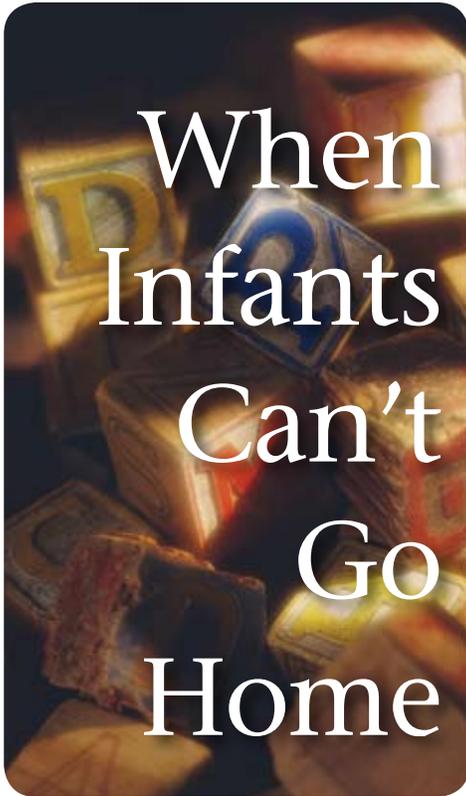




ImPrints



For most of her career, Ann M. Stacks, Ph.D., has been intrigued by the way relationships with important caregivers influence infant and child development and the potential for early intervention."

If an infant is maltreated," Dr. Stacks explained, "brain development is impacted in a way that further affects the way children respond to stress – the way they regulate their behavior and emotions."

As director of the MPSI Infant Mental Health Program, Dr. Stacks trains new infant

mental health clinicians and researchers how to improve the lives of infants who may be exposed to violence or caregiver mental illness to give them maximum opportunities for normal growth and development. For infants removed from their family of origin due to child abuse or neglect, there is much at stake. "Infants and toddlers in foster care nationwide are at extreme risk for poor developmental outcomes," Dr. Stacks said.

Approximately 15% of children in foster care enter the system before age 1; 30% come in before age 3. For all children, the first three years of life are a period of rapid growth and development in thinking, language, motor skills, and social and emotional development. Children in foster care often have two strikes against them: the trauma of the initial maltreatment, and the difficult transition to foster care placement. When combined, these often disrupt any stable, consistent and nurturing relationships the child might also have had, relationships crucial for healthy development and long-term feelings of security and attachment.

"Babies have unique needs in foster care," Dr. Stacks explained. "They need to be in enriched environments with secure attachments to their foster parents and the parents who will adopt them or to whom they will be reunited. They can't see a parent only one hour a week and stay connected to them."

At present, when abuse or neglect is substantiated and infants come to the attention of the court system there are three possibilities for placement. Judges can choose to keep the infant with the family of origin and order services for the parent and child. The second choice is a kinship placement with grandparents or other close relatives while the parents are evaluated to regain custody.

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Early Childhood Center student tends to their summer garden.

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Ninth and tenth grade students from Oakland International Academy cross Wayne States' campus to attend Giant Step Conference.

Infants in Foster Care

From cover

The third choice is foster care placement with unrelated family members.

Is one type of placement preferable to another? With her colleague Dr. Ty Partridge, Dr. Stacks is using a nationally representative dataset, the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well Being, to understand how infants fare in each of these settings. Initial findings suggest the answer may not be simple. More infants than expected had cognitive delays, and there was a wide range of educational quality and supportive adult presence in the home environments. Infants averaged 8 months old and watched more television than recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics, were disciplined by spanking, and had parents who were critical of them during a research visit. Infants placed with kin had fewer developmental problems than infants placed with foster parents. "But there is reason to be very concerned about all of these infants," Dr. Stacks said.

In a second study using the same database Drs. Stacks and Partridge found significant decreases in infant development regardless of placement type. Children who remained with their parents and those placed with relatives showed significant decreases in memory, receptive language, expressive language, and daily living skills. Children in foster care showed significant decreases in conceptual development, language, expressive language, and daily living skills in the first 18 months they were in care. Clearly, foster parents and kin caregivers need support and training to meet the special needs of these children.

"Regardless of where they are placed, these infants have an early and perhaps life-long disadvantage," Dr. Stacks said. For years, Dr. Stacks worked as an infant mental health specialist treating behavioral and social problems caused by abuse or neglect, and saw firsthand how they can plague children even into adulthood. "In addition to trying to understand the needs of infants and toddlers in the foster care system, I am evaluating a home visiting program aimed at preventing child maltreatment," she said. "Early intervention and prevention remains the best approach."



Research Awareness Day

MPSI joined the Institute of Gerontology this year to co-host the Fall Research Awareness Day in which students displayed large posters describing their current research projects. Approximately 100 people attended the session, including Vice President of Research Hilary Ratner who discussed the launch of the two Institutes' Lifespan Alliance.

Poster award-winning students were:

1st place – Susan Delonis (right)

2nd place – Sarah Shair (above far right)

3rd place – Emmylou Garza-Prisby (below left)



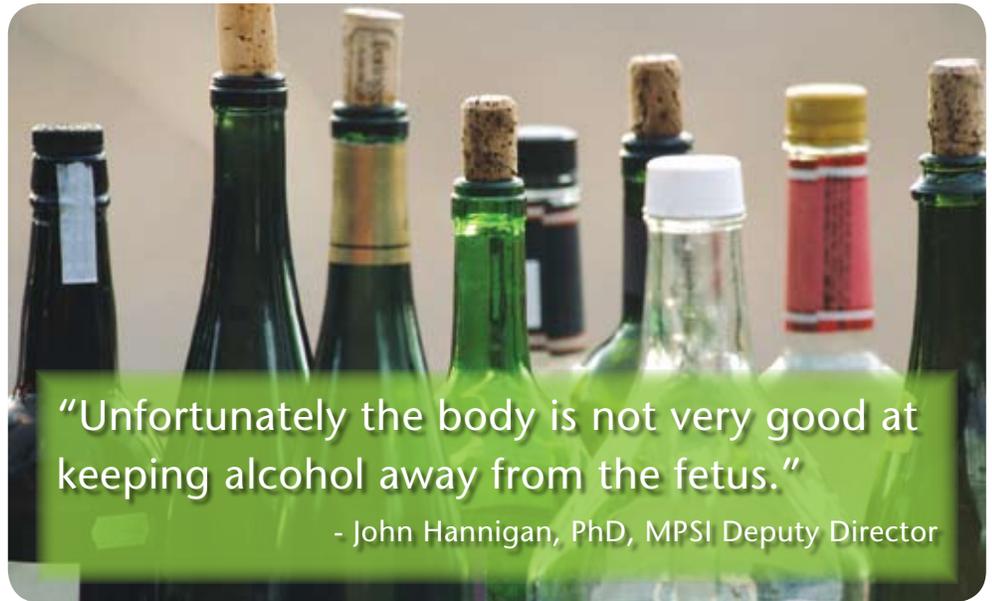
The Damage Done: Alcohol and Pregnancy

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy puts newborns at risk of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), a variety of physical, mental and behavioral problems that can last a lifetime. How much alcohol must a mother drink before the fetus is harmed? No one is sure, but we do know that 1% of all babies born in the U.S. display learning or behavior problems caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol, including learning disabilities, poor impulse control and difficulty using social skills. Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) is the most severe FASD and includes facial anomalies.

“Unfortunately the body is not very good at keeping alcohol away from the fetus. Alcohol travels everywhere,” said MPSI’s Deputy Director John Hannigan, Ph.D. Dr. Hannigan is also a professor of obstetrics and a professor of psychology at Wayne State University. His research has consistently asked: “How does the developing brain recover from any type of damage?”

For 25 years, Dr. Hannigan has studied FASD in animal models – primarily rats – as he searched for effective treatments for children. Rats work well as test subjects because their brains react to alcohol in ways similar to humans. Rats are also easy to train and test (the classic maze run) and they mature quickly so you can assess the brain as it ages.

In one of Dr. Hannigan’s studies, FASD rats took Ritalin-like stimulants to control their hyperactivity. The behavior improved somewhat – but with consequences to the function of the brain. “Because young brains are growing and developing, we must be cautious in the use of other drugs to curb the effects of prenatal exposures,” Dr. Hannigan said. “The drug approach was also too narrow. Children with FASD have broad problems. It is not enough to change one behavior. You must improve memory, spatial ability, and coordination. You must also help these children respond more appropriately at emotional and social levels. No drug can do that.”



To avoid the limitations of drugs, Dr. Hannigan shifted his focus to environmental enrichment for FASD children to help stimulate normal brain development and social interaction. Environmentally enriched FASD rats have shown cognitive improvements. Enriched rats lived with 12-15 mates in large cages with novel stimulation and lots of opportunities for social interaction. They were handled often, had room to roam, and played with objects that were changed frequently. “Even the rats with significantly damaged brains, who were severely compromised in their ability to learn, showed some improvements,” Dr. Hannigan said. He hopes to replicate this success in a new study providing targeted, intensive social skills training to children in after-school or vacation programs. “We want the study environment to look like a classroom,” Dr. Hannigan said, “and to do everything we can to ensure the gains made in the study can be sustained when the child returns to the real classroom.”

Dr. Hannigan’s research team is also trying to pinpoint the level of drinking during pregnancy that is most likely to damage the fetus. Thanks to the recent availability of sophisticated, non-invasive brain imag-

ing techniques, his team hopes to correlate changes in the brain structure and chemistry of FASD children with the drinking patterns of their mothers. “While a young brain is more susceptible, it is also more resilient,” Dr. Hannigan said. Some damage heals over time; other problems remain for life. Either way, researchers are certain that the brains of children with FASD are always compromised to some degree. “For the rest of their lives, these children must work harder to function optimally,” Dr. Hannigan said.

To help the families of FASD children understand and cope, Dr. Hannigan recently created FAS Cares (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Caregivers and Relatives Engaged in Support). A part of the MPSI Healthier Urban Families Outreach initiative, the free monthly meetings of FAS Cares provide information on social skills, siblings, techniques for redirecting inappropriate behaviors, legal issues, nutrition and other common concerns. “FAS children come into the world at an immediate disadvantage,” Dr. Hannigan said. “Parent training and support are key components of any successful method to help them.”

Play Is How We Learn



In the middle of MPSI, surrounded by students and faculty conducting serious research on infants, children and teens, sits a playground where 50 boisterous preschoolers dig, run, ride bikes, climb, slide and chase each other twice a day at recess. This is the heart of the Early Childhood Center, one of only two places on campus where young children are nurtured and educated to prepare them for kindergarten.

"We provide a structured day based in play," said Sue Madro, Ed.S., the center's director. "Play is the way humans learn." Engineers, physicists, and scientists like Einstein all play, said Sue. "Of course they are grounded in science, but when they research they play with different ideas. They creatively formulate hypotheses and test them to see how the world works. That is a kind of play -- with a lot of learning. Play makes life interesting."

Sue knows a few things about educating young children. She taught preschool and kindergarten, served as an early childhood administrator in Detroit Public Schools for 32 years, then retired for four before joining the MPSI ECC in August. It's hard to stay away from something you love.

The ECC at MPSI, and its sister school at the College of Education, are led by Executive Director Anna Miller. Hours, tuition subsidies, enrollment and philosophy of education are similar between the two centers, but the College of Education focuses on the training of future classroom teachers, while MPSI's ECC offers social and behavioral researchers the chance to study the children. From the child's perspective those differ-

ence are invisible. The ECC is where they meet friends, learn stuff and have fun when they can't be home with mom and dad.

"One child tells his neighborhood friends, 'I have to go to college today,'" Sue said. "Mom is a student at WSU so they both 'go to college.' He's so proud when he says it."

MPSI's ECC comprises large, bright classrooms filled with butterflies, wall drawings, blocks, mats, child-sized tables and chairs, and alphabets. The hallways are lined with family-made scrapbook pages honoring each child. The classrooms look onto a secure playground shaded by a 50-foot sycamore.

The Chance To Graduate

For 31 students at Wayne State, the ECC is a gift of time and concentration. Students who qualify for a Childcare Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) grant get free tuition for their child to attend full-time from 8:30-4:30. This allows the student to attend classes, and also to study and write papers while the child is at the center. "That way Mom and Dad can give their child undivided attention when they get home, instead of trying to read a textbook while kids are crawling onto their lap," said Sue. Students can apply for a CCAMPIS grant if they are undergrads, receive Pell grant funding, take at least 6 credit hours per semester, and maintain a 2.0 grade point average.

The ECC also allots nine places through the Great Start tuition subsidy for four-year-olds at risk for difficulties in kindergarten. Tuition covers an 8:30-3:00 school day five days a week. Currently all openings for CCAMPIS and the Great Start Readiness Program are full but enrollments change each semester. The remaining slots at the ECC are fee-based at \$520 a month for an 8:30-3:00 school day. A few openings are still available. The ECC's hours are 8-5:30 with before and after school fee-based options. The center follows the WSU calendar and is closed in July and August, though a summer camp may be available in 2010.

"We read, do puzzles, work on computers, and learn how to get along with each other," Sue said of the three mixed-age classrooms. The ECC uses the Project Approach for their curriculum model and is guided by the Michigan Standards of Quality for Pre-kindergarten Programs.

Lizzie Merrill Palmer founded the Merrill Palmer School in 1916 with a generous bequest. Her mission was to serve Detroit's children through formal academic programs, but the school day included exercise, sensory stimulation, cooking, crafting, dance and song. Today decades of research support the value of this whole child approach. "Our ECC is very much in line with Lizzie Palmer's vision," Sue said. "I think she would be very comfortable coming back here and would say, 'Yes, this is a good place.'"

Experts Help Keep Urban Families Strong

The team of Beverly Weathington, M.S.W., and Joan Blount, M.S., brings education, support and resources to hundreds of Detroit families every year. Their Healthier Urban Families Outreach program taps into the special needs of urban parents and children while their continuing education seminars bring the latest information to the professionals working with these families. Joan taught in the public schools and at community college, worked with Head Start, and has taught parenting classes for more than 20 years.

Bev has also worked with children and families her entire life, 17 of them at MPSI. "As an undergrad at Wayne State in 1983, I had classes in the Child Development Laboratory," Bev recalled. "I was a student assistant working with the pre-schoolers. I guess it was my destiny to make my career here." Through dozens of different research

and education projects, Bev learned wise lessons about parents and children. One of her first positions was a childcare resource and referral counselor in the Chrysler Plants, one of the first employee-driven programs of its kind in the nation.

The Universal Wish of Parents

"I really got to see what people need and want as parents," she said. "Everyone, from the people who work on the assembly line to the executives in the big offices, wants to know their children are being nurtured, educated and protected." She sees the same desires today in her role as co-facilitator of a new monthly support group for parents and caregivers of children diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. FAS Cares (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Caregivers and Relatives Engaged in Support) sessions are free and cover chal-

lenges such as social skills development, academic performance and appropriate behavior. "When it comes to being parents and caregivers," she said, "our needs and goals for children remain the same."

Bev also spent a year as a foster care specialist helping children and parents adapt to foster placement. "That was a hard job for me because I wanted to build a long, deep relationship with these families to insure success and there simply wasn't enough time. But I learned a lot."

Grandparents to the Rescue

Today Bev and Joan's skills and experience create about 15 programs a year for Detroit's parents. A growing issue is grandparents assuming the role of parents, driven in part by the current financial crisis. The U.S. has seen a 30% increase in G-to-G parenting since 1990. Sometimes a parent is incarcerated, has a drug or alcohol problem, is deceased, abandons the child or gives up parental rights. "It's all around us," Joan said. "Even President Obama was raised by his grandparents."

Several Healthier Urban Families programs are tailored to grandparents. "Parenting can be difficult for grandparents, especially if they are younger and still working themselves," she said. "But we also see positive effects, the strong bond they form with the grandchildren. If they are disappointed with their child's parenting skills, they get a second chance to pass on their own wisdom and do it right." The stress reduction workshop is especially popular with this group, but even with stress, "most grandparents say they would do it again."

To expand the impact of their grandparenting programs, Bev and Joan will soon release "The Work of Hope: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren," a set of four PowerPoint training modules available to support groups and professionals working with

Cont. on pg. 6

"Everyone wants to know their children are being nurtured, educated and protected."

- Beverly Weathington



Masterpieces Return to Freer Mansion

The Charles Lang Free House hosted a high profile series of events on the weekend of October 24 and 25. The new National Advisory Board for the Friends of the Freer House (FOFH) gathered for its first official meeting on Saturday. A reception and dinner to honor donors to the "Historic Freer House Art Reproduction Project" followed with 50 guests. On Sunday, Dr. Linda Merrill held a lecture at the DIA entitled, "The Blue Room: Whistler's Peacock Room in Detroit," followed by a reception at the Freer House for more than 250 enthusiastic participants. The events, sponsored by the Friends and MPSI, yielded \$4,000 for the Freer House and 30 new Friends.

A weekend highlight was the unveiling of 11 new reproductions of paintings by American artists T.W. Dewing and D.W. Tryon now displayed in the Freer House main hall and parlor. The reproductions are based on original paintings commissioned by Freer in 1892-94 that now reside in the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

The project was spearheaded by FOFH board member Doug Peters with the cooperation of the Freer Gallery of Art. Reproductions sponsors include: Phebe and Sid Goldstein, Peter Lichtenberg and Susan MacNeill, John and Ann Hannigan, Cathy Lysack and Stewart Neufeld, Thomas and Carla Jankowski, Marianne Endicott, Ann and James Nicholson; and a bequest from the estate of MPI alumnae Camille Schiffman.

- by William Colburn
Historic Preservation Specialist
and FOFH Board Member

CHARLES LANG FREER HOUSE

The Freer House is home to MPSI faculty, administrative offices and meeting rooms

JOURNAL RELEASE: In an upcoming article in the peer-reviewed journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, Dr. Steven Ondersma reports the results of studying 200 pregnant women, 18 or older, recruited at substance abuse treatment agencies. They found that external pressure to attend treatment is associated with greater retention in treatment as well as lower drug use. The group, subjected to pressure from legal, housing or child protection sources, attended more scheduled hours, stayed in treatment longer and used drugs less often.



EXPLORATIONS IN INFANT MENTAL HEALTH in June focused on parental chemical addiction. Responses to the conference were overwhelmingly positive. Forty-five professionals (plus a waiting list) who work with infants, toddlers and families attended the two day CE conference. Participants wrote:

- "Learning the characteristics of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder and specific medical effects related to mothers' use of alcohol during pregnancy was helpful to me as a therapist."
- "Dr. Fitzgerald's research is inspiring and speaks to intergenerational patterns. It provides credibility to infant mental health and relationship-based work."
- "The video examples of motivational interviewing was very helpful. I will use these concepts immediately in my work with parents."

Urban Families

Continued from p.5

families. The training examines the impact on grandparents, family dynamics, and the grandchild (from the child's perspective). It also includes an up-to-date list of available resources. "I'm piloting the modules with support groups now," Joan said. "It should be available to the community by mid-2010." Check the project's status at www.mpsi.wayne.edu.

Parenting From Prison

In addition to assisting with community workshops, Joan Blount facilitates Parenting from Prison with motivated male prisoners at Mound Correctional Facility. The 6-week course requires attendance at the twice-weekly, two and a half-hour sessions, extra reading, homework and a willingness to be honest about past parenting mistakes.

About 20 men, dressed in blue and orange prison uniforms, attend the session, many selected for early release within the next few months. "I know I have to take responsibility

for what I did wrong," one of the men said in a recent session. "My son might never forgive me but I want to try to make up for not being there, to be a good dad to him now." Another inmate admitted, "I got two boys and I don't understand either one of them."

Joan shares informational handouts, community resources, gives brief talks and answers questions. The men often perform roleplays to get comfortable with constructive ways of handling the inevitable conflicts that come with parenting. Inmate Raymond Carr is one of three facilitators for the class, a journalism study and an avid and talented writer. He has no children of his own. "All children are our children," he said. "I want to learn how to be a better father to the children in my community. We have to take responsibility so no more of our children end up here."

In October, the Parenting from Prison group donated more than \$400 and 50 handmade stuffed animals to Alternatives for Girls, an organization providing shelter, mentoring and counseling to high-risk girls and young women. "These men are trying hard to make amends and learn from their mistakes," Joan said. "Prisoners are often parents, too."



26TH ANNUAL

GIANT STEP TEEN CONFERENCE

hosted 274 students from 51 public, private, charter and parochial schools across metro Detroit. Giant Step's facilitated discussion groups to help students become more comfortable with diverse ethnic, cultural and religious views received media attention in the *Free Press*, *Oakland Press* and on Channel 7 TV news. "This four-hour conference changes attitudes," MPSI Director Peter Lichtenberg said. "It unites students who had previously been divided." Student responses were powerfully positive. Kali Cochran, 10th grade, said, "This was the greatest, most wonderful and best group. Even though a lot of us are a different race, we learned we are all the same people. We are all human and have feelings."



For more about the Giant Step Teen Conference contact **Trudy Shiemke** at 313-872-1790

MERRILL PALMER SKILLMAN INSTITUTE  for Child & Family Development



SAVE THE DATE:

HEALTHIER URBAN FAMILIES

Professional Development Seminars

All presentations held from 9am-12:15pm.
Register by calling 313-872-1790 or find forms at www.mpsi.wayne.edu.

(3 CE Hours each)

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 27

Substance Abuse in Parents & Long-term Effects of Prenatal Exposure

TUESDAY, MAR. 9

Grief and Loss in Children

WEDNESDAY, APR. 7

Autism Spectrum Disorders: Recommended Practices for Educational Interventions

WEDNESDAY, MAY 5

Child and Adolescent Obesity

FRIENDS OF THE FREER HOUSE

(Events open to the public, RSVP required)

SUNDAY, FEB. 7, 2010, AT 2PM

Benefit Concert at Freer House

A recreation of the first concert held at the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. on February 7, 1924 by the Library of Congress. Chamber music of diverse composers performed by the Scarab Club String Quartet. Benefit concert includes reception and tours. For cost and details contact Rose Foster at rmfoster@wayne.edu.

SUNDAY, MAR. 28, 2010, AT 2PM

Charles Freer and Detroit's Pewabic Pottery

A lecture by Dr. Thomas W. Brunk, Art and Architecture Historian. Cost: \$10. Students: \$5. Free to FOHH members. Includes reception and tours.

ALL SAVE THE DAY EVENTS WILL BE HELD AT THE CHARLES LANG FREER HOUSE (indicated by  on map)

WINTER COLLOQUIA occurs the second Thursday of each month from 11:30 -1:30. Lunch is provided, so please RSVP to mpsi@wayne.edu. Details of speakers and topics available in mid-December at www.mpsi.wayne.edu.

