

# REVOLUTIONIZING TREATMENTS FOR CHILD MENTAL HEALTH

**FIU**

Center for  
Children and Families





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Message From Our Director:

In support of our mission to improve the lives of children and families suffering from mental health problems, the faculty and staff of the Center for Children and Families (CCF) at Florida International University made FY 2017 another highly successful year. Marked by high scholarly productivity and significant accomplishments that directly impact our goals of developing and providing effective treatments, increasing awareness of these practices and providing training to the current and next generation of community professionals, I am proud to share with you some of the highlights of this past year in the pages of this report, and hope you will be inspired to support our center and its mission.

Research is the cornerstone of our center, and having 40 affiliated faculty members as dedicated and productive as ours is the foundation that helps us build a center that produces the sort of scholarly output that we are incredibly proud of sharing. At a time of challenging federal funding opportunities, CCF faculty obtained, from both federal and local sources, close to \$80 million in external funding in total awards since it was founded at FIU in 2010, with \$9,941,694.61 in FY 17 alone. An impressive 176 publications were published in scientific journals and our work was featured in many top-tier media outlets, an indication of its relevance, such as The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, Reuters, the Miami Herald, among others.

Disseminating the body of research generated at the center and the effective clinical practices we have had a hand in developing for the treatment of mental health problems in children is of utmost importance to the CCF. To that end, our training and education efforts continued on an upwards trajectory. During this last year, our center had 450+ undergraduate students and almost 100 doctoral and master’s level students involved in training. Through our robust collaboration with MDCPS, training was provided to 3,500 teachers and other school professionals. The CCF held the Miami International Child and Adolescent Mental Health (MICAMH)

Conference, attended by 435 professionals and students actively involved in working with children. Finally, the CCF provided 2400 Continuing Education Units to licensed professionals in the field.

Treating children and adolescents who struggle with mental health disorders is part and parcel of our mission. This past fiscal year we provided services to 3,162 children through our clinical, research, and other initiatives. We continued offering important behavioral health services, including the Summer Treatment Program and its related programs, which served 298 children during the summer months. Additionally, the Summer Reading Explorers Program, an initiative focused on improving foundational reading and reading comprehension skills reached more than 1,500 children during the summer.

Last but not least, I am proud to share that the CCF was named an FIU Preeminent Program, a recognition reserved for centers/ programs that demonstrate extraordinary success in providing unique learning opportunities, pioneering research and engagement, and enhance the university’s reputation at the national and international level. We at the CCF work hard, with a focus on quality and innovation, and receiving this recognition from the FIU community was an appreciated validation of our efforts.

CCF faculty, students, and staff are driven by the desire to improve the chances of success of every child who struggles with a mental health condition, and to equip the parents and professionals who surround these children with the best tools to promote the best outcomes. We hope you will join us in celebrating our accomplishments for FY 2017, as we work in pursuit of this goal.

Dr. William E. Pelham, Jr.  
Director, Center for Children and Families  
Florida International University

Director, Center for  
Children & Families  
Florida International  
University

FACULTY AND STAFF

CCF AFFILIATED  
FACULTY

Allen, Timothy A.  
Arango, Lisa  
Bagner, Daniel  
Bahrick, Lorraine  
Baralt, Melissa  
Coles, Erika  
Comer, Jonathan S.  
Coxe, Stefany  
Dick, Anthony  
Fava, Nicole  
Furr, Jami  
Gonzalez Jr., Raul  
Graziano, Paulo  
Hart, Katie  
Li, Tan  
Mattfeld, Aaron  
Mazzant, Jessica Robb  
McMakin, Dana  
Musser, Erica  
Nichols-Lopez, Kristin  
Page, Timothy  
Pelham, Jr., William E.  
Pettit, Jeremy  
Pham, Andrew  
Pruden, Shannon  
Raiker, Joseph  
Reeb-Sutherland, Bethany  
Schatz, Nicole  
Schwartz, Jacqueline  
Sibley, Margaret  
Soto, Fabian  
Trucco, Elisa  
Villodas, Feion  
Villodas, Miguel

Arguello, Jessica  
Aristide, Stephanie  
Bager, Arwa  
Barresi, Carmen  
Beauboeuf, Regine  
Betancourt, Camila  
Beyer, Christopher  
Bisono-Gonzalez, Sarah  
Briceno, Delmy  
Bueno, Andrea  
Cabot, Lissandra  
Camacho, Alejandro  
Castillo, Gladys  
Castro, Rosalia  
Castro, Rosanna  
Cortina, Jennifer  
Costales, Amanda  
Defeo, Sahara  
Deleon, Miriam  
Espinosa, Antonella  
Gnagy, Elizabeth  
Golik, Alexandra  
Gonzalez, Ingrid  
Gonzalez, Jaife  
Gregg, Della  
Greiner, Andrew  
Hernandez, Daniela  
Hidalgo-Gato, Nicolas  
Isaac, Natalie  
Jimenez, Marianne  
Leon, Erika  
Lerner, Brenda  
Lines, Maria Alejandra  
Lozano, Cinthya  
Maldonado, Annette  
Martin, Julio  
Martin, Pablo  
Martinez, Diana  
Maurat, Ruth  
Medina, Dassiell  
Melo, Jennifer  
Miguel, Elizabeth  
Montenegro, Francesca  
Morales, Gabriela  
Morley, Candance  
Munio, Stephanie  
Ochoa, Carolina

Ortega, Carmen  
Pardo, Sophia  
Paula, Dayana  
Perez, Analay  
Pita, Katherine  
Polo, Katherine  
Pulido, William  
Raddatz, Susan  
Ramos, Francisco  
Rey, Yasmin  
Rodriguez, Isabel  
Rodriguez, Tatiana  
Rodriguez, Yesenia  
San Nicolas, Rosemary  
Santos Soto, Tamara  
Su, Meifung  
Valdes, Bernardina  
Vanegas, David  
Vazquez, Alejandro  
Vicente, Elina  
Waheed, Ifrah  
Wang, Suyan  
Watanabe, Carmen  
Zuraw-Moya, Ruth

POSTDOCS

Andon, Anabelle  
Del Busto, Cristina  
Garcia, Dainelys  
Hou, Jiancheng  
Lopez-Quintero, Catalina  
Maharaj, Andre  
Mahotiere, Margaret  
Mikhail, Sarah  
Stout, Tyler

CCF  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
AND RESEARCH  
STAFF

Acosta, Denisse  
Aguirre, Gloria  
Alvarez Gonzalez, Maria  
Arauz, Guillermo

# PROVIDING THE HIGHEST QUALITY CARE

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## RESEARCH

The Center for Children and Families (CCF) is an FIU Preeminent Program and a world-class clinical research center dedicated to improving the lives of children and families struggling with mental health problems.

Our center provides state-of-the-art services to approximately 3,000 families each year through clinical and clinical research programs presenting with the following concerns:

- Academic & social skills
- ADHD
- Anxiety & fears
- Conduct & behavioral problems
- Developmental delays
- Family stress & parenting support
- Mood problems & depression
- Trauma

With a team of 40 of the nation's best researchers and experts, the support of federal funding and university partnerships, we continue to gain new insights about the cause, process, effects and treatment of child & adolescent mental health disorders.

In addition, we also provide training and education to hundreds of students, and continuing education opportunities in evidence-based approaches to thousands of psychologists, other mental health professionals and educators nationwide.

## EDUCATION & TRAINING

## CLINICAL SERVICES



# MISSION AND VISION

Our mission is to improve the lives of children and families struggling with mental health concerns by:

Advancing evidence-based knowledge of the causes, mechanisms, outcomes, and interventions for mental health and learning problems of youth.

Promoting the development of effective treatments and prevention through scholarly research.

Providing state-of-the-art prevention and treatment services to children and families in South Florida.

Disseminating knowledge to students, consumers, and professionals in mental health, education, and primary care.



## WE ARE INCREDIBLY PROUD TO HAVE BEEN NAMED ONE OF FIVE PREEMINENT PROGRAMS AT FIU!

A Preeminent Program at FIU is defined as a collaborative endeavor that demonstrates extraordinary success in providing unique learning opportunities, pioneering research and engagement while expanding FIU's financial base. Designation as a preeminent Program is recognition for outstanding contributions to advancing FIU's Beyond Possible 2020 strategic plan and enhancing the university's reputation at the national and international level.



# IMPROVING LIVES

CLINICAL & CLINICAL RESEARCH SERVICES OFFERED IN 2017

## MEETING FAMILIES WHERE THEY ARE

When children with developmental delay and behavior problems complete early intervention, it can be a complicated process for many families. Our **Advancing Child Competencies by Extending Supported Services (ACCESS) for Families** program funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and led by psychologists Daniel Bagner and Jonathan Comer, bridges the gap by providing online treatment for families with children aging out of Early Steps to learn more about managing their child's behavior from the comfort of their own home.



## EXTENDING OUR CARE BEYOND SCHOOL HOURS

The support kids with ADHD need extend beyond the classroom and parents can often find it difficult to keep their child safely occupied after school hours. Our **After-School Treatment Program (ATP)** is designed for children ages 6-12 at-risk for attention, behavior and academic problems at Dr. Carlos J. Finlay Elementary School. Led by psychologist Joseph Raiker and funded by The Children's Trust, the program works directly with children, their caregivers,

administrative staff, and their teachers to improve across multiple settings, including the home, school, and interactions with peers.

## SUPPORTING TEENS WITH ADHD NAVIGATE TOUGH ISSUES

The teenage years are rough to navigate, especially for a teen with ADHD. By the time adolescents have reached 8th grade, approximately one in five have tried alcohol and just under one in six have tried marijuana or other drugs. By 12th grade, 61 percent of teens and have tried alcohol and 48 percent

of teens have tried marijuana or other drugs. Adolescents with ADHD are especially at risk for problems with alcohol and other drugs. They try substances at younger ages, they escalate to regular use more quickly, and they are more likely to develop substance use disorders.

Led by psychologists William E. Pelham, Jr. and Nicole Schatz, the **ATLAS Project** is one of the **first substance-use prevention program in the U.S.** designed for adolescents with ADHD. The program helps teens with ADHD build the skills they need to make the best decisions when facing tough issues and common challenges with relationships, school, alcohol or other drugs, and more.

## PUTTING FEARS & ANXIETY AT EASE

Anxiety is one of the most prevalent problems of childhood and adolescence. Up to 10 percent of children experience severe anxiety or fears that interfere with their life or relationships with others. Led by psychologist Jeremy Pettit, the **Child Anxiety & Phobia Program (CAPP)** provides cognitive-behavioral therapy and computer-based attention training programs to treat fears related to being separated from parents, sleeping alone, going to school, social situations, or specific objects or events. This program also provides services for children and adolescents who are experiencing depression.

## HEALING CHILDREN AFTER TRAUMA

Each year, approximately five million children experience some form of traumatic event in the United States. Abuse and neglect, witnessing domestic violence, natural disasters, car accidents, a serious illness, sudden death of a loved one—all can have a devastating impact on the child, altering their physical, emotional, cognitive and social development.

Our **Individual Trauma-focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)** program funded by The Children's Trust and led by psychologists Nicole Fava and Erika Coles, provides evidence-based treatment for youth ages 3-17. The program teaches youth healthy ways of coping with their feelings, while caregivers learn stress management, parenting and behavior management skills, and communication skills.

More than  
**3,000**  
families helped



## PERSONALIZED HIGH-QUALITY CARE

When it comes to mental health care, treatment isn't a one-size-fits-all. Providing the best care and patient experience means tailoring the service to recognize the patient as an individual, taking them as well as their family and background into account.

In order to provide families with the high-quality care they need, our clinic offers **individual treatment** to families, tailoring the treatment to meet the needs of a child and his/her family.

## LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO GIVE FAMILIES ACCESS TO CARE

For families struggling with mental health problems, in-person treatment can be costly, time-consuming and not always available in convenient locations, so many do not seek help. There are also not enough appropriately trained specialists providing evidence-based treatments for serious psychiatric disorders. Training is lengthy, complex and costly. In addition, there



are only a few specialized centers in highly populated metropolitan areas where patients can seek treatment. The services are expensive and wait lists are long.

**Our Mental Health Interventions and Technology (MINT)** program broadens the availability and accessibility to effective treatment for those who need it most.

Led by psychologist Jonathan S. Comer, the MINT program offers cognitive-behavioral therapy for childhood anxiety disorders, selective mutism, and OCD. Service options include in-clinic and telehealth treatments, which use secure videoconferencing to deliver real-time, therapist-led treatment directly to families in their own homes.

## HELPING FAMILIES PROMOTE POSITIVE CHANGE

Every parent wants to have a better relationship with their child, but for parents of children with ADHD, it can be an even bigger challenge. Led by our clinical staff, our **Parenting Strategies Group** and **Saturday Treatment Program** gives both the child and caregivers the opportunity to learn new skills that will improve the quality of family life.

In the program, caregivers learn effective techniques to reduce their child's negative behaviors and promote positive changes at school and the home. At the same time, children learn to develop social skills that promote positive peer relationships by participating in classroom and recreational activities.

## IMPROVING THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

There comes a point in every parent's life when their child's behavior becomes difficult and a source of stress. Healthy family functioning is at the root of good mental health and getting your family on the right track early on provides many benefits. Our center offers **Parent-Child Interaction Therapy** for children ages 2-6 who are experiencing behavioral difficulties and emotional disorders. Led by psychologist Paulo Graziano, the program places emphasis on improving the quality of the parent-child relationship and changing parent-child interaction patterns.

## PROMOTING BRAVE TALKING

Selective Mutism (SM) is more than shyness—it is a complex anxiety disorder during childhood characterized by a child's inability to communicate in social settings such as speaking in school or socializing during family events.

With only seven evidence-based programs in the country, treating SM can be time-consuming and costly. Led by psychologist Jami Furr, our center offers individual weekly, intensive, and group-based treatment programs for children with SM and other anxiety disorders. Using cognitive behavioral therapy, our programs target the difficulties of speaking in social or school situations with familiar and unfamiliar peers and adults.

## HELPING FAMILIES GET ANSWERS

In the U.S., almost 20 percent of youth suffer from mental health issues with many of the symptoms displaying themselves in the classroom. Intervention during childhood is key in lessening the impact of mental health disorders on a person and their family's life. Our clinic offers low-cost **psycho-educational evaluations** for families with children ages 5-16 to help with diagnostic status and educational planning. The evaluation includes diagnostic clinical interview with the parent, rating scales, IQ testing, academic achievement testing and more. Parents receive a detailed report and diagnostic feedback, as well as recommendations for further testing or intervention.

## EXTENDING OUR CARE INTO THE SCHOOLS

Schools are often the primary setting where most children who suffer from mental health disorders display symptoms. Most children in the U.S. who need mental health care don't receive it, and oftentimes, their academic performance suffers.

Led by our clinical staff, our center provides **school consultation** meetings with a child's school staff & parents to develop individualized interventions for school-based problems.

## ASSISTING FAMILIES THROUGH THE TEENAGE YEARS

The teenage years are the toughest when it comes to tackling mental health disorders for the first time, but our center is there to help every step of the way.

Led by psychologist Margaret Sibley, our **Supporting Teens Academic Needs Daily (STAND)** program provides family-based services that teaches parents and adolescents with attention, organization and behavioral problems, to work together to improve organization and academic skills, parent-teen conflict and teen independence.

## HELPING TEENS OVERCOME DEPRESSION

Adolescent depression continues to increase at an alarming rate and recent surveys indicate that approximately one in five teens suffer from clinical depression. Our **Teen Helping Overcome Perceptual Expectations (HOPE) program**, led by clinical staff, is a group cognitive behavioral therapy led by clinical staff, for adolescents displaying depression and/or anxiety symptoms.

## PROMOTING TEEN SOCIAL SKILLS

Developing social skills early on leads to healthier interactions and relationships throughout life. However, many children enter their teenage years lacking the proper skills to engage in social situations. Teenagers require a combination of cognitive and social skills to tackle their problems, and prepare for future challenges in adulthood. Led by clinical staff, our **Teens Power** program led by clinical staff helps teens to build effective communication skills, social skills, improve problem-solving skills and learn how to manage challenging situations.







# When A Child Stops Speaking, Researcher Helps Find Their Voice

by Ayleen Barbel Fattal

Eleven-year-old Aylani Suazo has not spoken to anyone in school since age 7. Her mother, Aysel, knew there was a problem halfway through the school year when Aylani was in first grade. What seemed like just shyness was affecting her daughter's progress in school. Aylani went completely silent.

It was only about a year ago that Aysel realized her daughter suffers from selective mutism — an anxiety disorder that causes her to not utter a word in certain public places, like school, although she is otherwise talkative at home.

More prevalent in girls than boys, selective mutism is two to three times more likely to affect bilingual children. The disorder can hinder academic achievement and socialization. It can cause a child to become isolated and withdrawn leading to missed birthday parties and less time in the playground.

Most elementary schools have at least one child with selective mutism. The condition usually begins by age 5, but it is often mistaken for shyness and goes undiagnosed until it begins to interfere with a child's progress in school.

"There are a number of factors that put a child at risk for selective mutism including anxiety in the family history, reinforcing avoidant behavior or allowing the child to escape speaking opportunities and modeling of anxious behavior," said FIU Center for Children and Families psychologist Jami Furr. "It is much less common for a trauma to be the trigger of selective mutism."

Furr's training and research focuses on anxiety disorders. She decided to specialize in selective mutism after identifying a real need for effective treatment and a lack of available services.

For a year, Aylani received therapy to treat her selective mutism in her home state of North Carolina with no success. This past summer, Aylani and her family traveled to South Florida to take part in FIU's Brave Bunch Program for Selective Mutism.

"When I realized Aylani's anxiety was affecting her in and out of school, I began looking for local help but could not find people that specialized in selective mutism," Aysel said. "I found information on Brave Bunch online and decided to take the chance."

One of only seven programs in the country and the only one in the Southeastern United States, Brave Bunch is a week-long program designed with a camp format for children ages 4 through 10. Directed by Furr, the program teaches coping skills, incorporates activities that encourage verbalization, social interaction and exposure to unfamiliar peers and adults to help children like Aylani find their "brave voice." The camp also incorporates daily two-hour parent training sessions and bi-monthly booster sessions for families after camp is over. "With six-hour days, they have time to process, adjust and practice multiple situations with repeated

exposure," Furr told the New York Times. "The idea is to translate gains to a real school setting, where they have the most limited speech."

For Aylani, the week she spent at FIU's Brave Bunch camp proved to be transformative. She now orders in restaurants and responds when spoken to. As she gets ready to start the 5th grade, Aylani is already communicating with her teachers and peers.

**"Brave Bunch has given us both my daughter and I strength and the tools we need to move forward"**

"Brave Bunch has given us both my daughter and I strength and the tools we need to move forward," Aysel said. "I would definitely recommend this program. So far it has changed our lives."



Psychologist Jami Furr encourages Aylani Suazo to use her brave voice during "Wacky Wednesday" activities at the FIU Center for Children and Families' Brave Bunch Camp.





# NATIONALLY ACCLAIMED SUMMER CAMP PROGRAMS

## KIDS WITH BEHAVIORAL, EMOTIONAL AND LEARNING CHALLENGES GET THE HELP THEY NEED

ADHD is the most common childhood mental health disorder, costing society an estimated annual amount of \$30 to \$50 billion. Left untreated, children with mental health issues grow into adults with more prevalent, complex, and costly problems. Led by Dr. Erika Coles, our nationally acclaimed **Summer Treatment Program (STP)** is a comprehensive summer camp program for kids ages 5-12 with ADHD and related behavioral, emotional and learning challenges.

**During the eight-week camp, children receive 360 Hours of treatment—the equivalent to seven years of weekly one-hour sessions.**

Over the course of the camp, children receive group and tailored individual treatment plans to improve on their academic functioning, problem-solving and social skills, as well as their ability to follow instructions, complete tasks and comply with requests.

STP also encourages parent involvement with weekly parent training sessions, where they develop the skills needed to change their child's behavior at home and assist in their progress.

## STARING KINDERGARTEN OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT

Staring kindergarten can be a big challenge—especially for kids with behavior problems. Led by Drs. Katie Hart and Paulo Graziano, the **Summer Treatment Program –PreK (STP PreK)** is a comprehensive school readiness program for children entering kindergarten with behavioral, attention, and/or emotional difficulties.

This eight-week summer camp helps pre-kindergartners to improve problem-solving and social skills, academic skills, their ability to focus and follow classroom rules and routines, as well as emotional functioning, self-control skills and self-esteem. The program also helps kids build a positive attitude towards learning and school, build teamwork, good sportsmanship, and basic sports skills.

The STP-PreK also encourages parent involvement with weekly parent training sessions to develop the skills needed to prepare their child for kindergarten, to change their behavior at home/school, and to assist in their progress in camp.

## GIVING KIDS IN LIBERTY CITY A CHANCE TO SUCCEED

More than 40 percent of kids under the age of six in Liberty City live in or near poverty and children who live in poverty are more likely to develop mental health problems. Led by Dr. Katie Hart, the **Summer Academy in Liberty City** is a comprehensive school readiness program adapted from the Summer Treatment Program for Pre-Kindergartners. FIU Summer Academy is fully funded by The Children's Trust and operates in Liberty City at Thena Crowder Early Childhood Diagnostic and Special Education Center.

The program assists kids to:

- Surpass moderate to severe learning and behavioral needs
- Overcome academic shortfalls, underachievement, and school failure
- Learn school readiness skills
- Positively transition and succeed in kindergarten and beyond

## HELPING KIDS FIND THEIR BRAVE VOICE

Selective Mutism (SM), an anxiety disorder in which a child who is talkative at home is unable to speak in other social settings, such as school. Prevalence of SM is less than one

percent of the population, but could be up to 20-30 percent prevalence amongst bilingual children. Led by Dr. Jami Furr, the Brave Bunch one-week summer camp is the only SM program in the Southeast region of the United States and simulates a classroom environment along with parent training to provide guided opportunities for children with SM to:

- Interact with a number of new children and adults
- Participate in classroom-like activities (e.g., morning meeting, circle time, show and tell, group creative projects)
- Engage in field trips (e.g., to the library, park)
- Play socializing games that promote verbal participation ("brave talking") and spontaneous speaking

## TURNING HEALTHY CHOICES INTO LIFELONG HABITS

More than one-third of children and adolescents in the U.S. are overweight or obese. When a child is overweight, it affects their self-esteem, behavior, mental health and overall well-being. Eating healthy and getting exercise are just the beginning. Led by Dr. Paulo Graziano, the **Healthy-Lifestyle Intervention Program (HIP)** actively involves children ages 4-8 and their parents in promoting physical health in addition to school readiness. The program focuses on helping children to:

- Become familiar with and increase their enjoyment of healthier food
- Build a positive attitude towards a healthy lifestyle, learning, and school

298

children were  
helped over the  
summer

Our programs are  
designed to help the

WHOLE

family succeed





- Improve on their academic and behavioral skills they need to succeed in school
- Improve ability to focus and follow classroom rules and routines
- Improve emotional functioning, self-control skills and self-esteem
- Build teamwork, good sportsmanship and basic sports skills

Parents also learn strategies to a) encourage healthier eating and physical exercise, b) reduce problem behaviors associated with picky eating and/or resistance to new foods, c) encourage children's self-control skills, d) promote learning and academic success, and e) promote better communication with their children.

### PROMOTING EARLY LITERACY SKILLS

Funded by The Children's Trust & led by Dr. Katie Hart, the Reading Explorers Program

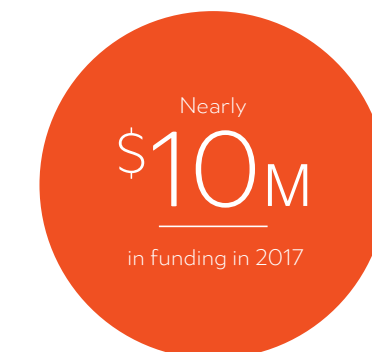
helps rising kindergarten, first, & second graders improve their reading skills. The free program is managed and operated by the CCF, in partnership with Nova Southeastern University.

**Since 2013, Reading Explorers has helped over 6,000 children and families and annually serves 1,500+ children across Miami-Dade County.**

The services provided by Reading Explorers include:

- Parent School Readiness Workshops
- Book giveaways
- Reading assessments at the beginning, middle, and end of the summer with personalized feedback for parents about child's oral reading/pre-reading progress
- Structured and interactive reading instruction tailored to child's ability levels, delivered 30 minutes/day, 4 days/week for 6 to 8 weeks.

## RESEARCH IS AT THE CORE OF WHAT WE DO



## RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

With **40** of the nation's best researchers and clinical experts, we aim to advance the way we treat child and adolescent mental health disorders.

# AWARDS



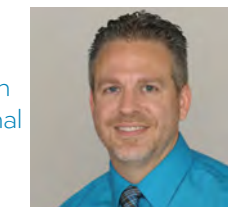
**Dr. Timothy Allen**  
President-Elect, Florida Consortium on the Neurobiology of Cognition (FCNC)



**Dr. William E. Pelham, Jr.**  
Distinguished Scientific Contributions to Clinical Psychology Award, Society of Clinical Psychology, Division 12 of the American Psychological Association (APA), 2017



**Dr. Daniel Bagner**  
CASE Faculty Award, Outstanding Contribution in Research, Florida International University, 2016



**Dr. Jeremy Pettit**  
Psychology Doctoral Graduate of Distinction, Florida State University, 2017



**Dr. Katie Hart**  
CASE Faculty Award, Outstanding Contribution in Engagement, Florida International University, 2016



**Dr. Joseph Raiker**  
CHADD Young Scientist Research Award, 2016



**Dr. Bethany Reeb Sutherland**  
Early Career Impact Award, Federations of Associations in Behavioral and Brain Sciences (FABBS), 2017  
  
Provost Award for Outstanding Mentorship of Graduate Students  
University Graduate School, Florida International University



# MARIJUANA COULD PUT USERS AT RISK FOR ADDICTION, RESEARCHERS FIND

By Rosanna Castro and Ayleen Barbel Fattal

Contrary to the belief that marijuana is a “safe drug,” a researcher at FIU’s Center for Children and Families has found that the use of this drug actually has long-term effects on the brain.

A recent **study** suggests participants who smoked more marijuana had less activity in the brain in response to reward compared to those that reported less use. This means that individuals who commonly smoke marijuana are likely to seek out drugs more frequently to counteract their weaker response to natural rewards from daily life.

The brain’s reward center controls and regulates a person’s ability to feel pleasure.

Feeling pleasure motivates us to repeat behaviors that are critical to our existence. “We are all born with an innate drive to engage in behaviors that feel rewarding and give us pleasure,” said FIU Psychologist **Elisa Trucco, one of the authors of the study.** “We now have convincing evidence that regular marijuana use impacts the brain’s natural response to these rewards. In the long run, this increase in more compulsive marijuana use is likely to put these individuals at risk for addiction.”

Currently, recreational marijuana use is legal in four states and 23 states support medical marijuana use. At least 11 more states are likely to legalize recreational marijuana use in

the near future with a growing misconception that marijuana has no long-term impact on the brain. Participants in the longitudinal study included 108 20-year-olds that were asked several questions regarding their marijuana use and their brains were scanned using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) at approximately two-year intervals. While in the scanner, participants played a game that asked them to click a button at the moment they saw a target appear on a screen in front of them. Before each round, they were told they might win 20 cents or \$5, that they might lose that amount, or have no reward or loss.

Non-marijuana users showed lots of activity in the part of the brain that responds to rewards at the thought that they may win some money. But for marijuana users, the response was blunted which researchers say may actually open them to more risk of becoming addicted to that drug or others. “What we saw was that over time, marijuana use was associated with a lower response to a monetary reward,” said lead author and University of Michigan Neuroscientist Mary Heitzeg. “This means that something that would be rewarding to most people was no longer rewarding to them, suggesting but not proving that their reward system has been ‘hijacked’ by the drug, and that they need the drug to feel reward — or that their emotional response has been dampened.”

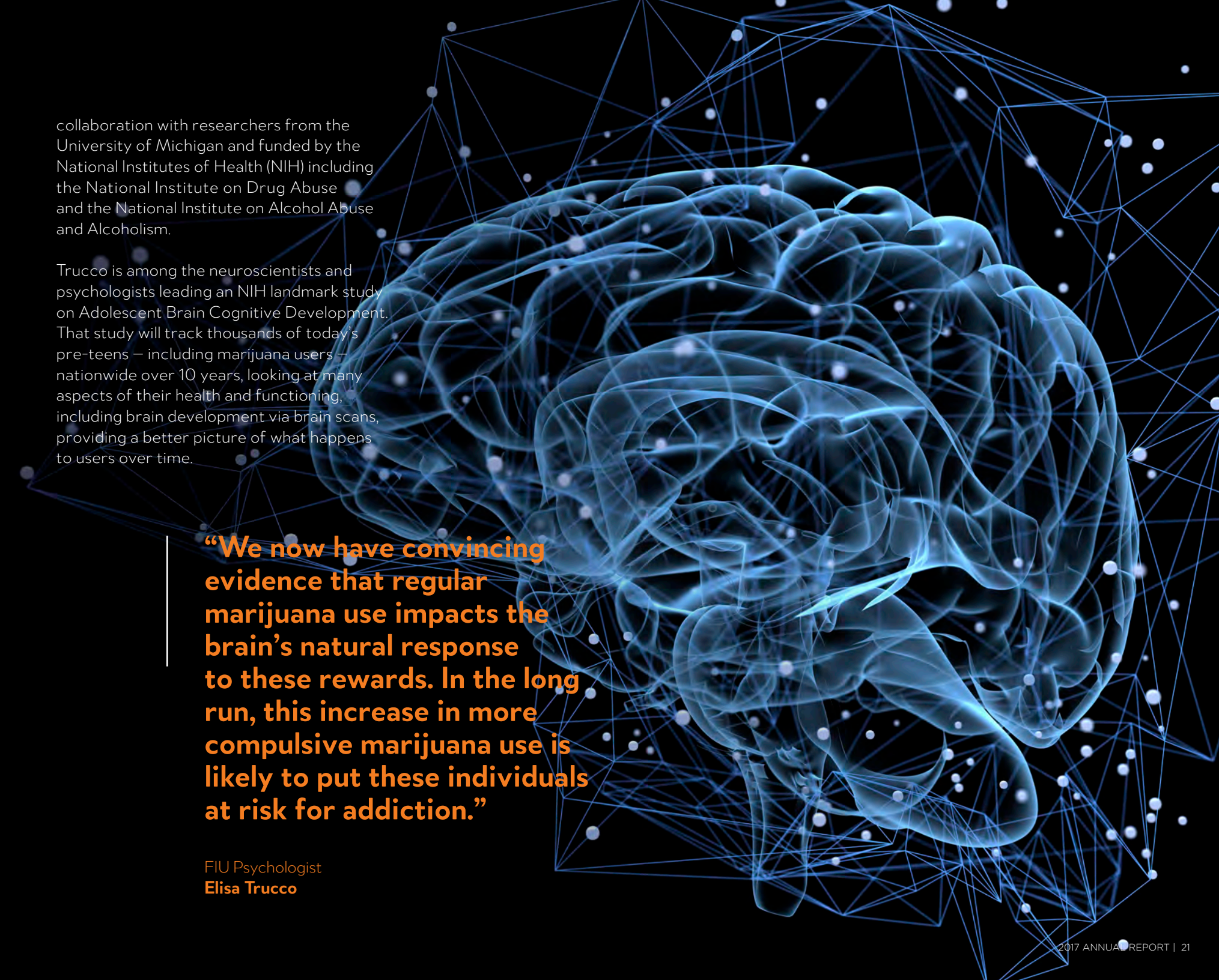
The findings were published in the **Journal of the American Medical Association Psychiatry**. The study was conducted in

collaboration with researchers from the University of Michigan and funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) including the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

Trucco is among the neuroscientists and psychologists leading an NIH landmark study on Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development. That study will track thousands of today’s pre-teens — including marijuana users — nationwide over 10 years, looking at many aspects of their health and functioning, including brain development via brain scans, providing a better picture of what happens to users over time.

**“We now have convincing evidence that regular marijuana use impacts the brain’s natural response to these rewards. In the long run, this increase in more compulsive marijuana use is likely to put these individuals at risk for addiction.”**

FIU Psychologist  
**Elisa Trucco**





# TRAINING & EDUCATION

Anchored in evidence-based approaches, our center is committed to providing extensive education and training opportunities for educators, mental health professionals, students and the community, through various programs that focus on child and adolescent mental health.

We provided 600 hours of training to nearly 8,000 community professionals, including teachers, school psychologists, parents, and licensed mental health professionals.

More than 2,400 Continuing Education Credits were provided through our online training and education website. Training and education opportunities offered at our center include:

**IN-SERVICE TRAINING:** Training that helps educators to identify & understand childhood and adolescent learning and mental health problems; and learn practical strategies to manage difficulties in the classroom.

**SCHOOL CONSULTATION:** Consultation with teachers and staff to collaboratively assist in the establishment and maintenance of a school-based, system-wide intervention; both school-wide for the prevention of behavior problems as well as interventions for individual children for mental health

problems that interfere with children's academic and social functioning in school.

**SPEAKER SERIES:** Presentations designed to offer health and mental health professionals, educators, and students with current strategies for understanding, identifying, and treating children and adolescents with mental health problems. All sessions are free and provide continuing education credits for mental health professionals.

**ONLINE TRAINING:** Website that offers free high-quality learning resources for both parents and professionals about evidence-based practices that promote child and adolescent mental health. In addition, professionals have the opportunity to earn free continuing education units

**PARENTING WORKSHOPS:** Free workshops for caregivers and others in the community to be better prepared in identifying and understanding early challenges and implementing strategies for positive changes.

**MIAMI INTERNATIONAL CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH (MICAMH) CONFERENCE:** Leading interdisciplinary conference that presents state-of-the-art, evidence-based prevention and treatments for mental

health and educational problems in children and adolescents.

Our center also collaborates with a number of partners - including various agencies and non-profits - to improve the lives of children and families affected by mental health disorders, both in South Florida & around the world.

Through CCF's partnership with Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) and The Children's Trust, the center has provided professional development training to more than 6,000 teachers and more than 500 schools, which has improved classroom experiences for educators and students.



# 600 HOURS

of training provided







# EXPERTS EXPLORE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN CHILD MENTAL HEALTH CARE

By Rosanna Castro

More than 400 mental health professionals from all across the world convened in **Miami for our Miami International Child & Adolescent Mental Health (MICAMH) Conference.** Researchers presented the latest findings for child mental health problems including ADHD, anxiety, autism, suicide and depression, trauma and obsessive-compulsive disorder. The conference keynote presentations covered a wide-range of topics including treatment for children and adolescents exposed to traumatic life events and improving mental health care in Hispanic communities.

"This is the field's leading interdisciplinary conference focused on clinical child and adolescent psychology," said Jonathan S. Comer, FIU psychology professor and chairman of MICAMH.

**"Our goal with this conference is to educate as many clinicians, practitioners and students as possible on the most effective ways to treat child and adolescent mental health problems."**

During the three-day conference hosted at the FIU Kovens Conference Center, practitioners also had the opportunity to learn hands-on strategies to improve the way they treat children with mental health problems.

"The fact that people came from all over the world to attend our conference truly speaks volumes of the worlds ahead information that was presented here by the best psychologists in the field," said William E. Pelham Jr., director of the Center for Children and Families and founder of the MICAMH Conference. "We are truly proud of the

incredible growth this conference has had at an international level in the last 15 years."

**More than 400 professionals attended our 2017 MICAMH Conference and 1,929 Continuing Education Credits were provided.**



# TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION OF MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Working closely with the Department of Psychology, our center offers students the opportunity to gain hands-on experience and participate in ongoing research.

We help to train undergraduate and graduate students seeking a career in the child and adolescent mental health field through research assistantships, practicum experiences and volunteering opportunities.



## 2017 CHILD AND ADOLESCENT CLINICAL SCIENCE DOCTORAL PROGRAM STUDENTS

Our center trains graduate students in this APA-accredited doctoral program, which applies scientific evidence to further the design, implementation, and evaluation of assessment, prevention, and treatment procedures for use with children from infancy to adolescence. This program is a mentor-based program in which students apply to work with individual faculty.

Acosta, Juliana  
Altszuler, Amy  
Barroso, Nicole  
Bechor, Michele  
Blizzard, Angela  
Bose, Deepika  
Bry, Laura  
Buitron, Victor  
Campez, Mileini  
Cheatham-Johnson, Randi  
Chou, Tommy  
Cornacchio, Danielle  
Coto, Jennifer  
Cromer, Kelly

Duperrouzel, Jacqueline  
Garcia, Alexis  
Hartley, Chelsey  
Hedemann, Erin  
Helseth, Sarah  
Hong, Natalie  
Landis, Taylor  
Little, Kelcey  
Macphee, Fiona  
Magarino, Loreen  
Melendez, Raquel  
Merrill, Brittany  
Morrow, Annie  
Moses, Jacqueline

Ogle, Robert  
Ouellette, Rachel  
Pacheco-Colon, Ileana  
Poznanski, Bridget  
Ros, Rosmary  
Ross, Jessica  
Sanchez, Amanda  
Tenenbaum, Rachel  
Vaclavik, Daniella  
Ward, Anthony  
Yeguez, Carlos  
Zhao, Alisa

**96 Graduate students were trained at our center in 2017.**

## 2017 PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY MASTERS PROGRAM STUDENTS

This program trains masters-level mental health counselors and is the first masters-level program in the nation focused on evidence-based treatments in child and adolescent mental health. This program leads to a Master's of Science in Psychology (M.S. in Psychology) and a license to practice as a Mental Health Counselor (LMHC). The program is designed to train practitioners and researchers who can function in a variety of mental health settings in both the private and public sector.

Acosta, Erika  
Alonso, Melisa  
Alvarez, Yesenia  
Aurobindo, Natasha  
Brozovich, Kaitlin  
Cabeza, Katya  
Caine, Kayla  
Calzadilla, Maria  
Castellon, Nestor  
Castillo, Kyra  
Dacks, Haley  
Defeo, Sahara  
Fernandez, Stephanie  
Fuentes, Gian  
Garces, Lina  
Gonzalez, Maylin  
Gregg, Della  
Guerra, Thomas  
Gustave, Altagrace  
Hart, Michelle

Hernandez, Katherine  
Hernandez, Melissa  
Hernandez, Vanessa  
Herrera, Aileen  
Hodgson, Sidney  
Johnson, Ajai  
Jones, K'Nisha  
Karolewicz, Hannah  
Landa, Alexis  
Ley, Amanda  
Lopez, Luis Jose  
Lyndaker, Cristiane  
Mallory, Camille  
Marques, Zunamy  
Meschisi, Christopher  
Murillo, Adriana  
Noyola, Nicole  
Perez, Guadalupe  
Perkins, Alexia  
Pintos Lobo, Rosario

Pizarro, Angelica  
Potes, Sergio  
Raksin, Shulamis  
Ramirez, Jose  
Reytarova, Anfisa  
Rodriguez, Ann-Marie  
Ruiz, Ericka  
Saavedra, Michelle  
Santos, Christian  
Silberman, Danielle  
Taque, Jose  
Thomas, Haley  
Thorson, Isabel  
Troya, Sarah  
Uriarte, Rosaura  
Wood, Benjamin



We trained  
**580**  
Undergraduate  
students

#### UNDERGRADUATE PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS

Our center takes pride in providing training opportunities for hundreds of undergraduate students for credit, salary, or as volunteers who seek research-training experiences. This past year, we saw an increase in the number of involved undergraduate students to 450 from 250 the previous year.

Additionally, we provided paid internships for 130 undergraduate and graduate students as part of our summer programs. Many of these students travel to FIU from well-known universities across North America, including: University of Florida, Florida State University, Virginia Tech, Georgetown College, University of Miami, Southern University and A&M College, Providence College, George Washington University, University of Houston, college of William & Mary, New York University, Vassar College, Kansas State University, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, among others.





# ADHD DRUGS DON'T HELP WITH HOMEWORK

by **Rosanna Castro**

A study led by Brittany Merrill, one of our doctoral students in the FIU Clinical Science Program, found that giving stimulants to kids with ADHD did not help them complete homework or get better grades.

Researchers tested the effectiveness of medication against behavioral interventions in 75 children that attended our Summer Treatment Program with classes each weekday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. for eight weeks.

They randomly assigned children to receive either behavioral treatment that included daily report cards for kids and coaching parents to help with homework or a long-acting stimulant.

“Long-acting stimulant medications haven’t been shown to help with homework performance despite companies advertising their utility for homework time,” said lead study author Brittany Merrill.

“Behavioral interventions are more effective than long-acting stimulant medications in improving homework performance among children with ADHD, and stimulant medication did not add to the effectiveness of the behavioral intervention.”

Researchers tested these two approaches in children who were around eight years old on average, but ranged from five to 12. All of the kids had an ADHD diagnosis with symptoms observed by parents or teachers.

In the group assigned to receive medication, doctors worked with kids over two weeks to assess the correct dose of drugs to give them. After that, kids received either a stimulant or a placebo for three weeks, then switched, so researchers could see how drugs impacted each child’s homework performance.

For the group assigned to behavioral therapy, clinicians led a series of six two-hour group sessions over the first two weeks, followed by an individual half hour session during each of the next two weeks. Medication had no significant effects on homework completion or accuracy, compared with a placebo, researchers report in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*.

But with behavioral treatment, children got 10 percent to 13 percent more homework problems finished and completed eight percent more problems accurately than they did without the treatment. This translates into the difference between getting an average passing grade of C with behavioral help, compared with an average failing grade of F without intervention.

Researchers mention that one limitation of the study is the potential for differences in the children’s home or school environments to influence how much taking medication might improve their homework performance. It is also possible, that children might see improvements associated with stimulants if they took a higher dose or used the medication for a longer period of time.













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[ccf.fiu.edu](http://ccf.fiu.edu)

11200 SW 8th st  
AHC 1, Room 140  
Miami, FL 33199  
[ccf@fiu.edu](mailto:ccf@fiu.edu)  
305.348.0477

