



ImPrints



Infant mental health students meet for an Early Relationships lab at Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute.

New Degree Program Supports Infant Well-Being

The country's first Dual-Title Degree in Infant Mental Health launches this summer through the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute and the School of Social Work at Wayne State University. MPSI will provide curricular oversight, help with admissions and work with students' advisors to ensure adherence to the curriculum.

"I'm really excited about it," said Ann Stacks, Ph.D., director of MPSI's Infant Mental Health program. "We've created new courses and assessments. Infant mental health will be meaningfully linked to social work courses." The College of Nursing and the early childhood department of the College of Education also have applications pending to offer the degree.

For years, MPSI offered a well-regarded certificate in infant mental health, a valuable option for students but lacking the academic integration and depth of a dual-title degree. Last year, MPSI had an external review done

of the certificate program. "That was such a helpful experience," said Dr. Stacks. "We realized we had the depth of knowledge to make this a dual-title program. The reviewers' insight helped to shape it."

Dual-Title Degree is One-of-a-Kind

The coursework is challenging and interdisciplinary. Faculty participate from psychology, education, nursing, social work and Merrill Palmer Skillman. Because of the rigor of the coursework, the IMH dual-title can be offered at the masters level, making it a one-of-a-kind opportunity at Wayne State. "Masters level students must have a placement site or thesis," said Dr. Stacks. "Doctoral students must have IMH integrated into their qualifying exams and dissertation."

Kathryn Sims is clinical supervisor of the

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NEWS & HONORS

MPSI and the College of Education (COE) founded the Midtown/Downtown Child Care Consortium, coordinated by **Dr. Sharon Elliott**, associate professor in the COE, in collaboration with **Anna Miller**, executive director of Wayne State's Early Childhood Centers. Members include directors of 11 centers in Detroit plus community representatives from the Woodward Corridor Initiative and Vanguard Community Development. The Consortium meets periodically to promote high quality early child care in metropolitan Detroit, with MPSI and COE faculty and staff providing professional education and advice to center personnel. For more information, please contact Dr. Elliott at 313-577-7887 or sharon.elliott@wayne.edu.

Pre-doctoral trainee **Amy Loree** won the John Teahan Memorial Award from the Department of Psychology as a student who demonstrates exceptional personal drive in developing clinical skills." Amy also won the first-place Clinical Research award from



LOREE AND HANNIGAN

the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neuroscience for *Sex Differences in the Purchasing and Use Patterns of Heroin and Cocaine*.

Graduate trainee **Jessica Lucero** will soon have "Ph.D." after her name. She successfully defended her doctoral dissertation, *Neighborhood Risk and Protective Factors for Teenage Childbearing and Fathering at the School of Social Work*, and will join Utah State University in the fall as a tenure-track assistant professor of social work.

Two important awards were granted recently to graduate trainee **Mickey Sperlich, MSW**. The School of Social Work named her the 2012 Elizabeth N. Brehler Scholar for her paper, *Asking Why: Confronting Childhood Sexual Abuse*. She also joins the editorial board of the journal *Child Maltreatment*, reviewing manuscripts under the supervision of MPSI faculty member **Dr. Shawna Lee**.



SPERLICH

Beverly Weathington, MSW, reported MPSI's Healthier Urban Families program trained 430 professionals since September plus five parent trainings reaching 180 parents. Locations included Native American Healthy Start and the Wayne/Metro Head Start.

New Degree from p.1

birth-to-six programs at The Guidance Center which offers support services to children and their families. She likes the balance a dual-title degree brings between research and clinical skills. Students with only clinical experience might not fully appreciate the value of research, she said. "Dual-title graduates are more likely to return to research for study and to help guide their work. They might also be more willing to participate in research projects. The field of Infant Mental Health continues to need qualitative and quantitative research to support the most effective clinical model," she said. "This degree will strengthen our field."

Employment prospects in the field are good, with many current job postings requiring masters level education with an endorsement from the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health. Dual-title degree graduates will be highly credentialed and well prepared to receive this endorsement.

One of IMH's first dual-title students will be MPSI predoctoral trainee Mickey Sperlich, M.S.W. She plans to research

how violence and psychiatric vulnerability are transmitted across generations and develop interventions for trauma survivors. "The dual title will provide a unique opportunity to receive specific, expert interdisciplinary training to better understand and support the infant-caregiver relationship," she said. "I'm very excited to be among the first to pursue it."

Wayne State and MPSI are a fitting location for the country's first IMH dual-title degree. The field of infant mental health was born in Michigan with strong support from MPSI, a top international institute in child development. Other IMH programs around the country have modeled ours, said Dr. Stacks. "IMH is all about supporting the domains of child development seamlessly across disciplines," she said. "MPSI encourages that. We may specialize in one domain but they all overlap."

Dr. Stacks and the director of the dual-title degree program, Carla Barron, will run the program. Dr. Stacks has been both a clinician and a researcher in IMH, "so I appreciate how much focus it takes to do clinical work and how difficult it can be to

learn and understand research. Both areas are complex and time consuming." Carla has been deeply involved in the infant mental health community for about a decade and is an expert on training parents and professionals in reflective supervision of children.

Ten students have already enrolled in the first dual-title course offered this summer. To learn more about the degree, please contact Carla Barron at 313-664-2528 or ac77863@wayne.edu.



"If parents learn it's not their fault the baby is crying, it could lessen the frustration. . ."

- Ann Stacks, Ph.D.

When Baby Cries and Cries

In addition to creating the Dual-Title program, Dr. Stacks was named principal evaluator of the Southeast Shaken Baby Syndrome Project designed to train new parents on infant crying and how to cope

MEMORY LANE

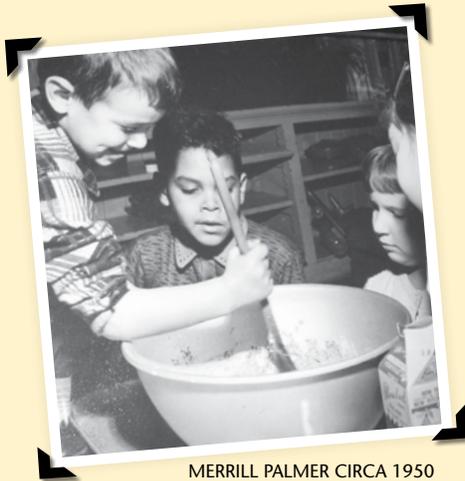
Legacy Writer Recalls Preschool Fun at Merrill Palmer

By Joann Castle

The year was 1978. I made my first acquaintance with Ferry Street when I brought my young son to Merrill-Palmer to begin his education. Now, 34 years later, I again approached Ferry Street seeking a senior writing class at Wayne State's Institute of Gerontology. To my amazement, both entities share the same building. I was overcome with nostalgia at the sight of the Merrill-Palmer preschool.

I was directed to the writing classroom, but I was distracted. My gaze was drawn to the preschool's outdoor play area. I felt myself slip down memory lane, to a time when my son was one of those children playing there. It was as if I could hear those little voices. I stepped closer to the window and slid further into the past as my eyes took in the tricycles in the play yard.

The once tiny sycamore tree now stood tall against the sky with branches spread as if protecting the little children who played under them. "Guard them well," I thought. "Steel them for the road ahead. They hold our future in their hands." Other writers entered the building then, seeking the classroom, and my quiet spell was broken.



MERRILL PALMER CIRCA 1950

But the trip into my past had taken hold in my mind, so I asked if I could take pictures. Perhaps my son, now 37 with preschool boys of his own, could tease some memories from the embers of his then 4-year-old mind.

Later we sat, with his 2- and 4-year old sons at his knee as he stroked the screen of his iPad considering the pictures. He laughed. "A four-year old mind doesn't hold many memories." But then . . . "This was my room with the mirrored glass in the wall . . . and this view of the courtyard."

More memories flooded in of two little friends, Aubrey and Harry. "I know that cabinet! The top drawer on the left was where they kept Harry's pacifier. They gave it to him if he started biting when Aubrey and I tried to play without him." There was more.

"Yes, here on the floor, we sat in a circle. They passed a telephone around to learn about numbers and how to turn its rotary dial. We learned our phone numbers." He paused at the outdoor pictures, "I remember the pillars. We played under this overhang." My heart warmed at his memories of time past.

For the past 90 years (its anniversary is this year) Merrill-Palmer has maintained its mission of a quality education for young children and research and training to improve the health and well-being of families and children. How fortunate we are to have its foundation at our feet as life passes from generation to generation.

Joann is a mother of seven with a Wayne State degree in medical anthropology and a 27 year career in healthcare. She has been writing about life experiences and personal observations since she retired in 1990.

with it. Shaken Baby Syndrome is the leading cause of abuse related death among infants. Nearly one-third of shaken babies die and 50-80% who survive suffer brain damage. "Being a new parent can be a very stressful time," Dr. Stacks said. "A parent isn't sleeping much, is anxious and then the baby cries for long periods of time and can't be consoled. Parents get frustrated."

What most parents don't know is that long periods of crying in a two-month-old is often normal. According to the National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome, 30 years of research on infant crying show that normal infants can cry many hours a day but will, in most cases, stop at about 4-5 months. "If parents learn this is normal and it's not their fault the baby is crying, it

could lessen the frustration that can lead to shaking," Dr. Stacks said.

The three-year project is led by The Children's Trust Fund of Michigan in partnership with area hospitals, Wayne State faculty physicians, and MPSI. The goal is to prevent deaths and injury from shaking a baby by training hospital personnel to educate parents of newborns with a training tool kit called the Period of PURPLE Crying. The acronym PURPLE defines normal – but frustrating – infant crying. The crying **peaks** at about 2 months, is **unexpected** with no apparent reason, **resists** soothing, infants have a **pain-life** face (even when they are not in pain), crying bouts can last 30-40 minutes and as **long** as 5 hours or longer, and usually occurs in late afternoon or **evening**.

Parents and other caregivers will learn to comfort, carry, walk and talk to soothe the baby, but if anger and frustration build, to put the baby in a safe place and walk away. It is never okay to shake or hurt a baby. Materials include a 10-minute DVD and a full-color booklet available in multiple languages.

Train-the-trainer workshops will be held at MPSI with Dr. Stacks evaluating and analyzing the effectiveness of the program. "This is the only evidence-based prevention program available for shaken baby syndrome," Dr. Stacks said. "Other states that adopted this training saw abusive head trauma and child abuse go down. This project can save lives and also protect the fragile bond between infants and caregivers."

Friendly drawings decorate the Kids-TALK welcome sign. Their offices and counseling rooms occupy the restored 1880's home in background.



Partners in Research Help Children Heal from Trauma

The Kids-TALK Children's Advocacy Center occupies a large, stucco home on a pretty Detroit street at the edge of Wayne State's campus. Beautifully restored Victorian homes line the block. A stone mansion with turrets sits majestically across the street. Though the house is now offices, the cheery rooms maintain a homey feel with upholstered chairs, pastel walls and assorted toys and games. Kids-TALK could be a private school or a neighborhood children's center.

It is neither. Kids-TALK is the centerpiece of the serious business of investigating child abuse, neglect and trauma. Children come here to be interviewed about their experiences.

In allegations of child abuse, the forensic interview is often key. Law enforcement officials, physicians, mental health professionals, and Children's Protective Services (CPS) all need to hear the child's account of what happened, but repeated interviews

can be extremely detrimental. "Now we all come to the child," said Melanie Richards, MSW, the assistant director of Kids-TALK. "The interview rooms all have full recording capability." While the child builds rapport with a single, highly trained forensic interviewer, a multidisciplinary team of investigators can watch the interview live from a separate location, even feeding questions through the interviewer's earpiece.

The interview process should not add to a child's trauma "We always put the well-being of the child first," Melanie said.

The Detroit site of Kids-TALK opened about 18 months ago as Wayne County's newest location for these interviews. It is one of two sites run by their umbrella organization, The Guidance Center in Southgate. The need for a convenient location in Detroit drove the decision to open a center in midtown.

Kids-TALK has also expanded their services beyond child sexual abuse to include

severe physical abuse, neglect and the witnessing of violent crimes. "In 2008, the Southgate center conducted 450 interviews," Melanie said. "This year we'll do about 1,200. Sadly, the need is growing."

The services of Kids-TALK don't end with the interview. "While it is crucial to identify cases of child abuse," Melanie said, "we also want to work with the children and non-offending families to help them heal and move on with their lives." Kids-TALK offers free therapy services to any child or family that has experienced abuse or trauma. "For as long as you need it, whether home-based or in the office, we can provide counseling," she said. A staff of five therapists and up to 15 interns insure that every family's needs are met.

Making an Offer that Some Families Refuse

The surprising problem for forensic interviewing, not just at Detroit's Kids-TALK but nationally, is that most families do not take advantage of the free therapy after-care. Dr. Valerie Simon, associate professor at MPSI and the Wayne State Department of Psychology, and a team of WSU researchers are collaborating with Kids-TALK on research to learn why.

"Early intervention is particularly important," Dr. Simon said. "But very few families are making use of it." Possible reasons include negative views of mental health services, distrust of the police and systems that support them, shame and self-blame for the abuse, and the context in which families learn about the therapy services. "A forensic interview about child sexual abuse is a time of high distress. People may be focused on the legal and prosecutorial part of the equation," Dr. Simon said. "Therapy services might not register as the next step. Perhaps cultural barriers also add to the problem. We don't know. That's why this research is important."

The collaboration between Wayne State University and Kids-TALK is a good fit. It's convenient: MPSI's offices are directly across the street from the center. Most



“A forensic interview is a time of high distress. Therapy might not register as the next step.”

- Valerie Simon, Ph.D.

importantly, Dr. Simon’s expertise ties in well with Kids-TALK’s goals. For years, she has researched the effects of child sexual abuse on psychological well-being and social development. “Sexual abuse increases kids’ risk for depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse and destructive relationships,” she said. “It can also distort emotional and sexual intimacy important to healthy relationships and well-being.”

Dr. Simon understands why families might want to hide from therapy and the

strong feelings it might invoke, including shame and self-blame for the abuse or its consequences. “But early after-care can help individuals work through those intense reactions and put youth back on track developmentally. Without it, negative reactions can persist and increase child and family risk for those long-term psychosocial problems,” she said.

The research project involves a collaboration of Wayne State faculty from MPSI, Psychology, and Social Work. The team will collect data on about 150

families, following them for 6-9 months to determine whether and why they seek therapy. They will gather information on child and parent distress, abuse reactions, motivation for change, and views about mental health services to identify factors that predict service utilization. “We don’t know what’s in the way,” Dr. Simon said, “and we can’t fix what’s in the way until we know what’s in the way.” After identifying the barriers to therapy, the team will develop and pilot a brief intervention that addresses the obstacles that might prevent families from utilizing important KidsTALK services.

As researchers seek answers, Kids-TALK continues to expand its services. It is currently renovating the rear carriage house for medical services and testing, so children can receive non-acute sexual abuse exams as part of the interview process. Without on-site testing, children often go to emergency rooms or family physicians, not optimal for the comfort of the child and often inexperienced in this type of examination. “Here we can explain what is happening in child-friendly terms,” Melanie said. “Our physicians are thoroughly trained and deeply experienced in these procedures.”

Kids-TALK also embraces its roles as a good neighbor and an engaged member of the Detroit community. It trains professionals, conducts school-based child abuse prevention workshops, hosts professional lectures on topics such as human trafficking and forensic interviewing, and sponsors an annual Youth Poetry Slam.

“Outreach and collaboration matter,” Melanie said. “We will pool everyone’s knowledge and resources if it helps us provide the best services for our families.” Dr. Simon agreed. She is humbled by the potential national impact of her current research. “Kids-TALK wants to be a state-of-science delivery model in child maltreatment research and intervention,” she said. “This is a great opportunity to conduct really important research.”

The child-friendly and child-focused therapy room in Kids-TALK is a place where children can use play to work through the trauma and abuse they have experience or witnessed



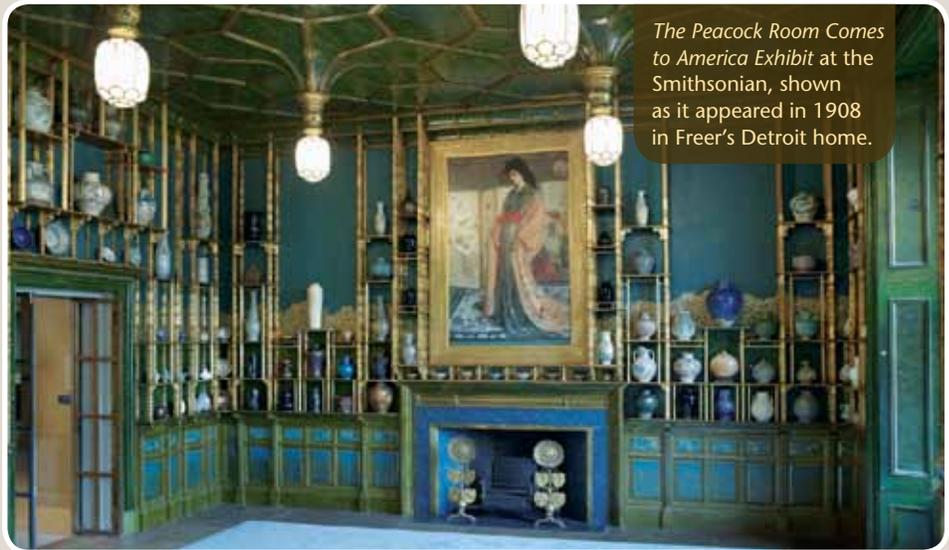
FREER HOUSE is home to MPSI faculty, administrative offices and meeting rooms

“Painting with Pottery” Explains Odd Piece in Freer Collection

Charles Freer amassed many magnificent pieces of pottery in his years as a collector of Asian, Islamic and American art. But for Louise Cort, curator for ceramics at the Smithsonian Institution’s Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, one piece stood out from the rest – and not because it was a masterpiece. The 1901 bowl was “odd,” said Louise, “a strangely lumpy attempt, probably by an amateur potter. It was a very, shall we say, uncertain movement in clay.” Why did Freer collect it?

Solving this mystery was the basis for Louise’s recent lecture at the Detroit Institute of Arts, *Painting with Pottery in the Peacock Room*. Approximately 165 people attended the lecture which, according to a DIA spokesperson, made it the most well-attended lecture of the 2011-12 program season in Danto Lecture Hall. Louise brought extraordinary depth to her study of Freer’s collection of ceramics and porcelains. She is a noted authority and scholar of historical and contemporary ceramics of Japan, South and Southeast Asia.

The Peacock Room began as the dining room of a wealthy ship owner in London. American artist James McNeil Whistler decorated the room in an elaborate peacock motif. Charles Freer purchased the room in 1904 and moved it to his Detroit home. After his death in 1919, the Peacock Room was installed in the Freer Gallery of Art at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. In a new exhibit, *The Peacock Room Comes to America*, the Freer Gallery populated the Peacock Room with Freer’s ceramics arranged as he displayed them when the



The Peacock Room Comes to America Exhibit at the Smithsonian, shown as it appeared in 1908 in Freer’s Detroit home.



Freer House member Delf Dodge (lt), director of global operations at GM Research, and husband, architect Tim Dodson (rt) meet guest speaker Louise Cort (center) at the Freer House reception.

room was in his Detroit home (based on 1908 photographs).

As Louise studied the sophisticated artistic choices made by Freer in his collection, she kept returning to his purchase of the “lumpy” pot. “What was Freer thinking?” she asked again and again. She spent months studying Freer’s choices and charting trends in his purchases, including a large expansion of his collection immediately after the Smithsonian agreed to create the Freer Gallery to house it. As the ceramics re-filled the room, and Louise read Freer’s meticulously kept records, she suddenly saw the pieces through his eyes. He liked “the opalescent blue glaze on Chinese pieces that became iridescent as they decayed over

hundreds of years in tombs,” she said. He loved a “tea bowl with a runny glaze” and the “luster of low temperature ceramic glazes.”

So what was Freer thinking?

“Harmony of color,” Louise said. “It was all about the colors.” Freer “painted” the Peacock Room with color by grouping his ceramics in balanced swathes of color across the shelves. His sense of color was strong, almost spiritual, according to Louise. He wrote of the “surface beauty” of the pieces; of the “universality of elements that made these objects beautiful.” Freer lovingly collected the “lumpy” pot and cherished it for its “fine autumnal tones.”

After the lecture, about 100 guests returned to the Freer House, home of the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute, for a reception and tour. They saw the space that once housed Whistler’s peacock masterpiece and tried to imagine the grandeur Freer brought to the room in 1908. “It’s amazing to realize it was actually here,” one of the guests said. “I’m impressed and grateful that Freer’s home has been preserved.”

Louise Cort’s lecture and reception was sponsored by the Freer House, the Asian & Islamic Art Forum of the Detroit Institute of Arts, and the Japan America Society of Greater Detroit and Windsor.

Giant Step Helps 266 Teens Embrace Diversity

The concept is simple. Unite young teens from schools across southeast Michigan. Seat them in small groups with a diverse mix of students they've never met before. Foster honest, open discussion guided by a trained facilitator, covering topics like social status, politics, religion, sexuality and bullying. Wait four hours.

The result is the Take a Giant Step Teen Conference. Entering its 29th consecutive year, this free event is the longest running conference of its type in Michigan, and possibly in the United States. "Our students come from public, parochial, charter and private schools," said Trudy Shiemke, conference coordinator. "We've had dozens of home-schooled children, too." Asian, Hispanic, African American, Caucasian and Arabic ethnicities are well-represented. The founders of Giant Step knew that if students from different neighborhoods, cultures, ethnicities, religions and income levels had the chance to get to know each other, much prejudice and discrimination would vanish. The students say it themselves:

"I liked meeting new kids, getting to know other communities and views."

"A great event. Due to my recent issues, the things we talked about helped a lot."

"I learned how others my age go through the same things I do."



Teens from charter, parochial, public, and private schools befriend each other during facilitated small group discussion.

Our research surveys confirm it. In attitude measurements before and after the conference, we found statistically significant improvement in a majority of students in: finding it easier to get to know people who are different from them, preferring to live in a community of people different from them, accepting responsibility for their actions, and believing they can do a lot to help their community and country.

In student's evaluations:

- 93% said that talking with teens from different backgrounds was interesting and educational
- 94% said Giant Step was a positive experience and recommended their school continue to participate
- 79% said they planned to stay in touch with the students they met at Giant Step.

"Our goal is to have all students realize that under the surface – beneath culture, zip code, religion, and skin color – all teens have many life issues in common," said Dr. Peter Lichtenberg, director of the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute that hosts Giant Step. "If we remember the similarities, we erase the distrust, hostility, violence and bullying."

This year's Giant Step Teen Conference will be held on Tuesday, October 30, from 8:30 am – 2:00 pm in the Student Center Ballroom on Wayne State University's campus.

Giant Step is free to all students. Donations from supporters are the backbone of our organization. If you would like to sponsor a student to attend Giant Step, please complete the adjacent form. Be our partner and Take a Giant Step with us toward inclusion, harmony and acceptance.

SPONSOR A STUDENT AT \$50 EACH



Name _____

Full Address _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

Make CHECK payable to: WSU – MPSI Giant Step Teen Conference, Check # _____

CREDIT: Visa Mastercard Card # _____

Exp. Date _____ Sec. Code _____ Amount \$ _____

Signature _____

MAIL TO: Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute, Attn: Trudy Shiemke
71 E. East Ferry Ave., Detroit, MI, 48202

REGISTRATION

Early Bird Registration
(available until August 1st)
\$60 per day

Regular registration
\$70 per day

ALL walk-in registration
at the door
\$100 per day

Registration includes
continental breakfast, lunch,
CEs and incredible speakers!

For more info:

Beverly Weathington at
313-664-2526 or
ac8787@wayne.edu
OR

Carla Barron at
313-664-2528 or
ac7863@wayne.edu

Merrill palmer
Skillman institute
for Child & Family Development



WAYNE STATE
UNIVERSITY

Michigan Association for
Infant Mental Health
Metropolitan Detroit



SAVE THE DATE

2012 Explorations in Development

12 CE CONFERENCE

Thursday, Sept. 27, 9:30am - 4:30pm

Understanding Disorganized Attachment and Caregiving

PRESENTER: **Judith Solomon, PhD**

Friday, Sept. 28, 9:30am - 4:30pm

Defining Therapeutic Action:

Attachment-Based Intervention with High-Risk Families

PRESENTER: **Miriam Steele, PhD**

NEW LOCATION: Michigan First Credit Union, Community Room,
27000 Evergreen Rd., Lathrup Village 48076

HOSTED BY: *The Healthier Urban Families Outreach Program and the Infant Mental Health Program
of the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute for Child & Family Development at Wayne State University*