



# ImPrints

MPSI IS PART OF THE DIVISION OF RESEARCH AT WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY, DETROIT, MI

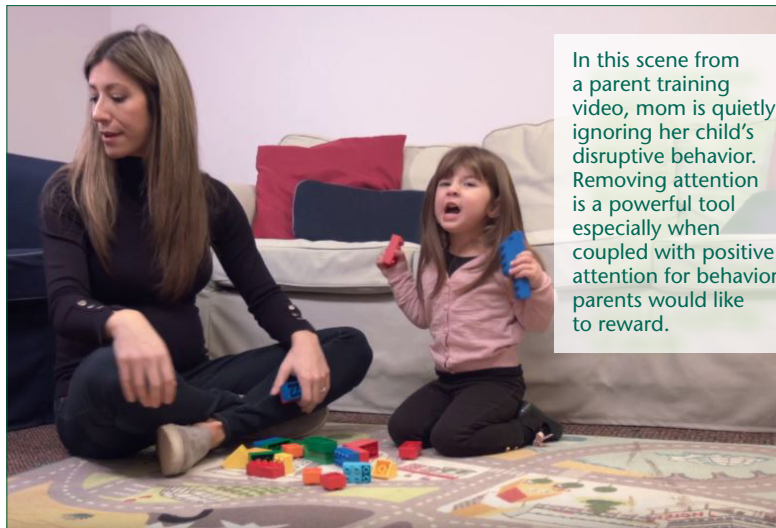
SPRING 2019

## Testing a New Approach to Parent Education

Parents of young children are beyond busy. Meals, baths, bedtimes, doctor visits, reading, playing, more meals, more baths. Not to mention trying to spend a little quality time with your child's other parent. For parents of children who are challenging or disruptive, there can be little time to seek help or guidance.

Kathleen (Lucy) McGoron, PhD, MPSI's newest faculty member, wants to make it easy for parents to learn new parenting strategies. She is hoping parents can slot her high-tech approach into random down-times to enhance their skills in dealing with disruptive behaviors. "We have a wealth of research-based information out there," Dr. McGoron said. "We need a way to connect it to parents in a meaningful way. This approach could create the bridge between basic research and the families who can benefit from it."

The National Institute of Mental Health agrees. Dr. McGoron won a four-year, \$533,000 grant to use her internet-based approach to identify disruptive behavior in



In this scene from a parent training video, mom is quietly ignoring her child's disruptive behavior. Removing attention is a powerful tool especially when coupled with positive attention for behavior parents would like to reward.

children and motivate parent engagement. Her K01 Career Development Award provides support and mentorship to promising researchers training in a new field. "My PhD is in applied developmental psychology, basic research," Dr. McGoron said. "I'm switching my focus to intervention development, especially mHealth approaches."

### Learn While You Wait

Dr. McGoron's Parenting Young Children Checkup (PYCC) will begin during check-in at the pediatrician's office. Parents will be asked if they'd like to complete a brief

screening on a tablet while they wait for the doctor. (The study compensates them for their time.) If the child is exhibiting disruptive behavior, parents receive a brief intervention, also on the tablet. They are then sent follow-up text messages linking to video-based content on a parent training website.

"Our first focus was whether parents would access parent training online. There's no hope for a program that people won't use," Dr. McGoron said. The team expected resistance, as-

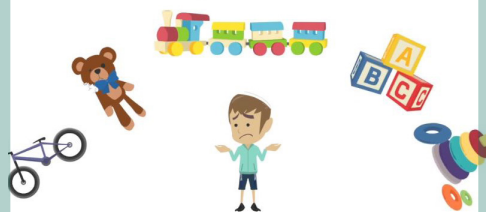
suming parents wouldn't want to be told how to parent. They assumed wrong. "We received very positive feedback. Parents were open to any information," Dr. McGoron said. "We kept probing, trying to tease out any resistance: What don't you like? The response was, 'Why wouldn't I look at this on my phone? If you send me a 10-minute video that could help, why wouldn't I watch it?'"

From here, the program's content and graphics will continue to be refined based on feedback. Then the team will test whether

see [Testing page 2](#)

### PARENT TRAINING MESSAGES

It may be that you are offering more choices than your child can handle.



Your words have a tremendous impact. Children need guidance from adults.



*We received very positive feedback. Parents were open to any information"*

– Dr. McGoron

## Testing from page 1

er the brief intervention and text messages motivate parents to learn new skills. Eventually they will ask about improvements in the child's disruptive behavior. "But the main goal is to determine whether parents will make use of this type of approach. Are they logging in? Do they like this way to connect?"

Web-based training can have significant advantages over person-to-person:

- Not threatening or intimidating. Reaches parents reluctant to seek mental health services.
- Cost-effective and convenient.
- Perfect fidelity. Rather than train multiple therapists to deliver a program the same way, these messages stay consistent.
- Large reach – the chance to help thousands of parents make small but significant changes that impact their children's development.
- Frequency and content can be tailored to individual parents' needs.
- Preventative. Children whose problems are not yet severe enough to warrant therapy can be helped before they progress.

## Insights from Motherhood

Dr. McGoron's role as mom to a 7- and 3-year-old crystallized her interest in using pediatrics and the internet to reach parents. "We were always at the doctor's office when my kids were little," she said, "Or Googling some of the silliest things in the world for help. For most parents, the resources they use most are their pediatrician and the internet."

Now that the project is off to a good start, Dr. McGoron reflects on one of her earliest challenges: meeting with busy pediatricians to get permission to offer the tablet-based screening in their office. "They generally liked what we were trying to do," Dr. McGoron said, but finding a time when they could complete the paperwork was difficult. "I gained enormous respect for how truly busy pediatricians are, on their feet all day, seeing patients back-to-back. It's made me much more patient when I sit in the waiting room with my own children."

## NEWS & HONORS



**Spotlight on Sexting** – MPSI Fellow **Davia Steinberg** won a \$5,000 grant from the International Society for the Study of Women's Sexual Health to support her dissertation research. A PhD candidate in clinical psychology, Davia is mentored by MPSI professor **Valerie Simon**. Davia is assessing teen sexting in the context of romantic and sexual behaviors, part of Dr. Simon's longitudinal study of adolescent interpersonal development.

Why sexting? It's prevalent and research is limited. In her paper in the January *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, she found that of 453 high school teens, about 50% had sexted by 11th grade. "Just like engaging in other sexual behaviors, sexting may not in and of itself be worrisome," Davia says. She advises parents to "try not to freak out." Davia's work was chosen for a Spotlight Article by WSU's Graduate School.

**Student Shares Baby on Board Research** – **Devan Keys**, an undergraduate research assistant on MPSI's Baby on Board project, presented research at the Alliance for Graduate Education and Professoriate (AGEP) conference in Lansing. Devan is a WSU McNair Scholar, chosen for academic and leadership excellence, and president of the Black Student Union. Dr. Carolyn Dayton leads the Baby on Board study of urban fathers' role in early parenting.



## LIFESPAN RESEARCH DAY WINNERS



Board Member Maureen Saxton (rt) congratulates Lauren Sparks.



Sydney O'Shay-Wallace captivates the audience with her research.

**You've Got Three Minutes** – The annual Lifespan Research Day, jointly hosted by MPSI and the Institute of Gerontology, added a new competition to its traditional poster and podium presentations: the 3-Minute Thesis. Students were allowed one PowerPoint slide and a mere 180 seconds to describe their research to a lay audience. The five brave contestants had a strong showing. "I was blown away," said judge **Maureen Saxton**, a MPSI Board member. "Everyone gave a professional-grade speech." Judges deliberated for more than an hour. "This was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make," Ms. Saxton said.

**3-Minute Thesis Winner** – **Lauren Sparks** for *How We Hope: The Development of the Hope Protocol for Young Children*.

**Podium Presentation Winner** – **Sydney O'Shay-Wallace** for *We Weren't Raised that Way: Understanding How Families Manage the Stigma of Substance Abuse*.

**Poster Presentation Winner**

**Lauren Sparks** (yes again!) for *Predicting Unique Hope Trajectories in Adolescence*.



## Lasting Lessons from the Little Ones

"I wike her," said a four-year-old boy sitting in a circle, as a young woman read the children's book *Snow* to the group. "I wike her a lot."

"Her" is Megan Fordon, a 19-year-old sophomore in psychology at Wayne State University who has been visiting MPSI's Early Childhood Center a few hours each week for the past six weeks. "It's fun working around kids," Megan said. "This is a great age group to be around. I babysat a lot in high school, but never with kids this young."

Megan is part of WSU's Developmental Psychology Service Learning Laboratory. Taught by Professor Hilary Ratner, the class is a project-based complement to Developmental Psychology that provides students with hands-on experience throughout the lifespan. Students choose from service learning sites involving children, youth, adults or older adults. Six students chose the Early Childhood Center, visiting at least two hours a week. Senior Gina Montalto, a psychology major, chose the class as a "foot in the door to learn more about how children develop inside the classroom and at home. Plus I'd heard nothing but good



Megan Fordon leads circle time at the Early Childhood Center.



Gina Montalto helps the preschoolers' make believe family negotiate household duties.

things about Dr. Ratner," she said.

The students write weekly reflections and observations of their experiences in the field, connect a journal article about developmental psychology with their service learning, and write a final summary paper. "Reading the students' writing over the course of the semester is always so rewarding," Dr. Ratner said. "They typically learn a lot about the field and themselves, and I have the opportunity to see and support their deepening understanding."

Megan and Gina found the experience exhilarating, surprising and sometimes exhausting. Megan wanted a preschool, because she thought she'd want to work in one someday. She expected preschoolers to be loud and a little crazy, but "I didn't realize how much I don't know about 3- to 5-year-olds. How little we remember about being that age." The on-site experience was enriching but also altered her plans. "I'm thinking about working with adolescents and abnormal psychology next, to see if that's a better fit."

Gina enjoyed observing students in action. "I learned so much from watching what they did, how they chose to say things, who they played with and how they played. Kids are so pure. No filters," she said. Though she was nervous and in-

timidated by the students at first, the staff quickly offered support and helped her to relax. For her final project, she read *Chicka Chicka Boom-Boom* to the students. The lively circle of children helped her re-enact the alphabet falling out of the tree. "All the letters fell down, down, down and went boom on the bottom," one child said. He made a sad face. "Oops that was ouchy!"

Jamie Karagatsoulis, director of the MPSI Early Childhood Center, welcomes Wayne students. "Our center provides a wonderful place for students to get hands-on, real world experience working with children," Ms. Karagatsoulis said. "Although at times it can be challenging for students with little to no experience working with children, every student who completes their service learning hours at the center leaves enriched by the experience."

While not always easy, Gina enjoyed the challenge of expanding her knowledge of the developing brain in young children. "I'm going to miss them a lot," she said as the semester came to a close. "Coming here is the highlight of my week." Several service learning students have gone on to become student assistants at the Early Childhood Center. Gina is now one of them.





The Freer House will host its spring House Tour on May 19 with docent-led tours at 1:30 and 3:30 pm. Contact **Rose Foster** at 313-664-2509 or [rmfoster@wayne.edu](mailto:rmfoster@wayne.edu) for details and to RSVP.

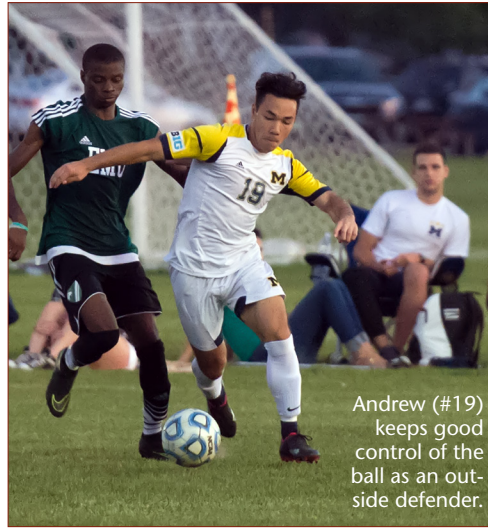
## Soccer Star Gets His Kicks Working at Freer House

Andrew Smutek radiates energy. By day, he's a research technician and assistant to the director of Freer House, planning events, building relationships with the community, and installing exhibitions. By night, he's the outside defender on the Michigan Stars Football Club, a semi-pro team based in Pontiac, Michigan, with aspirations to go professional. Soccer may be Andrew's first love, but his community education work at the Freer House is a close second.

"Andrew uses the same mental focus and goal oriented strategies for his work in helping me to promote and preserve the Freer House that he uses in his success playing soccer," said Freer House Director William Colburn. "His intellectual acumen and curiosity about Freer's legacy, and his thoughtful interaction with our diverse members and visitors, makes Andrew a much appreciated ambassador for the Freer House."

Andrew did have to climb a bit of a learning curve. "I didn't know anything about Freer and the house when I started," he admits. His first exposure was as an intern in the summer of 2017, while a student at the University of Michigan where he majored in history and minored in museum studies. "My advisor knew about the Freer House and told it was in Detroit. I'd heard of the Freer Sackler Gallery at the Smithsonian in Washington, but that was about it."

He returned to school with two books: Dr. Thomas Brunk's *The Charles Lang Freer Residence* and *Freer: A Legacy of Art* by Thomas Lawton and Linda Merrill and "started reading up." Director Colburn hired him after graduation. A few weeks



Andrew (#19) keeps good control of the ball as an outside defender.



At ease in social situations, Andrew connects well with guests at a reception in the Freer House's former Peacock Room.

later, Her Imperial Highness, Princess Akiko of Japan, made a historic visit to the house. "We wanted to get everything correct and perfect, so the prep work was kind of crazy," Andrew said. A quick learner, he figured it out as he went. It was "all kinds of hectic," but the day unfolded beautifully. "That was a rewarding experience. I don't think I'll ever get to meet royalty again, especially in such a direct, personal atmosphere. You start your job and the first thing you do is meet royalty."

At 22, Andrew's work experience is eerily well-suited to his Freer duties. He's had gigs

in college catering, collections management at the Detroit Institute of Arts, tours at Cranbrook's Frank Lloyd Wright Smith House, and archiving databases at the U-M Museum of Art. His current passion project is enhancing the visitor experience at the Freer House. "The trend is interactive tours that engage the visitor, moving away from one-directional lectures," Andrew

said. "I helped with class tours at the U-M Museum of Art. These often included a 'special exhibition,' maybe 15 art objects pulled to entice the students and spark discussion and interpretations. The visitor experience is the focus."

Visitors to the Freer House are as varied as the art Charles Freer collected. Andrew regularly connects with Detroit's Japanese, Korean, Chinese and Indian communities deftly mastering cultural protocols. "It boils down to being respectful and having manners. I grew up in an Asian household. My grandparents came from the Philippines in the 1900s, so those values got instilled. Polite and respectful. That's pretty much it. Polite and respectful goes a long way."

Competitive soccer requires a different protocol. Monday through Friday, Andrew makes the long drive north to Washington for a 10 pm to midnight practice. Weekends he travels to games. The work all day / train at night schedule is more demanding than his years on UM's club team. How does he balance? "I grew up playing soccer. It's embedded in me, second nature. It's what I do," he said. The few times he hasn't played, he soon itched to return. His big dream is to go professional. "I really enjoy my work at the Freer House. It's interesting and rewarding," he said. "But what's life without soccer?"

*Inclusion, Harmony, Acceptance*

# The Recipe for Empathy & Understanding

Put 300 teens together from different schools, religions, cultures and neighborhoods. Mix them up so they don't know anyone at their table. Add facilitators to inspire discussion. Provide lunch. Wait four hours. What do you get?



Teens who entered as strangers now call themselves friends. Kids who were leery of kids who didn't look like them realize it's what's underneath the clothing that counts. Students who felt lonely or marginalized at school start to see a bigger world full of different people who accept them – just as they are.

This is the beauty of the annual Giant Step Teen Conference, hosted by Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute at Wayne State University. For nearly 40 years, Giant Step has successfully followed a simple mission: Help students from different parts of metro Detroit get to know each other and watch the walls of racism, bigotry, sexism, and bullying start to tumble. "Detroit is one of the country's most segregated cities," said Cheryl Deep, Giant Step's coordinator. "Our conference builds bridges across those islands. Teens get comfortable with teens who seem different from them but are really quite similar where it counts."

This year's Giant Step conference takes place on October 29. It includes a special 3 CE professional development workshop for the teachers and counselors who bring students to the conference. The conference, lunch, giveaways and speakers are all free to attendees. Giant Step's volunteer steering committee raises funds to support the event. A donation of \$50 pays the costs for one student to attend.

Pre and post surveys confirm that Giant Step makes a difference. More than 90% of students significantly improve in being open to making friends with people who are different from them, and in finding things in common with almost anyone, re-

gardless of appearance. "Beneath culture, zip code, religion, and skin color – teens have many life issues in common," said Dr. Peter Lichtenberg, director of Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute.

Richard Thomas, Giant Steps' co-chair with his wife Dr. Sonya Thomas, agrees. "The teens begin the day quiet and looking very uncomfortable," he said. "By the afternoon, though, they're laughing and talking, sharing Instagram accounts." Sonya adds how gratifying it is to see these students open up to each other. "The morning's scared teenager leaves with a new attitude and a table of new friends," she said.



Teens at the Giant Step Conference share a "wake-up" exercise (lt) and report on what they learned (rt). The podium summary from each table is a highlight.

## Help a Teen Attend

Giant Step is the oldest, continuously run teen conference on diversity and inclusion in Michigan, reaching about 300 students each year. Trained facilitators foster discussion on topics like bullying, social status, acceptance, similarities and future plans. And it's free! Would you like to help a teen attend? \$50 sends one student to the conference held October 29 on Wayne State's campus. The more money we raise, the more students we host.

For more information email [cheryldeep@wayne.edu](mailto:cheryldeep@wayne.edu) or visit <https://mpsi.wayne.edu/outreach/teen-conference>



2019 Spring Newsletter

- \$50 each to Sponsor-a-Teen for a total of \$\_\_\_\_\_
- Sponsor a Table-of-Teens for \$350

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Giant Step Teen Conference  
Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute  
71 E. East Ferry Ave.  
Detroit, MI 48202

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INNOVATIVE FOR THE TIME



1929

Merrill-Palmer creates rating scales for personality development and attitudes in young children. Versions of these scales are still in use today.

Share Your Memories

In 2020, MPSI becomes a centenarian. We plan to celebrate with an exhibition of historical highlights and a symposium on child and family issues. We'd also like to compile assorted MPSI memories, and hope you can help. Were you a visiting college student who interned at Merrill Palmer for a semester? A faculty member who taught here? A teacher in our Early Childhood Center or one of its preschoolers? Did your experiences at Merrill Palmer impact the person you became?



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