of the Rising Voices Organization commemorate Pride Month in the Freer House as part of an Asian American Artists Celebration.



FALL: Programs on the historical connections between Freer, Detroit and Japan including Linda Hoaglund's documentary, *Edo Avant Garde*, a related educators' workshop on Asian art, and a special lecture, *Making Waves: Charles Lang Freer and the Waves at Matsushima*, by Frank Feltens, PhD, curator of Japanese Art, Freer Gallery of Art, National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian.

2024 EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

APRIL: Hosted a meeting of Detroit Asian American civic and business leaders with WSU President Kimberly Andrews Espy, with a presentation on the history of the Freer House and its connection to Asian art and culture in the U.S.

MAY: Co-sponsored "The Women of Ferry Street 2024" to honor the significant role women played in the history of E. Ferry Street and today's women inspired by their legacies.

Hosted the Garden Club of Michigan's annual

meeting plus a tour of the house and gardens, which the club has supported since the project's launch 10 years ago.

JUNE: Hosted a packed Pride Month audience at Rising Voices' "Asian American Queer Artists Celebration" with a panel discussion by Asian American artists, music, food and festivities.

The Japan America Society of Michigan & Southwestern Ontario held a sold-out reception at the Freer House followed by dinner at WSU's McGregor Center, designed by Yamasaki. Dr. Feltens spoke about the impact of Freer and Detroit on U.S. cross-cultural relations and appreciation of Japanese art.



SEPTEMBER: The Colonial Dames of America (Michigan Chapter) held its annual meeting with a special tour of the Freer House highlighting Freer's contributions to the cultural heritage of Detroit, the Smithsonian and the nation.

Clockwise from top: About 100 guests attended the annual reception of the Japan America Society of Michigan and Southwestern Ontario held in the Freer House and gardens. | The Garden Club of Michigan, a long-time supporter, tours the house. | Garnering support for a federal grant to the Freer House are (l-r): Patrick Lindsey, WSU VP for Government & Community Affairs; and members of Sen. Gary Peters' staff Sarah Shapiro, legislative director, and Bryan McMurran, regional director.



Eleanor Clay Ford (l), Merrill-Palmer Institute's board chair, and MPSI Director Pauline Knapp review plans at the Freer House for a new adjacent Knapp Building (ca. 1955).

Freer House & Ford House: A New Old Partnership

by William Colburn, Freer House Director

When serious damage happened inside the Freer House in 2021 caused by an HVAC unit leak, sending water from the attic to the main floor, Freer House Director Colburn reached out for help. He had witnessed the strong commitment of the Eleanor & Edsel Ford House in Grosse Pointe to maintaining high quality historic preservation standards, so he contacted its president and CEO, Mark Heppner.

Would Ford House consider 'adopting' the Freer House and share its historic restoration expertise?

Mr. Heppner, aware of the importance of the Freer House and motivated to help support WSU's preservation efforts, generously agreed to have Rebecca Torsell, Ford House's director of historic preservation, provide pro-bono consulting services. Since then, Ms. Torsell has offered her tremendous knowledge of restoration practices and resources to the Freer House and WSU's Facilities Department, on a regular basis.

This new partnership between two outstanding Detroit landmarks has historical precedent. Eleanor Clay Ford, while living with her family at the Ford House, served on the original Mer-

rill Palmer Institute's board of directors for 50 years (1926-1976), prior to WSU's acquisition of the Institute in 1983. Mrs. Ford spent countless hours at the Freer House, meeting with students, faculty and families who shared her keen interest in early childhood development. As an avid art collector, she knew of Freer's legacy as Detroit's great collector of Asian and American art and the historical importance of his home.

The survival of the Freer House in the era of mid-twentieth century modernization and urban renewal may be due in part to the influence of Mrs. Ford. When three adjacent historic houses on Ferry Street were demolished in 1958 for construction of the Knapp Building, which Mrs. Ford helped to sponsor, the Freer House was spared, and the first efforts to seek historic designation and initial plans for its eventual restoration were begun in 1971, a few years before her death.

The Freer House is deeply grateful to Mark Heppner, Rebecca Torsell and the Ford House for 'adopting' the Freer House as a partner in preservation through its generous donation of in-kind support and restoration expertise.

Freer House Values Its Volunteers

Volunteers are the glue that holds Freer House together. They supply much of the energy that let the house host events and welcome hundreds of visitors each year.

The Freer House is fortunate to have passionate and resourceful volunteers of diverse backgrounds willing to contribute their time and talents to conducting historical research and documentation, serving as expert tour guides, helping to host programs and events, and graciously welcoming visitors. Thank you to our Freer House volunteers, including:

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| Darren Brim | Laura Grimshaw |
| Carla Ciringi | Marc Herrick |
| Matt Coleman | Hiroko Lancour |
| Michael Coleman | Kathleen Marcaccio |
| Sandi Combs | Natalie Miller |
| Ryan Cunningham | Doug Peters |
| Lillian Dean | Gail Powell |
| Chuck Demske | Lindel Salow |
| Lisa DiChiera | Rebecca Savage |

MPSI Board of Visitors from left: Director Huth-Bocks, Board Chair Debra Partrich, Marianne Endicott, Seymour Nayer, Nancy Swords, Carolyn Barth, and Ann Nicholson.



MPSI Support

Why I volunteer for the Freer House . . .

- “ While the house is a piece of local history, Mr. Freer’s story is a global one which stretches from upstate New York, to Detroit, to Europe, to Asia and finally to Washington, D.C..”
– **Michael D. Coleman**
- “ I love history and I love touring the grand houses of Detroit from ages past. The Freer House combines these two loves.”
– **Gail Powell**
- “ I enjoy researching, discovering new information, and sharing it. It is a privilege to be a Freer House volunteer because it allows me to assist in cultural exchange activities that promote a better understanding of the U.S. and Japan.”
– **Sandi Combs**
- “ Charles Lang Freer has perhaps the most important United States legacy and story of art - all beginning and involving Detroit history. Hidden in plain sight.”
– **Laura Grimshaw**

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Board member Nancy Swords discusses fall harvest with ECC tots.



THE FREER HOUSE *The historic 1892 Freer House has proudly served as home to Merrill-Palmer since 1920.*

MPSI Students Awarded Scholarships



SOLOMON



KONDOR



MAYLUM

Dr. Deborah Weatherston has had a transformative impact on professionals working with infants and toddlers, and on the field of Infant Mental Health in Michigan and around the world. Several years ago, she created the Deborah J. Weatherston Infant Mental Health Endowed Scholarship to provide financial support to students in the IMH Dual-Title Program with financial need.

We proudly announce that **Jillian Solomon** and **Lyndsey Kondor**, students in the School of Social Work, won Weatherston Scholarships in

2024. Jillian is pursuing her master's degree with a concentration in Innovation in Community, Policy, and Leadership. "I am passionate about trauma-informed care and understanding how gender-based violence influences interpersonal relationships," she said. She interns at the Brightmoor Childcare Quality Initiative in Detroit.

Lyndsey is a licensed master social worker earning her doctorate in Social Work with the IMH Dual-Title Degree. Her research interests include social emotional learning, maternal

health, and fatherhood. For several years she has also worked as a home-based clinician at Oakland Family Services and hopes to pursue a career in academia.

MSW student **Katelin Maylum** won the 2023 scholarship. She is interning at Saginaw County Community Mental Health Authority and has been intrigued by IMH since learning about infant development and caregiving in a lifespan course. She hopes to work as an IMH clinician or school social worker.



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<https://give.wayne.edu/campaigns/37408/donations/new>
In the "Make Your Selection" column, choose "Other."
In the "Other designation or notes about gift" box, type "MPSI Weatherston Scholarship"

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Weatherston
Scholarship*