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Online training to improve outcomes for maltreated infants and toddlers

DETROIT – A two-year project to create online training for multidisciplinary teams that serve maltreated children has been awarded \$500,000 by the Michigan Health Endowment Fund. [Ann Stacks, PhD](#), the project’s principal investigator, expects the project to train 600 professionals by 2024, including attorneys, jurists, and child welfare and infant mental health practitioners. The training would augment Baby Court, a science-informed model to integrate infant mental health best practices into services for abused and neglected young children and their families.

Stacks directs the [infant mental health \(IMH\) program](#) at Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute, where she developed the country’s first dual-title degree program in IMH. “Training for Baby Court teams is crucial,” Stacks said “but the current training format doesn’t meet the needs of the workforce. High turnover requires high-quality, on-demand, self-directed training.”

Children under age 5 children total 40% of the child welfare population in the U.S. In Wayne County, more than 4,000 infants and young children were victims of maltreatment in 2018 alone (Kids Count Data Center, 2020). Early childhood is a sensitive developmental period when children are highly vulnerable to the negative physical and mental health effects of maltreatment.

Baby Court teams aim to heal trauma, repair the parent/child relationship, promote permanency, and stopping the intergenerational cycle of maltreatment. The Baby Court model provides a workforce that is trained in the science of child development and collaborates to provide effective services to children and families so to improve child safety and well-being.

[Jeff Kupperman, PhD](#), executive director of InGlobal Learning Design, will lead the creation of the learning modules. He has 20 years of expertise in online learning for adults and will use human-centered design methods to ensure training is effective, engaging and well-matched to the workforce. An advisory team made up of practicing Baby Court jurists, attorneys, case workers and infant mental health clinicians will help Stacks and Kupperman develop module content, including case studies, and test the modules. Render Studies will develop video exemplars of best-practice in Baby Court to be used in the modules.

The grant will train 200 members of Baby Court in its second year and another 400 by 2024. “If each trained worker serves on 10 cases a year for 10 years,” Stacks said, “Sixty-thousand maltreated children would be positively impacted over the next decade.”

***The Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute for Child & Family Development** promotes and improves the well-being of children and families across the lifespan through research, education and outreach. The institute is part of **Wayne State University**, one of the nation’s preeminent public research universities in an urban setting. For more information about research at Wayne State University, visit research.wayne.edu.*