



Participants in the 2019 Michigan Infant Mental Health Conference, including WSU Infant Mental Health Program leaders.

It's been 30 years since Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute graduated its first Infant Mental Health Certificate student. This landmark makes it one of the longest running programs of its kind in the country. "Our program provides expert interdisciplinary training to help students better understand and support the infant-caregiver relationship," said IMH Director Ann Stacks, PhD, IMH-E(IV). In 30 years, it has helped to create nearly 200 professionals working in the field of infant mental health. "With longevity comes impact," she said.

Infant Mental Health Program Celebrates 30 Years

see 30 YEARS page 3

30 Years from page 1

MPSI's infant mental health program has survived and thrived by responding to changing student and community needs. An extensive review of the certificate program in 2010 pointed to the need for more depth and integration with students' majors and an increased focus on research. The new Dual-Title Degree in Infant Mental Health, launched in 2012, became the first such program in the country. Courses fit well with major coursework and meet the Michigan Association for Infant Mental health endorsement criteria.

"The change to a dual-title option was a response to the changing needs of students and MPSI," said Dr. Carla Barron, IMH's clinical coordinator. Approximately 10 graduate students each year, from psychology, nursing or social work, choose the dual-title degree. While some IMH programs have struggled, MPSI's shift with the times has kept the program vibrant and successful.

Karol Wilson, LMSW, is a 1993 graduate of the original certificate program. Now a supervisor with Starfish Family Services, Karol finds students from the dual-title program "have been immersed in what attachment means" and understand the importance of early relationships. They are encouraged to not always have the answers but "to be present with the family." She appreciates the practicum where students make home visits, parent-child observations and experience real-life situations. "We recruit students from the dual-title because we know they have these intrinsic qualities."

Dr. Stacks also credits MPSI's Director Peter Lichtenberg with the IMH's continued success. He organized the



Dr. Mickey Sperlich, now an assistant professor at the University at Buffalo, was the first to earn a dual-title PhD in social work. Shown here with her newborn in 2013.

program review committee and helped revise the program in response to feedback. "Dr. Lichtenberg gets major credit for our longstanding success," she said. "He took the program review seriously, supported me during difficult decisions and was willing to invest in the program and its staff. I am ever grateful."

MPSI is particularly indebted to the early impassioned vision of Deborah Weatherston, PhD, who co-founded its Interdisciplinary Graduate Certificate Program in Infant Mental Health in 1988 and served as its director until 2004. The training program included graduate level coursework, clinical field placements, observations of infant development in relationships, and space for clinicians to reflect on their work. Nearly 100 students earned their Infant Mental Health Certificate during Dr. Weatherston's tenure, and she co-authored the first *Manual for Infant Mental Health Home Visiting*, now in its third edition. MPSI recently established an endowed scholarship for students in the dual-title program in her honor (see page 4).

The first 1,000 days of a child's life are critical to lifelong mental and physical health. Happy Birthday to MPSI's Infant Mental Health program. May the education and experience it provides reap rewards for countless infants and families to come.