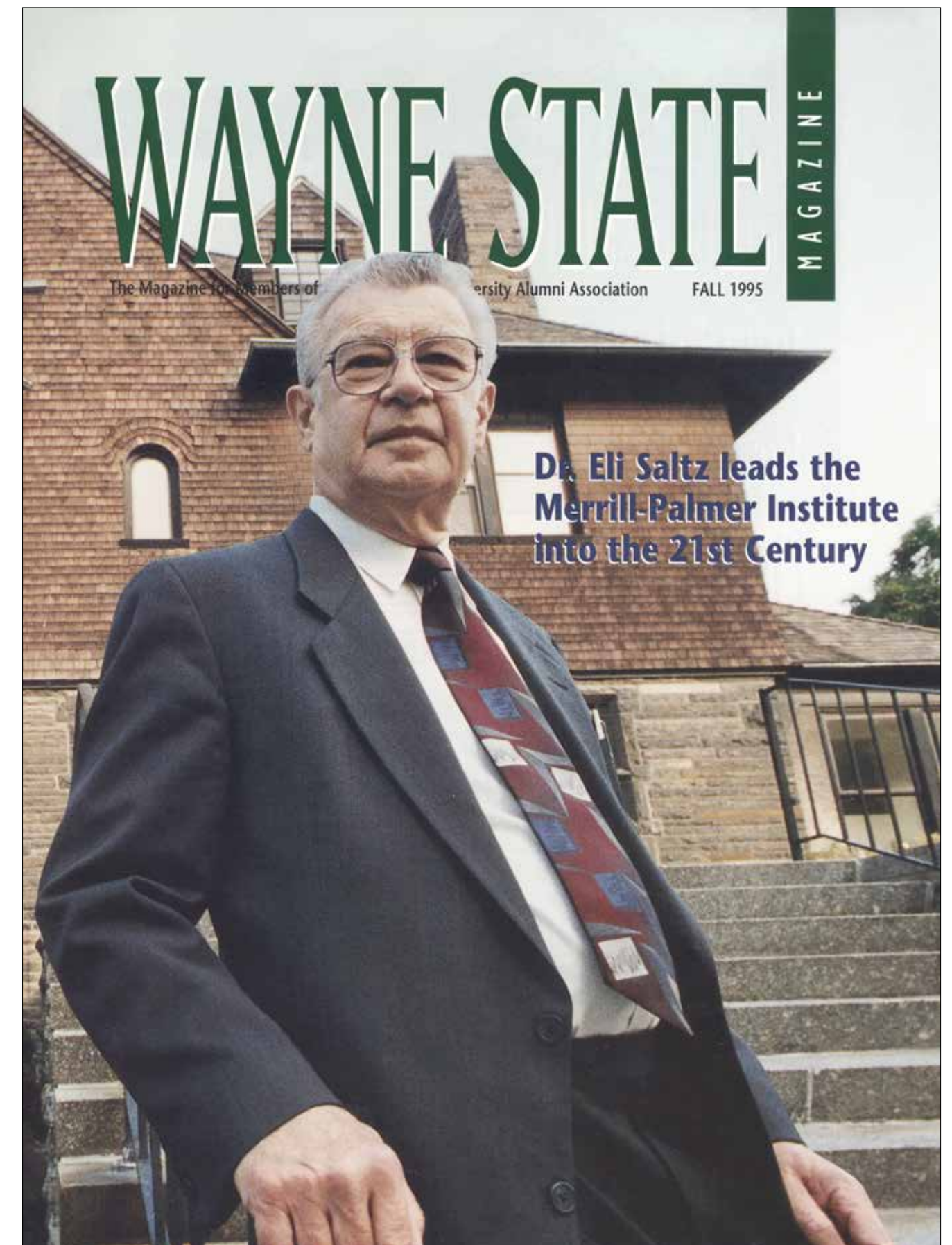


## A New Life

*“Our goals (for the new institute) are in effect an extension of the original goals of the Merrill-Palmer Institute since its founding in 1920.”*

– **Eli Saltz**, director of the Merrill-Palmer Institute, 1982–1997

Caroyln Shantz, editor of the *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* and professor, Wayne State Department of Psychology

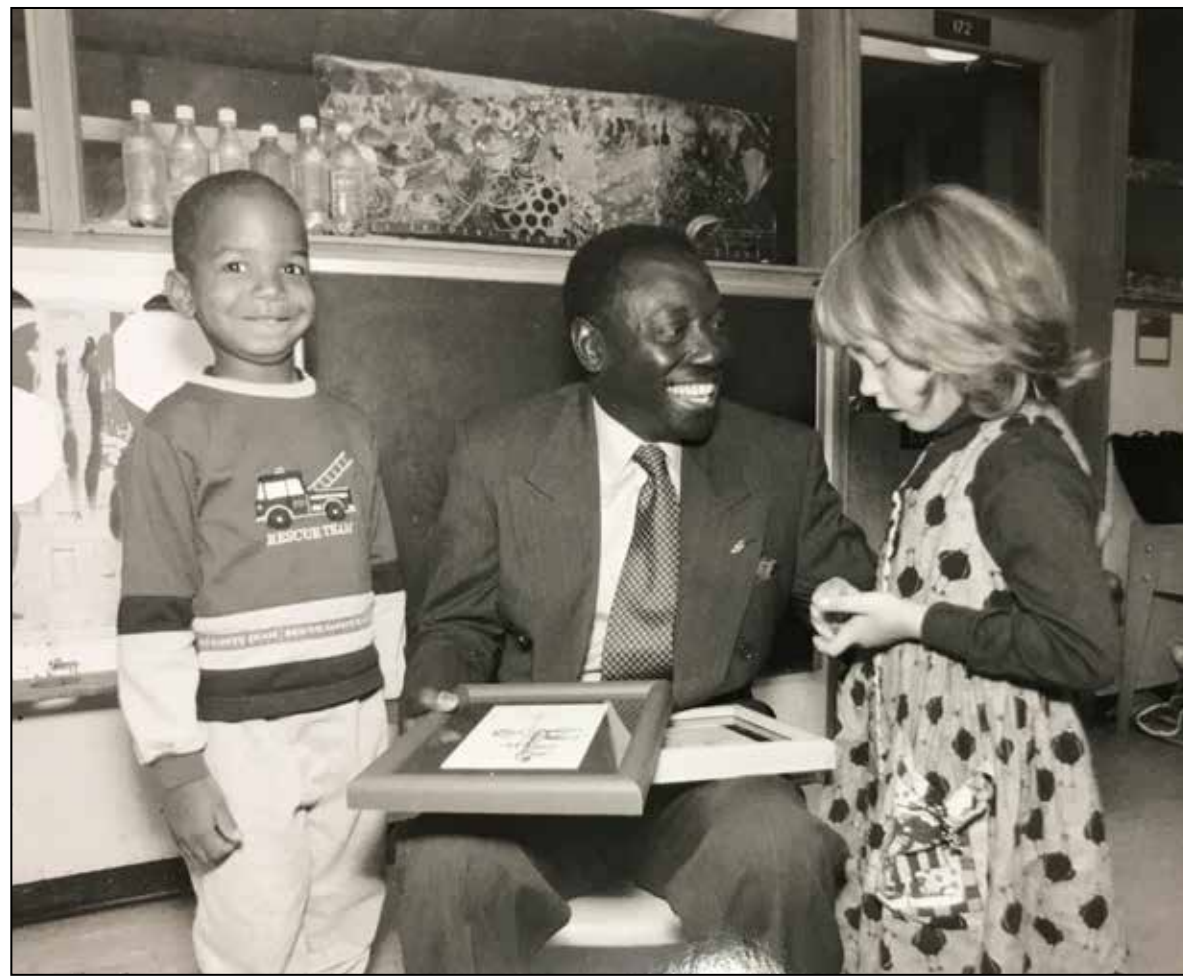


Eli Saltz was named director of the new Merrill-Palmer Institute and Carolyn Shantz became editor of the *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*. Both were members of the Department of Psychology at WSU with earlier ties to Merrill-Palmer. Dr. Saltz worked on multiple projects with Merrill-Palmer faculty and Dr. Shantz was a research associate at Merrill-Palmer between 1965 and 1971. Saltz served as director until 1997 and Shantz as editor until 2004, when each retired.

Both charted new directions built on the 60-year legacy of the Institute: science in the interest of education, and community to foster child and family development. New Institute programs focused on the three interrelated areas of family, early education and parenting. Faculty from multiple disciplines across campus and from other universities again came together to study, teach and reach out to the Detroit community. The Merrill-Palmer Board of Visitors was established to help raise money and awareness. The Institute grew.



# Renaissance in the Renaissance City



WSU President Irvin D. Reid reads to children at the Merrill-Palmer Early Childhood Center (c. 2002).

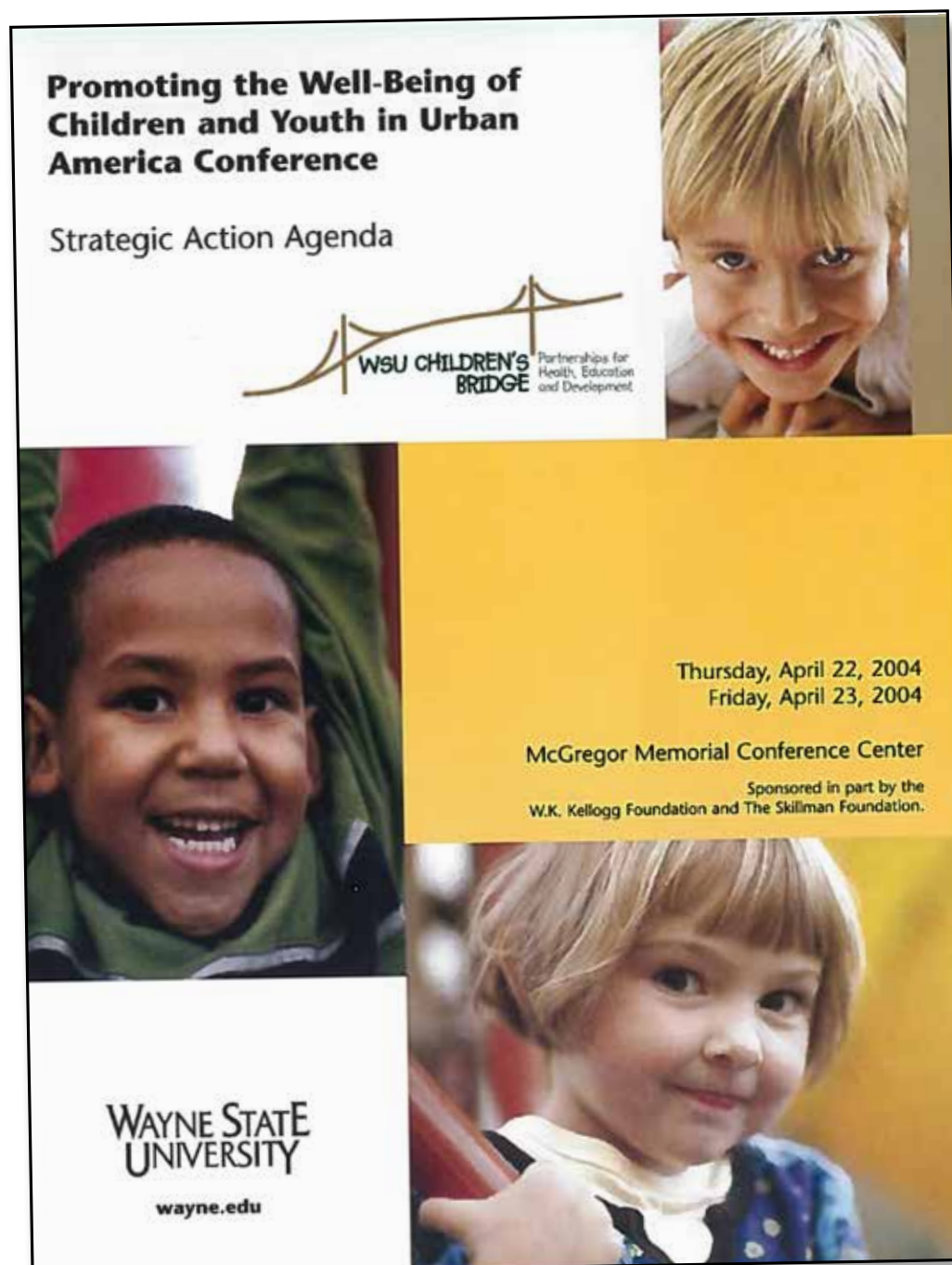
WSU President Irvin D. Reid created the Children's Bridge in 2003 with Merrill-Palmer, uniting faculty and community members to address common interests. In 2004 nearly 600 national leaders, community partners, funding representatives and WSU faculty and students met at a conference to promote the well-being of urban children and youth.

Discussions at the conference led to a Strategic Action Agenda that has since guided child development research at WSU and Merrill-Palmer in partnership with the larger community in five key areas:

- *Premature birth, low birth-weight and perinatal care*
- *Child care and school readiness*
- *At-risk children and adolescents*
- *Health disparities and the role of technology*
- *Violence, trauma and abuse*



President Reid addresses attendees of the Children's Bridge Conference in 2004.



The Skillman Center for Children merged with Merrill-Palmer in 2005 to create the current Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute (MPSI). This merger strengthened both programs and continued the legacy Rose Skillman established 40 years earlier to support the larger Detroit community. This change set the stage for substantial growth at MPSI over the past 15 years, guided by the Office of the Vice President for Research.



Peter Lichtenberg was appointed director of MPSI in 2008 by then Vice President for Research Hilary Ratner. Funding and programs have increased substantially under his leadership.



Today

## Education, Science & Community Engagement

Current MPSI programs have their roots in the early years of the WSU Merrill-Palmer Institute, but connections to a long-ago past are also very much present. The integration of education, science and community in service to child and family development that began in 1920 with Edna Noble White continues on in the work of the faculty, staff and students who are MPSI today.

MPSI programs do reflect traditional Merrill-Palmer themes but are responsive to contemporary and forward-looking issues: Risk and Resilience; Investment in Children and Youth; and equity and Identity. The expression of these themes changes, however, as children develop. MPSI's interdisciplinary research mission supports collaboration between faculty from a variety of schools and departments. Most MPSI faculty are jointly appointed, with home departments across multiple schools and colleges.



Still need outline



Hearts and Minds on Babies researchers learn biological data collection techniques to track biomarkers of stress.

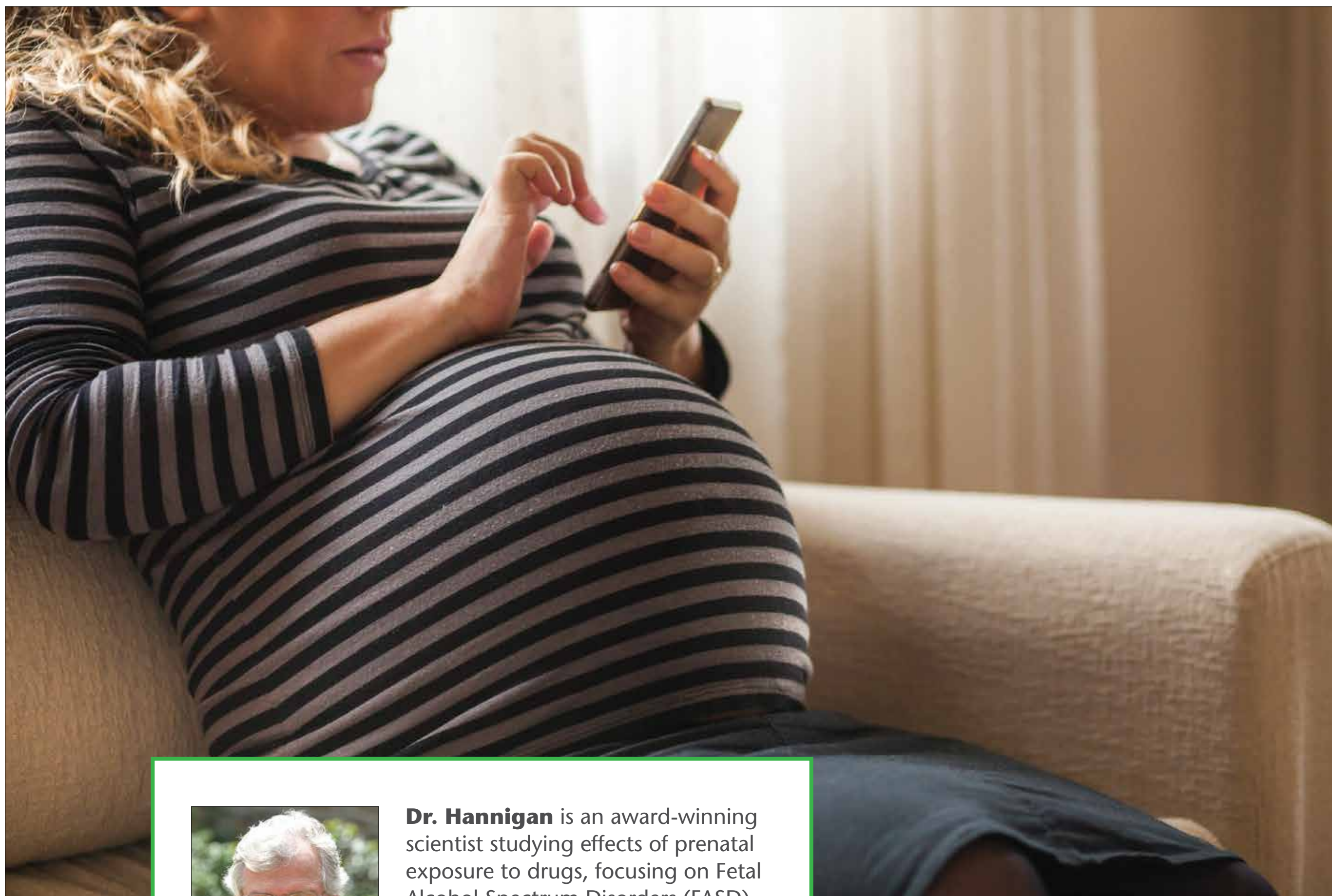
*"Today MPSI is recognized as a leader at Wayne State University in both child development research and meaningful connections with the community."*

**– 2017-2022 Strategic Plan**



Attorneys who represent parents involved in child abuse and neglect cases learn new approaches to keeping children out of foster care. *Baby Court*, co-led by Dr. Ann Stacks, improves parenting skills through training and helps the court system keep the infant's welfare at the center of decisions.





John Hannigan, PhD  
Obstetrics &  
Psychology

**Dr. Hannigan** is an award-winning scientist studying effects of prenatal exposure to drugs, focusing on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). He assesses neurobehavioral outcomes and implementation of clinical screens for drinking during pregnancy. Dr. Hannigan chairs the Science Advisory Board of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism's international Collaborative Initiative on FASD. He co-leads career enhancement at WSU's Center for Urban Responses to Environmental Stressors (CURES).



Steven Ondersma, PhD  
MPSI, Deputy Director  
Psychiatry &  
Behavioral  
Neurosciences

**Dr. Ondersma** creates brief technology-based interventions to decrease tobacco, alcohol and marijuana use during pregnancy. Women access his novel interactive software during their regular doctor's visit. These simple patient contacts can double the rate of abstinence and may work at least as well as therapist-delivered brief interventions. Dr. Ondersma is also expanding opportunities for MPSI research by establishing a network of community families willing to participate in research.



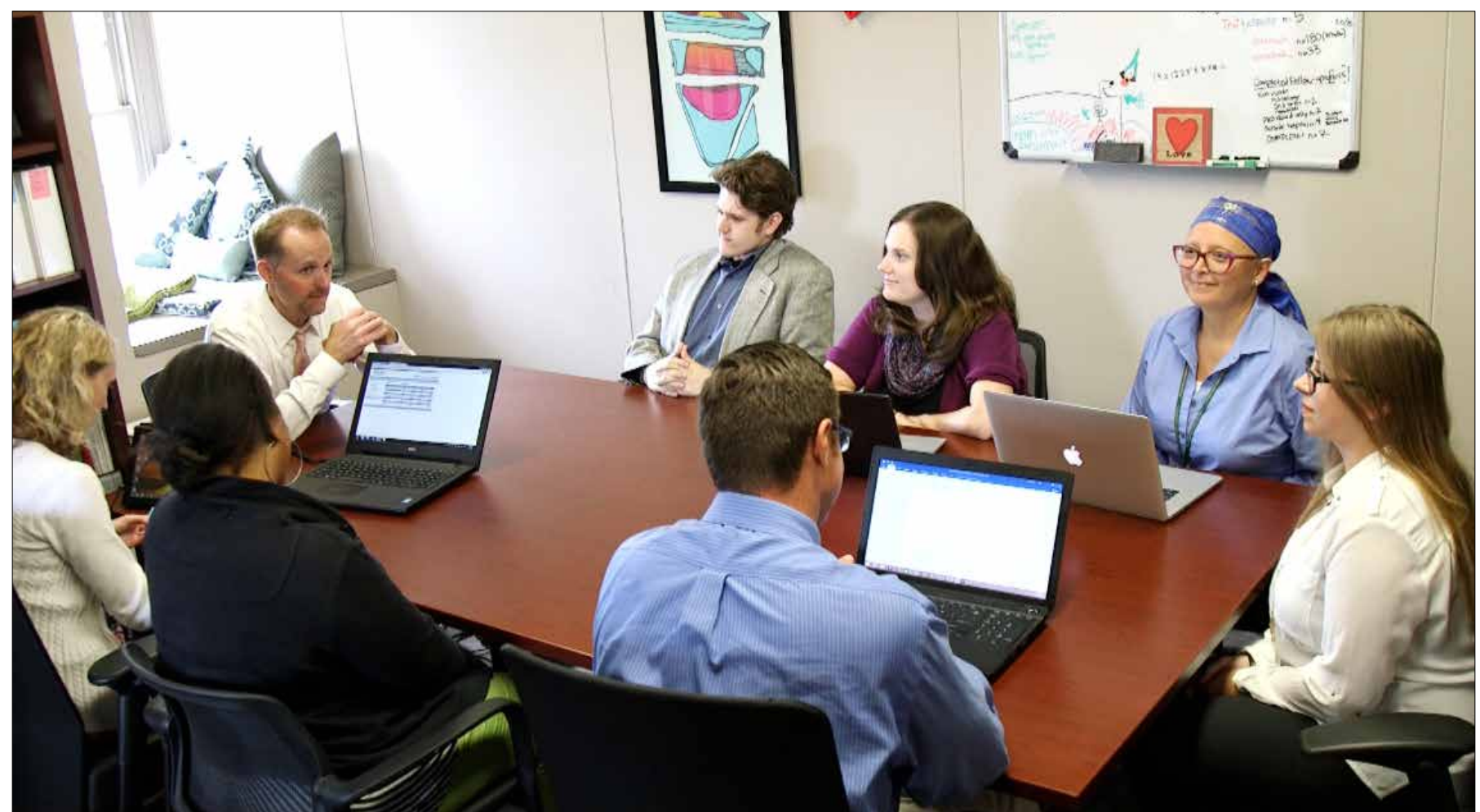
Sarah Raz, PhD  
Psychology

**Dr. Raz** assesses the development of neurobehavioral skills in babies born prematurely. She and her students have collected data from more than 300 children. They are following about 100 preschoolers, assessing development of language, memory and attention. Prematurity and low birthweight are prevalent in the Detroit community and even two additional weeks in the mother's womb can mean major improvements in growth, cognition, motor function and overall survival.

## Prenatal & Infant Development

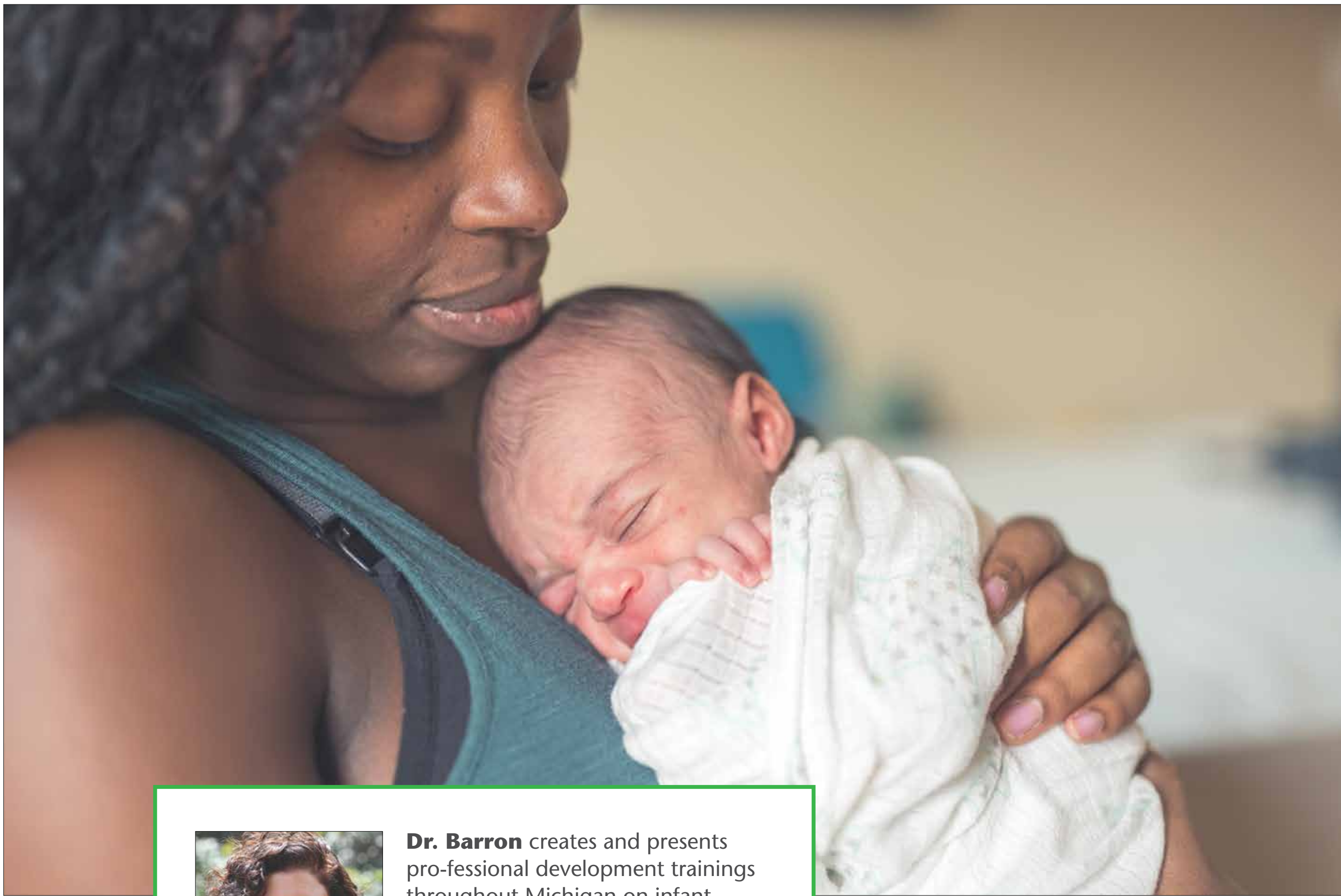
MPSI scientists and students work with mothers-to-be who are at risk for substance use during pregnancy. Their programs aim to understand how prenatal exposures to alcohol, cocaine and other drugs hurt children. One innovative approach involves screenings and interventions, delivered via computer, to reduce substance use among pregnant women. These tools are being made widely available through the internet or smart phones, and even in doctors' offices, to revolutionize successful support and treatment.

Substance use is just one risk to the newborn. Others include poor growth in the uterus, not enough oxygen prior to birth, or respiratory distress at birth. MPSI researchers work to understand and reduce these risks to improve health and cognitive outcomes for children.



Dr. Ondersma (left) meets regularly with his research team to provide guidance and mentorship.





Carla Barron, PhD  
Clinical Coordinator  
Infant Mental  
Health Program

**Dr. Barron** creates and presents pro-fessional development trainings throughout Michigan on infant mental health, early parenting, home visiting and reflective supervision. As clinical coordinator, she works closely with graduate students in MPSI's Infant Mental Health dual-title degree program. She is facilitator and researcher with the Hearts & Minds on Babies project, guiding discussions with Early Head Start parents, teachers and administrators.



Carolyn Dayton, PhD  
LMSW, IMH-E®(IV)  
Associate Director,  
Infant Mental  
Health Program  
Social Work

**Dr. Dayton** works with community partners to evaluate early childhood programs. She supervises infant mental health practitioners across metro Detroit. Her research focuses on early parenting, emphasizing fathers in urban settings. She works to reduce the impact of parent incarceration by promoting fathers' involvement with their children. Dr. Dayton helps parents exposed to violence to be more sensitive and patient parents by teaching them to sing lullabies to their babies.



Ann Stacks, PhD,  
LMSW, IMH-E®(IV)  
Director, Infant Mental  
Health Program  
Social Work

**Dr. Stacks** trains students and professionals to build caregiving relationships that support healthy social-emotional development of young children. She partners with Early Head Start agencies across Michigan to test the effectiveness of an attachment-based parent and teacher training program called Hearts & Minds on Babies. Dr. Stacks also advises Wayne County Baby Court, which provides infant mental health services to families under court jurisdiction for maltreatment.

## Infant Mental Health

The Interdisciplinary Graduate Certificate Program in Infant Mental Health at Merrill-Palmer was created in 1988. Co-developed by Drs. Melissa Kaplan-Estrin and Deborah Weatherston, it was based on the work of Dr. Selma Fraiberg and the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health (MI-AIMH) Training Guidelines. Dr. Weatherston directed the program until 2004 and was instrumental in developing the Infant Mental Health (IMH) Endorsement, now adopted by 30 states and two countries. Dr. Weatherston later became the director of MI-AIMH and then the founding director of the Alliance for the Advancement for Infant Mental Health.

IMH professionals focus on relationships to support the socioemotional well-being of infants and families. Researchers study the transmission of early relationships across generations and how relationships shape mental health, caregiving and well-being.

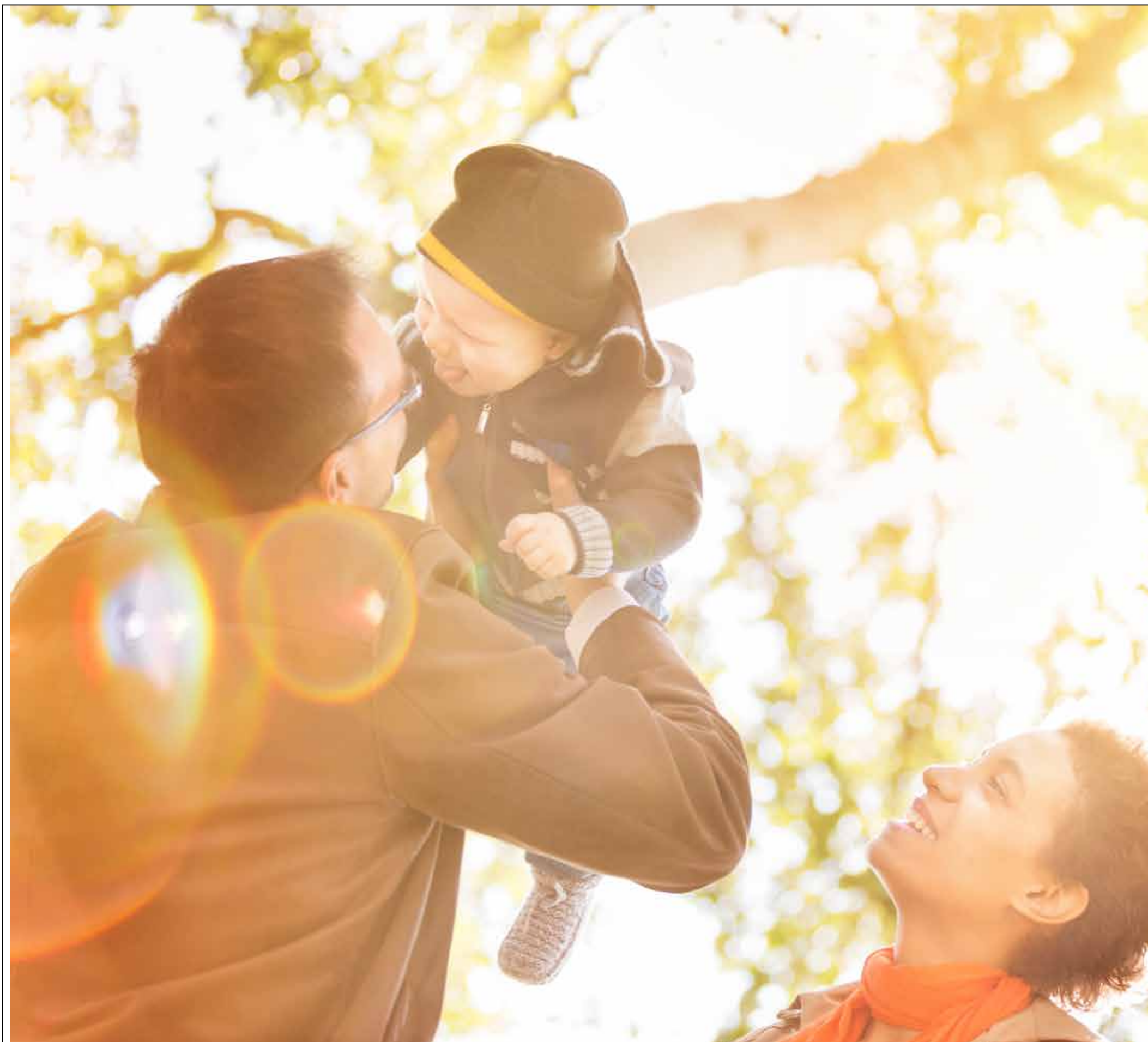
The IMH certificate program evolved into a unique dual-title degree. Graduate students in social work, developmental or clinical psychology, or nursing at WSU can enroll in the program and participate in research. The program is the first of its kind in the nation, reminiscent of Mary Sweeny's educational model for the Merrill-Palmer School, and has graduated nearly 200 students.



*"Merrill-Palmer was a natural place to start a certificate program."*

– **Deborah Weatherston**, first director of the Infant Mental Health program





## Early Childhood

The Merrill-Palmer Nursery School has been housed in different places and had different names, but it has operated continuously since 1922 with a consistent mission. Today the Early Childhood Center (ECC) enrolls about 60 children between 2½ and 5 years of age from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds and income levels. The ECC, along with a sister program in the WSU College of Education, are among only five sites in Detroit accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The ECC serves as an anchor for the Early Childhood Consortium, which includes MPSI and College of Education faculty, directors and staff from 31 Detroit early childhood centers and community partners. The Consortium is dedicated to strengthening the quality of early child care and education programs in Detroit. The Consortium also promotes the “5-a-Day” parenting program, part of a technology-based system to identify and respond to challenges parents face today.

A special program provides support for parents in military families. Multiple deployments take their toll on mothers, fathers and children who all must cope with long separations and potential loss. Helping all family members manage these stresses benefits parents and their young children.

Learning and memory can be influenced by these traumas as well as diseases such as epilepsy. Studying brain structure and function beginning in early childhood and stretching into adulthood is one way to better understand these effects and how to help all children learn better.



Julie Wargo Aikins, PhD  
MPSI Director of Training  
Psychiatry &  
Behavioral Neuroscience

**Dr. Wargo Aikins** is a child clinical psychologist who focuses on disruptions to child development and the influences of parent and peer relationships. She studies the effects of military deployment on the mental health of service members and on family and child well-being. By pinpointing factors that undermine or protect family and child adjustment, Dr. Wargo Aikins aims to develop prevention and intervention programs to help active-duty and veteran families.



Jamie Karagatsoulis, MEd  
Director, MPSI  
Early Childhood Center

**Ms. Karagatsoulis** started at the MPSI Early Childcare Center as a lead teacher in 2009 and is currently in her sixth year as director. She hires and trains staff to meet NAEYC accreditation and state licensing requirements. She also manages the curriculum to ensure high standards are met, develops school policies and procedures, and fosters open communication with parents.



Kathleen McGoron, PhD  
Research

**Dr. McGoron** develops technology-based systems to help parents detect and respond to parenting problems and address their children’s disruptive behaviors. She works with community early childhood education centers and pediatric practices to evaluate her internet-based programs. Dr. McGoron also studies parent-child interactions to assess causes of parenting challenges and young children’s behavior problems. She works to create effective parenting interventions.



Anna Miller, MEd  
Executive Director  
WSU Early Childhood  
Centers

**Ms. Miller** has worked with young children and their families for over 35 years. She is executive director of both WSU early childhood centers and is a lecturer in the College of Education. Ms. Miller chairs the Early Childhood Consortium of early childhood center directors, Detroit-area community partners, and WSU’s faculty. She serves on many community committees focused on young children and provides professional development to early childhood educators.



Noa Ofen, PhD  
Psychology,  
Translational  
Neuroscience  
School of Medicine

**Dr. Ofen’s** Cognitive and Brain Development Laboratory investigates structural and functional brain development in typically developing children and adults. Her goal is to characterize how developmental changes in the organization of the brain underlie growth in the capacity to learn, retain and retrieve information. Dr. Ofen also investigates environmental and genetic factors that influence development, particularly for children with epilepsy.



Hilary Horn Ratner, PhD  
Psychology

**Dr. Ratner** has been a psychology faculty member and administrator at WSU for nearly 40 years. Her research expertise is in the development of learning and memory from preschool through adolescence. She published the first study of how mothers’ conversations help children develop memory. Dr. Ratner co-leads the Early Childhood Consortium. She also developed an innovative service-learning course for undergraduates to connect their classroom experience with the community.





Jennifer Gómez PhD  
Psychology

**Dr. Gómez** investigates how violence impacts Black adolescents and emerging adults. She studies factors that increase trauma severity among minority populations, especially when trauma includes betrayal of trust within their cultural community. Dr. Gómez elaborated this concept in her Cultural Betrayal Trauma Theory and created an inventory scale to test it. She is also committed to communicating science to the public and publishes in many types of media outlets.



Stella Resko, PhD  
School of Social Work

**Dr. Resko** studies ways to prevent and treat the effects of high-risk behaviors such as substance use and inter-personal violence among teens. She has worked closely with the Michigan Prevention Association and other community partners to understand the effects of more wide-spread use of marijuana. Dr. Resko also co-leads two projects to prevent and treat opioid misuse in Michigan and to help families recover from substance abuse.



Valerie Simon, PhD  
Psychology

**Dr. Simon** studies how interpersonal violence can undermine romantic relationships in adolescence and she develops interventions that promote healthy adolescent relationships. Her innovative Trauma-Meaning-Making Interview characterizes emergent romantic and sexual development. Dr. Simon uses “virtual reality” and social media tools to assess cognitive, emotional and physiological reactions to challenging peer interactions by violence-exposed teenagers. She also investigates how people respond to childhood maltreatment to support maternal and child well-being.



Olivenne Skinner, PhD  
Psychology

**Dr. Skinner** researches experiences of Black youth in school and at home. She examines the effect of race and gender on academic achievement and classroom engagement. In the home, Dr. Skinner studies how mothers’ and fathers’ relationships and interactions with sons and daughters influence race and gender socialization. She investigates how family experiences influence psychosocial well-being and contribute to sex differences in achievement among Black youth.

*“It was clear to me that my school was failing to adequately educate a lot of students who looked like me . . .”*

– **Olivenne Skinner** referring to her research on classroom experiences of African American youth

## Adolescence & Emerging Adulthood

Merrill-Palmer recognized from the beginning that adolescence is a challenging time when youth strive for independence, identity and close relationships. Add difficult community or family situations or early trauma, and risks become greater.

MPSI researchers investigate how early exposure to drugs, violence, trauma or racial prejudice influence healthy youth development. They study how marijuana or alcohol use by parents or caregivers immediately affects young children and has lasting impacts on teens. Their research examines how physical, sexual and psychological abuse can impact youth’s mental health. How teens navigate friendships and romantic relationships is also critical. What happens in adolescence can have consequences into emerging adulthood.

Any of these challenges can be even greater for minority youth who must also deal with discrimination. Race, gender and other identities (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual) play important roles in relationships and academic achievement. For instance, being Black and female can lead to different experiences than being Black and male, with inequality impacting success in school and life. The experience of discrimination also contributes to disparities in mental and behavioral health, which adds to outcomes of trauma when betrayal of trust occurs within a cultural community.

MPSI research and intervention programs aim to reduce risk and increase resilience of youth through both traditional means and new uses of technology and social media.



## Trainees and Fellows

In 2011 MPSI reorganized its interdisciplinary training program for doctoral students and now draws students from multiple WSU programs. These students add to the dozens of undergraduate and graduate students working with faculty in research laboratories or enrolled in the Infant Mental Health program.



Jessica Goletz  
Psychology



Lama Hassoun Ayoub  
Psychology



Michael Henson  
Social Work



Kathryn Knoff  
Kinesiology



Bridget Murphy  
Psychology



Sidney O'Shay-Wallace  
Communication  
Sciences and Disorders



Jami Pittman  
Psychology



Zenaida Rivera  
Psychology



Britta Shine  
Psychology



Lauren Sparks  
Psychology



Kathryn Szechy  
Social Work



Sarah Wilhoit  
Psychology

## Affiliated Faculty



Marjorie Beeghly, PhD  
Chair, Developmental  
Science Core Faculty,  
Psychology



Tanja Jovanovic, PhD  
Psychiatry and  
Behavioral  
Neurosciences



Hilary Marusak, PhD  
Psychiatry and  
Behavioral  
Neurosciences



Christine Rabinak, PhD  
Applebaum College  
of Pharmacy &  
Health Sciences



Hannah Schacter, PhD  
Psychology



Elizabeth Towner, PhD  
Family Medicine and  
Public Health Sciences



Chris Trentacosta, PhD  
Psychology

## Senior Scholar



Pamela Reid, PhD  
Psychology





Bev Weathington demonstrates proper care and holding of an infant to a Detroit class of doulas, also known as birth companions.

## Healthier Urban Families Outreach

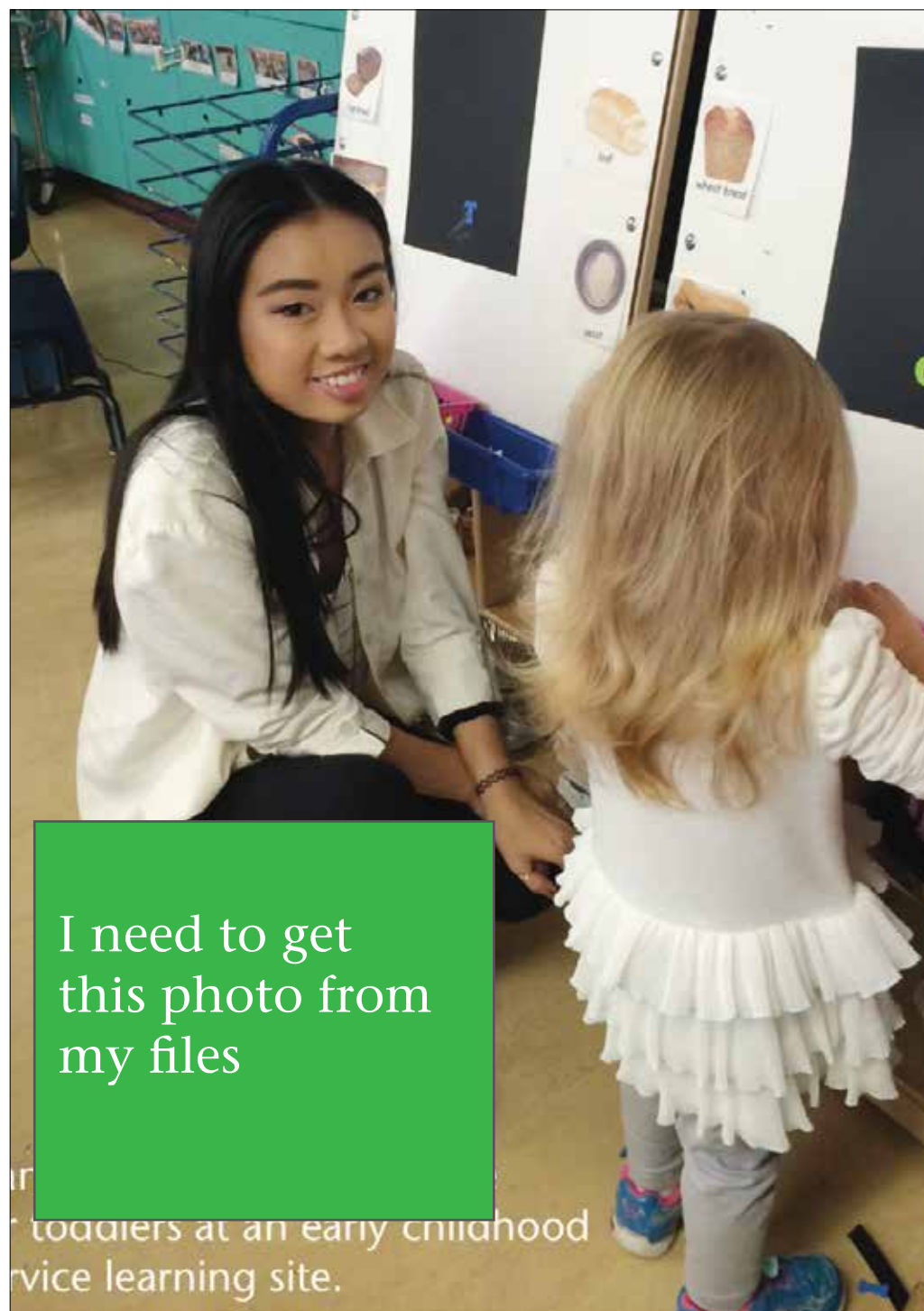
The Healthier Urban Families Outreach Program (HUF) is the backbone of today's community engagement. HUF seeks to understand the needs and concerns of families, particularly those in an urban environment. HUF helps parents, grandparents and the professionals who serve them through engagement and education. HUF places a strong emphasis on providing information that is meaningful and accessible to the community.



Beverly Weathington  
LMSW, Community  
Outreach Coordinator

**Ms. Weathington** leads the Healthier Urban Families program, co-chairs the Early Childhood Consortium, and helps coordinate the Giant Step Teen and Explorations in Development conferences. She engages hundreds of parents and families and thousands of professionals each year in workshops and trainings. She has helped metro Detroit families through coordinating child care resources and referrals, family counseling, program development, child welfare, and research.

A WSU student helps care for toddlers at MPSI's early childhood service learning site.



I need to get this photo from my files

toddlers at an early childhood service learning site.



Fatherhood Policy Forum, organized by Dr. Dayton, to keep fathers active in children's lives.



The annual Giant Step Teen Conference was launched more than 35 years ago to unite Southeast Michigan teens from diverse backgrounds. Each year Giant Step attracts hundreds of teens from public, private, charter, parochial and home schools to foster tolerance, acceptance and harmony. Teens enter as strangers but leave as friends.