



MERRILL PALMER SKILLMAN INSTITUTE

for Child & Family Development

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# MPSI REPORT

AWARDS

## Weatherston Scholarship in Infant Mental Health Selects First Awardees

by Cheryl Deep

Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute awarded graduate students, Leina Filipczak and Emily Brown, the 2020 Weatherston Scholarship for their exceptional work in the Infant Mental Health Dual-Title Degree Program. The specialized degree is open to WSU students working toward their master's in social work and interested in working with infants, very young children and their families.

The Weatherston scholarship was created under the leadership of IMH Director Ann Stacks, PhD, to honor the important work of Deborah Weatherston, PhD, in infant mental health (IMH) in Michigan, the country, and across the world. The scholarship has been funded through generous donations from dozens of faculty members and community professionals in social work, psychology and early childhood. It is designed to support diversity in the infant mental health field and provide financial support to deserving graduate students to cover some of the extra costs incurred in choosing the Dual-Title Degree option.

"It was a tremendous honor to be recognized for the work I did with infants and families long ago, my years at the Merrill-Palmer Institute as the co-founder and director of the Graduate Certificate Program in IMH, and the collaborative work I was privileged to carry out with the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health and the nationally recognized Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health," Dr. Weatherston said. "I wish to give a special thank you to every donor who has made this fund possible."



**Leina Filipczak**

Leina, 30, first heard about the field of infant mental health as an undergraduate and was "totally hooked." She had worked with adults with severe developmental disabilities and remembers that many of them had no words, except "Mama." Even if they hadn't seen their mother in 50 years, she said, that was still their only word. The importance of that early attachment relationship, "completely clicked and made sense to me," she said. "I've totally absorbed myself in it. I read the IMH books for fun. I just love it."

Leina knows Dr. Weatherston (Debbie) by reputation, though Covid-19 restrictions have kept them from meeting in person. Weatherston's seminal article defining an IMH specialist is Leina's checklist to keep her on track. She will graduate in May 2021 and would like to get experience working directly with moms and babies before eventually starting a non-profit for women with substance disorders or have experienced significant trauma. "My other passion is knitting which can be very therapeutic in a group setting," Leina said. "When I had my son, knitting was my lifeline. He would sit on my lap and play with the yarn while I interacted. I like the idea of a family-friendly therapeutic healing through art program that includes knitting."

Leina's son is now 8 and her second child is due in January. Working, parenting (including home schooling during the pandemic), field placement and attending graduate school has been stressful. She deeply appreciates the help provided by this scholarship and others she has received. "I would have had to put school on hold if not for this scholarship help," she said. "It makes all the difference."



**Emily Brown**

Emily, 27, will graduate with her MSW in 2022. She works part-time and is the mother of two: an 11-year-old and 1-year-old. She first learned of infant mental health as a high school student, pregnant with her first child and fortunate to have an astute guidance counselor who put her in touch with an infant mental health therapist through The Guidance Center. "She was wonderful," Emily said. "She was with us through my son's first day of kindergarten. So when I went back to get my master's, I looked up infant mental health program because I know that was what I wanted to specialize in."

Going back to school meant financial strain. Emily had to give up her position as a head start teacher. "I had a career and made a decent amount of money. Some days it was very hard, having a second baby, going to grad school." The Weatherston Scholarship meant much more to her than the financial boost, though. "It was a sign that I was doing what I should be doing, a boost that I was on the right track." Her ultimate career goal is provide the best help for families in need, either by working in administration for an agency to change policy or write grants, or directing an IMH program.

"I want to say how honored and grateful I am to be part of such an excellent program at Wayne State. My professors are so knowledgeable and supportive. And they are in it, in the field, part of the research and interventions, part of what makes IMH what it is," she said. "This has been a powerful and wonderful experience. The IMH community is kind, understanding and receptive. I am grateful to be a part of it."

"I am thrilled that the scholarship is so meaningful to Leina and Emily," Dr. Weatherston said, "as I hope it will be to others in years to come."

To learn more about the [Deborah Weatherston Infant Mental Health Scholarship](#) or to make a donation, please [CLICK HERE](#).



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