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 basis of our success. This past year we witnessed the impact of outstanding scholarly output that we are incredibly proud of sharing. At a time of challenging federal funding opportunities, CCF faculty obtained $2.5 million in external funding in total awards since it was founded at FIU in 2010, with $9,941,694.61 in total awards in FY 17 alone. An impressive 176 publications were published in scholarly journals and our work was featured in many top-tier media outlets, an indication of its relevance, such as The Washington Post, Nature, CNN, and many others. We continued offering important behavioral health services, including the Summer Treatment Program and its related initiatives. We continued offering important behavioral health services, including the Summer Treatment Program and its related initiatives. We continue to support our center and its mission.

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Last but not least, I am proud to share that the CCF was named an FIU Preeminent Program, a recognition reserved for centers/units with significant scholarly activity in providing unique learning opportunities, pioneering research and engagement, and enhancing 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 their success. This past year we will join with our colleagues in celebrating our accomplishments for FY 2017, as we work toward this goal.

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

Conference, attendance by 450 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 initiatives, which served 328 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 1,000 children during the summer.

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Happy 10th birthday, CCF! A decade of progress 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 the 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 WCOP, training was provided to 3500 teachers and other school professionals. The CCF held the Miami International Child and Adolescent Mental Health (MICHAMH)
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.
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 substantial contributions to advancing FIU’s Beyond Possible 2020 strategic plan and enhancing the university’s reputation at the national and international level.

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.

MISSION

AND VISION

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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 programs 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.

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.

The support kids with ADHD need extend beyond the classroom and parents can often feel it is 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, school staff, and their teachers to improve across multiple settings, including the home, school, and interactions with peers.

Supporting Teenage Girls to Navigate Tough Issues

Teenage years can be tough 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 10th grade, approximately one in three have tried 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.

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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 is 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 children’s behavior from the comfort of their own home.

IMPROVING LIVES

CLINICAL & CLINICAL RESEARCH SERVICES OFFERED IN 2017

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SUPPORTING TEENS WITH ADHD NAVIGATE TOUGH ISSUES

Teenage years can be tough to navigate, especially for a teen with ADHD. By the time adolescents have reached 8th grade, one in five have tried alcohol and just under one in six have tried marijuana or other drugs. By 10th grade, approximately one in three have tried alcohol and 48 percent have tried marijuana or other drugs. By 12th grade, 61 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.

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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 interventions for specific psychiatric disorders. Treatment is lengthy, complex and costly. In addition, there are only a few specialized centers in highly populated areas where adults and children can seek treatment. The services are expensive and not always accessible.

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 allow for 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 ever bigger challenge. Led by our clinical staff, our Parenting Strategies Group and Saturday Treatment Program treat 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 home and school.

HELPING FAMILIES GET ANSWERS

In the U.S, family and adolescent care is heavily focused on mental health issues with many of the symptoms displaying themselves in childhood. Intervention during childhood is key in increasing the impact of mental health disorders on a person and their family. To help our clinic offers psycho-educational evaluations for children ages 5-16. Led by clinical staff, the program places emphasis on improving the quality of the parent-child relationship and changing parent-child interaction patterns.

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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 achievements 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 undiagnosed. The condition is often social anxiety and misdiagnosis, and 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, Aysel 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 program 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.

“When 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.”

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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 school readiness 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 therapy to work on their academic functioning, problem-solving and social skills, as well as their ability to follow routines, as well as emotional functioning, self-control, 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 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 behavioral, emotional, and related difficulties. Led by Dr. Katie Hart and Paula Graziano, the Summer Treatment Program – Pre-K (STP PreK) is a comprehensive school readiness program for children entering kindergarten with behavioral, attentional, 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, 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 Pre-K also encourages parent involvement with weekly parent training sessions, where they develop the skills needed to prepare their child for kindergarten, to change their behavior at home, 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-Kindergarteners. FIU Summer Academy is a program for kids ages 4-8 in kindergarten with behavioral, attention, and/or emotional difficulties.

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 therapy to work on their academic functioning, problem-solving and social skills, as well as their ability to follow routines, as well as emotional functioning, self-control, 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 program assists kids to:
• 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 LIFEBLOG 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

Our programs are designed to help the WHOLE family succeed

298 children were helped over the summer
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. Since 2013, Reading Explorers has helped over 4,000 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.

- 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.

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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.

By Rosanna Castro and Ayleen Barbel Fattal

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 there might be 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, 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 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 and providing a better picture of what happens over time.

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FIU Psychologist Elisa Trucco

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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.
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 world’s 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.
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. 96 Graduate students were trained at our center in 2017.

### 2017 Child and Adolescent Clinical Science Doctoral Program Students

Our center trains graduate students in the 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.

### 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.

### Training the Next Generation of Mental Health Professionals

Acosta, Juliana
Ahlander, Amy
Barroso, Nicole
Bichot, Michelle
Bizzaid, Angela
Bose, Deepika
Boy, Lauren
Buxton, Victor
Campea, Miklos
Cheatham-Johnson, Randi
Chou, Tommy
Cooms-Wallace, Danielle
Coto, Jennifer
Cromer, Kelly

Acosta, Erika
Alcindor, Melissa
Alvarez, Yessenia
Aurand, Natalie
Brazovich, Kaitlin
Cabeza, Katya
Can, Kayla
Calzadilla, Maria
Castelino, Nastor
Castillo, Kyra
Dicks, Haley
Diego, Sahara
Fernandez, Stephanie
Fuentes, Gian
Garcia, Lina
Gonzalez, Michell
Grisom, Delia
Guerra, Thomas
Guinovides, Alagon
Hart, Michelle

Hernandez, Katherine
Hernandez, Melissa
Hernandez, Vanessa
Hernandez, Aline
Hodgson, Sidney
Johnson, Aja
Jones, K'Niha
Karoleswitz, Hannah
Landa, Alexis
Ley, Amanda
Lopez, Liv, Jose
Lyndaker, Cristin
Malloy, Camille
Marcus, Karmen
Maschi, Christopher
Murillo, Adriana
Noyola, Nicole
Perez, Guadalupe
Perkins, Alexa
Pinto-Lobo, Rosario

Pfeffer, Angela
Potes, Sergio
Rakoczy, Shikama
Ramey, Jose
Reyano, Arlane
Rodriguez, Ani-Marie
Ruiz, Ericka
Saavedra, Michelle
Sanos, Christian
Silberman, Danielle
Teague, Jovic
Thomas, Haley
Thompson, Isabel
Trujillo, Sarah
Unarte, Rosaura
Wood, Benjamin

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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.
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.


