



Center for
Children and Families

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

A photograph of four diverse children sitting on a large, weathered log in a wooded area. From left to right: a young boy with short dark hair wearing a blue denim jacket over a dark shirt; a young girl with long blonde hair wearing a white lace-trimmed shirt and brown pants; a young boy with curly brown hair wearing a white polo shirt under a plaid shirt and blue jeans; and a young girl with curly dark hair wearing a striped shirt under denim overalls. All four children are smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a sun-dappled forest floor.

Helping Families Achieve Their Full Potential

Annual Report 2018



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Message From Our Director:

Each year, our center continues to raise the bar on what it means to be World’s Ahead and 2018 was no exception. Thanks to our dedicated faculty, staff and students, we continued to promote excellence for child mental health through research, clinical services, training and education.

This report highlights the remarkable work taking place at the center, and the impact it has had on families, educators, students, and professionals, both local and nationwide.

Through the assistance of grants and the combined effort of more than 30 multidisciplinary CCF faculty and staff, as well as FIU graduate students and volunteers, the center is recognized as the largest in the state of Florida conducting child mental health

research and producing important scholarly work. We are proud to have received \$28.7 million in grants for child mental health research during the 2018 fiscal year—the largest total amount in grant dollars ever obtained by our center in a single year.

Our faculty also published 165 research papers in scientific journals and received multiple awards for research excellence from national groups including the National Institute of Drug Abuse, the American Psychological Society, and the American Psychological Association.

True to our mission of conducting research that results in qualitative improvements in the lives of children and families, our center provided evidence-based services to more than 3,000 families through clinical and clinical research activities. Over the summer alone, we helped nearly 300 families through our nationally acclaimed summer programs.

Through our partnership with Miami-Dade County Public Schools and The Children’s Trust, our center provided more than 450 hours of training to more than 6,000 teachers and other school professionals. We also provided 1900 Continuing Education Units to 735 licensed professionals in the field through our online continuing education website, the Miami International Child and Adolescent Mental Health (MICAMH) Conference and our Speaker Series talks. Furthermore, we provided training to more than 590 undergraduate students and 128 doctoral and masters-level students.

While we have made tremendous strides to improve child mental health, our work is far from over: There are more families to help and more research and training to be done. As I reflect on what our dedicated faculty, staff and students have been able to accomplish in a single year, and our trajectory across the past several years, I am more hopeful than ever that we will continue to advance the field of mental health. Together, we will make a direct difference in the lives of so many who struggle, allowing them to fulfill their potential.

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

Faculty and Staff

Affiliated Faculty

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Baralt, Melissa
Bickman, Leonard B.
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Hayes, Timothy
Li, Tan
Mattfeld, Aaron
McMakin, Dana
Musser, Erica
Nichols-Lopez, Kristin
Page, Timothy
Parent, Justin

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Ramos, Francisco
Rey, Yasmin
Rodriguez, Isabel
Rodriguez, Lourdes
Rodriguez,
Mariangela
Rodriguez, Yesenia
Ruiz, Ericka
Sanchez, Gabriela
Santos Soto, Tamara
Silva, Karina
Sotolongo, Lissandra
Tellez Ricardo, Samira
Valdes, Bernardina
Vanegas, David
Vazquez, Alejandro
Waheed, Ifrah
Wang, Suyan
Wilmot, Mellissa

Wilson, Maria
Zuraw-Moya, Ruth

Postdocs

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Garcia, Dainelys
Lopez-Quintero,
Catalina
Maharaj, Andre
Mahotiere, Margarette
Martinez Pedraza,
Frances
Mikhail, Sarah
Stout, Tyler

3,040



Families Helped In 2018

We are 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:

- ADHD
- Anxiety & fears
- Conduct & behavioral problems
- Family stress & parenting support
- Mood problems & depression
- Problems with academic & social skills
- Trauma

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



Research



Education



Clinical Services



Mission

\$28.7m

in total new funding
awarded in 2018- Nearly
four times the amount of
new funding in the 2017
fiscal year

165

research
publications by
faculty

\$102m

in research funding
to-date

Mission

We aim 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 & 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.

Advancing Child Mental Health Through Research

Through cutting-edge research, our goal is to provide the highest-quality care for children and adolescents affected by mental illness.

With a team of more than 30 of the nation's best researchers and experts, the assistance of federal funding and university partnerships, we continue to gain new insights about the cause, process, effects and treatment of child and adolescent mental health disorders.

Since our establishment in 2010, we have secured more than \$102m in external funding for research from sources like the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Institution of Education Sciences (IES), the National Science Foundation (NSF), The Children's Trust and the State of Florida, among others.

Faculty Awards



Daniel Bagner, Ph.D.
Faculty Award for Outstanding Contributions in Service, College of Arts, Sciences & Education, Florida International University, 2017



Jonathan S. Comer, Ph.D.
Stephen Boggs Career Research Award, Parent-Child Interaction Therapy International (PCIT), 2017
Faculty Award for Research, College of Arts, Sciences & Education, Florida International University, 2017



Erica Musser, Ph.D.
Faculty Award for Research, College of Arts, Sciences & Education, Florida International University, 2017
Exceptional Reviewer Award, Springer Publishers – Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 2017



Justin Parent, Ph.D.
Early State Investigator Paper Competition Winner, NIH/OBSSR, 2018



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



Jeremy Pettit, Ph.D.
Top Scholar Award, Excellence in Research & Creative Activities, Florida International University, 2017
Doctoral Graduate of Distinction, Department of Psychology, Florida State University, 2017



Bethany Reeb-Sutherland, Ph.D.
Faculty Award for Research, College of Arts, Sciences & Education, Florida International University, 2017



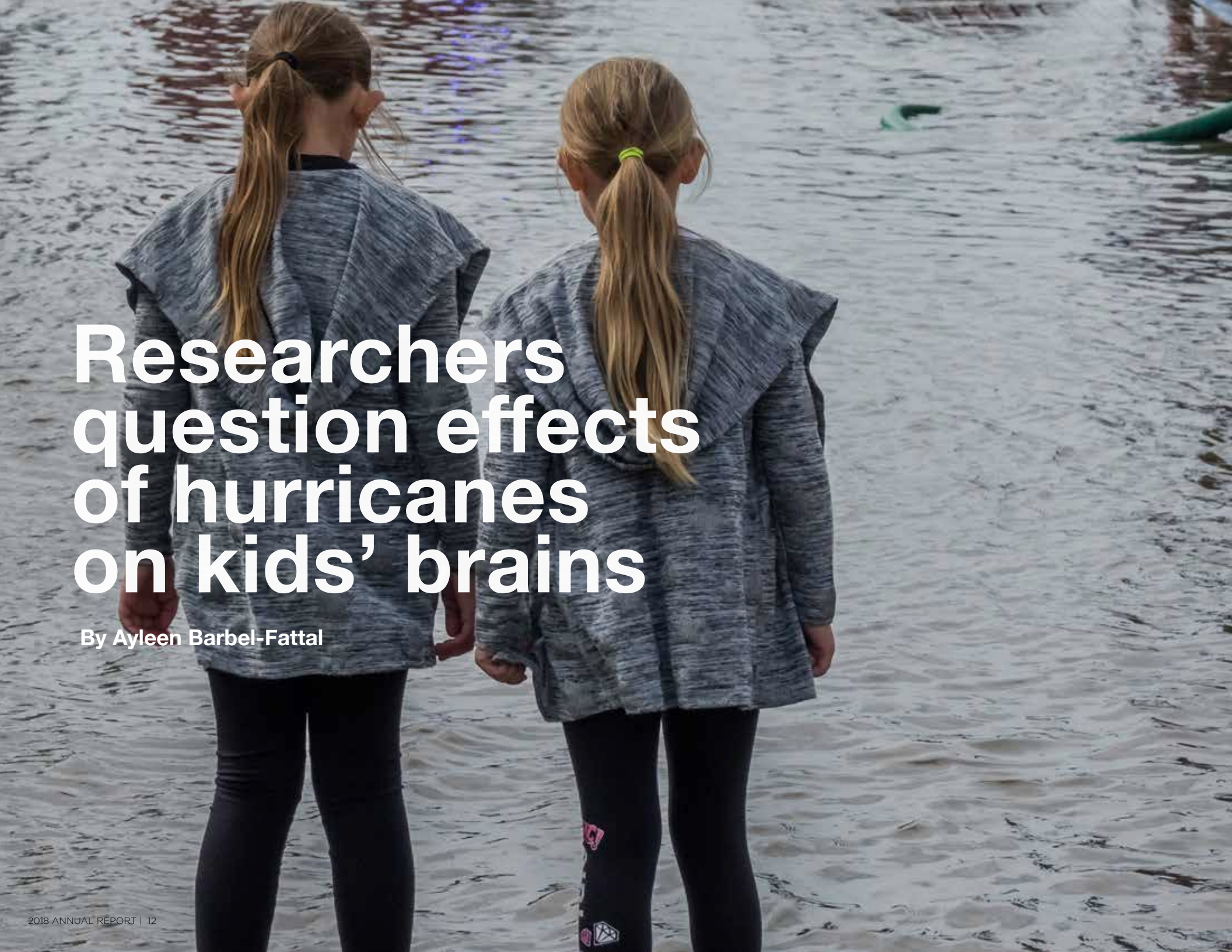
Margaret Sibley, Ph.D.
Title I Administration Appreciation Award, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2017
Exemplary Dade Partner Award, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2017



Matthew Sutherland, Ph.D.
Faculty Award for Research, College of Arts, Sciences & Education, Florida International University, 2017
Faculty Senate Award, Excellence in Research & Creative Activities, Florida International University, 2018



Elisa Trucco, Ph.D.
Faculty Award for Research, College of Arts, Sciences & Education, Florida International University, 2017



Researchers question effects of hurricanes on kids' brains

By Ayleen Barbel-Fattal

FIU scientists are investigating the effects of hurricanes and other natural disasters on brain development in children. Preliminary findings suggest these disasters contribute to increased post-traumatic stress symptoms.

For the first time ever, researchers are able to look on a large scale at both neurobiological and clinical information obtained before and after a hurricane makes landfall. Using data from the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development Study (ABCD) — the largest long-term study of brain development and child health in the United States — FIU psychologists Jonathan Comer and Anthony Dick are comparing child brain function before and after hurricane Irma with the intention of studying children's response to disasters more generally.

The recently released ABCD dataset gave them access to baseline data from three sites affected by Irma — Miami and Gainesville in Florida and Charleston, S.C. — providing a unique opportunity to study the effects of natural disasters in children and collect valuable data on a broad scale. Comer and Dick are combining this existing data with new data to evaluate each child's experiences related to Irma. They also surveyed children in San Diego for comparison.

Preliminary results show increased post-traumatic stress symptoms in children who evacuated under stressful conditions as well as those who remained directly in Irma's path during the storm. These are the children who felt the impacts of the aftermath first-hand and were exposed to large doses of storm-related

media coverage in the affected areas. Children in San Diego also exhibited post-traumatic stress symptoms associated with Irma-related media exposure even though they were not directly in harm's way.

"We hope to provide guidance for how communities and families can better prepare for and respond to disasters in ways that mitigate potential long-term child suffering in the aftermath of disaster," Dick said. "This work will identify key factors that can promote resilience in children exposed to disasters."

Comer and Dick recently presented findings of their National Science Foundation-funded study on Capitol Hill as part of the Coalition for National Science Funding. They were in Washington, D.C. to meet with members of Congress and their staff to advocate for continued science funding.

The next step is to collect additional data from the same families during the year following Irma. The children will also be followed into adulthood to find out how their brains respond to various disaster-related incidents. This will complete the first large-scale study of the effects of disaster exposure on children that incorporates biological data including neural and genetic factors, cognitive, clinical, and neuropsychological outcomes.

"Understanding complex and dynamic interactions that unfold across time when disasters affect youth is important for developing appropriate public response," Comer said. "Parents, first responders, and media and


policymakers at local, state and federal levels must know which actions can have particularly negative effects on disaster-exposed youth and which factors can instead promote resilience."

Comer has conducted extensive research on the psychological impact of traumatic events on youth. As director of the Mental Health Interventions and Technology Program at FIU's Center for Children and Families, he conducts research on expanding the quality, scope and accessibility of mental health care for children and adolescents. Dick is a co-investigator in the ABCD study and director of the Cognitive Neuroscience program at FIU. He studies the development and neurobiology of language and executive function. He uses neuroimaging methods, including functional and structural magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI and MRI) to examine typical and atypical child development.

Recruitment of participants for the ABCD study began in September 2016 at 21 study sites across the country including FIU. The study is designed to include a diverse population that reflects the demographics of the United States.

So far, nearly 8,000 youth have been enrolled. The goal is to enroll a total of 11,500 children by the end of 2018.

For more information or if you are interested in participating in this landmark study, please visit ABCDstudy.org.



“This is one of the first studies to examine the impact of e-cigarette use on the developing brain.”

Researchers investigate effects of e-cigarettes on adolescent brains

By Rosanna Castro

Use of e-cigarettes is on the rise, leaving scientists wondering what effects they could have on the developing brains of young people. A team of researchers from the FIU Center of Children and Families (CCF) have been awarded a \$2.1 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to investigate the effects of e-cigarettes, vaping devices and other electronic nicotine delivery systems on adolescents. Led by Elisa Trucco and Matthew Sutherland, the project is one of the first studies to examine the impact of e-cigarette-use on the developing brain.

“Although there is convincing evidence that these products may be useful tools for adults who regularly smoke cigarettes to cut-down their use, adolescents are vulnerable to adverse effects of nicotine because their brains are still rapidly developing,” said Trucco, an assistant professor of psychology at CCF and the director of the Research on Adolescent and Child Health (ReACH) Lab.

The team is also investigating whether e-cigarettes are gateway drugs that could lead to use of other substances including regular cigarettes, marijuana or illicit drugs. Although cigarette smoking has declined among Florida youth in recent years, use of electronic nicotine delivery systems has sharply increased among high school students — as much as 410 percent since 2011.

Approximately 300 teenagers will be recruited and followed over three years to determine risk and protective factors associated with e-cigarette-use; identify factors promoting the shift from e-cigarette products to cigarettes and illicit drugs; and determine negative health effects of these products on the brain using magnetic resonance imaging.

“Scientific evidence regarding the onset, potential transitions, and negative consequences of e-cigarette-use on the brain is critical to help clinicians improve prevention programming and assist policy makers in deciding how to continue regulating these products,” said Sutherland, an assistant professor of psychology and co-director of the Neuroinformatics and Brain Connectivity lab who oversees the brain imaging aspects of the project. “The results of this study will hopefully help health care professionals improve routine screenings, substance-use counseling and preventive interventions.”

The grant is part of a \$13.1 million grant from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) to the Robert Stempel College of Public Health and Social Work.



Innovative Clinical Programs

The **Advancing Child Competencies by Extending Supported Services (ACCESS) for Families** program 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. The program is funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and led by psychologists Daniel Bagner and Jonathan S. Comer.

The **ATLAS Project** is one of the first substance-use prevention program in the U.S. designed for adolescents with ADHD. Led by psychologists William E. Pelham, Jr. and Nicole Schatz, the **ATLAS Project** 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.

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.

Led by psychologist Jeremy Pettit, the **Child Anxiety and 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.

Our **Individual Trauma-focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)** program funded by The Children's Trust and led by social worker Nicole Fava, 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.

The CCF clinic led by psychologist Erika Coles, provides **individually tailored treatment** for a child or family, including parenting, depression, anxiety, anger management, disruptive behavior and divorce intervention.

Led by psychologist Jonathan S. Comer, the **Mental Health Interventions and Technology (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.

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 & recreational activities.

The 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.

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.

Led by psychologist Jami Furr, our center offers individual weekly, intensive, and group-based treatment programs for children with **selective mutism** 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.

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

The **Supporting Teens Academic Needs Daily (STAND)** program is led by psychologist Margaret Sibley and 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.

The **Teen Helping Overcome Perceptual Expectations (HOPE)** program offers group cognitive behavioral therapy led by clinical staff, for adolescents displaying depression and/or anxiety symptoms.

Led by clinical staff, our **Teens Power** program helps teens to build effective communication skills, social skills, improve problem-solving skills and learn how to manage challenging situations.



Nearly 300
children were
helped over
the summer

Turning struggles into lifelong triumphs

Preparing Kids With ADHD and Their Parents with The Tools To Succeed

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 psychologist 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 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.

Preschoolers Learn the Building Blocks of Kindergarten

Starting kindergarten can be a big challenge—especially for kids with behavior problems. Led by psychologists 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.

Kids in Liberty City Get Ready for Kindergarten

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 psychologist 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

Encouraging Kids to Use 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 psychologist 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, the park)
- Play socializing games that promote verbal participation ("brave talking") and spontaneous speaking

Improving Literacy Skills for Thousands of Kids

Funded by The Children's Trust & led by psychologist 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.

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.

Promoting Healthy Choices for Life

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 psychologist 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
- 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

Empowering Our Community

Our center is committed to providing extensive education and training opportunities for educators, mental health professionals, students and the community.

- **Partnered with more than 500 schools**
- **Provided more than 450 hours of training, consultation and community outreach**
- **Nearly 1,900 Continuing Education units provided to 735 mental health professionals**

Training Opportunities Offered:

In-service training- Training that helps educators to identify and 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 & 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.

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





Leading psychologists share the latest advances in child mental health care

By Rosanna Castro

The FIU Center for Children and Families (CCF) once again hosted their **Miami International Child & Adolescent Mental Health (MICAMH)** Conference, where nearly **500** mental health professionals from all across the world came together to learn about the latest findings for child mental health problems including ADHD, anxiety, autism, suicide and depression, trauma, phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder and more.

During the three-day conference hosted at the FIU Kovens Conference Center, practitioners attended keynote talks and workshops to learn hands-on evidence-based strategies for diverse child mental health topics including body dissatisfaction, sexual health, trauma, and racism; as well as critical issues such as reducing barriers to treatment for ethnic

minority families, integrating behavioral health services into primary care, and more.

“We used to host this conference every two years, but given the strong need and desire for more training and education in child mental health among professionals and students, we decided to host it annually,” said Jonathan S. Comer, FIU psychology professor and chair of MICAMH. “We are proud to say that this was the highest attended MICAMH conference to-date and we are happy that practitioners were able to walk out of this conference better prepared to provide families in their communities with the best treatments possible.”

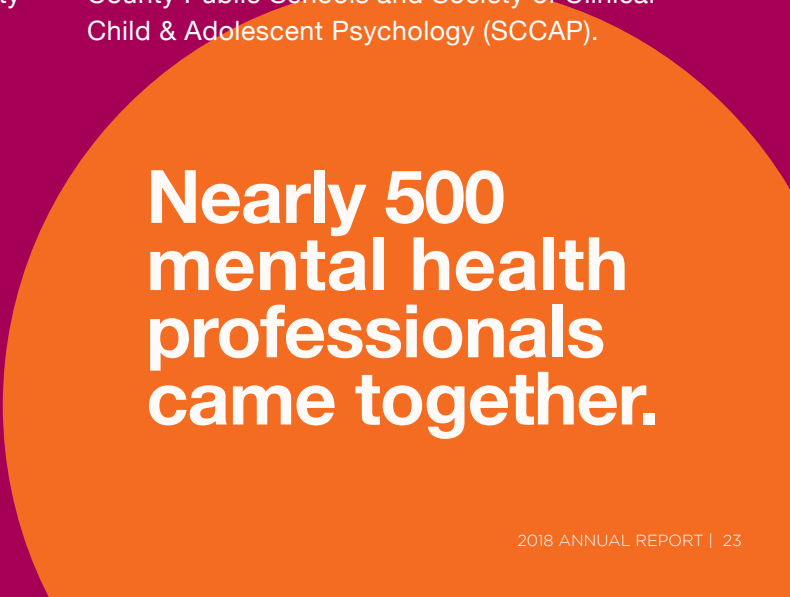
Speakers at the 2018 MICAMH Conference included:

- Thomas Ollendick, Ph.D., Virginia Tech
- Connie Kasari, Ph.D., University of California
- Enrique Neblett, Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Carolyn Becker Black, Ph.D., Trinity University
- Tara S. Peris, Ph.D., UCLA Semel Institute
- Nicole M. Fava, Ph.D., Florida International University
- Donna B. Pincus, Ph.D., Boston University
- Andres De Los Reyes, Ph.D., University of Maryland at College Park
- Thomas J. Power, Ph.D., ABPP, Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia
- Charlotte Johnston, Ph.D., University of British Columbia
- Erlanger A. Turner, Ph.D., University of Houston-Downtown

- Mary Fristad, Ph.D., ABPP, The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center
- Steven W. Evans, Ph.D., Ohio University
- George J. DuPaul, Ph.D., Lehigh University
- Erika K. Coles, Ph.D., Florida International University
- Thomas J. Power, Ph.D., ABPP, Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia
- Sannisha K. Dale, Ph.D., University of Miami

“This has undoubtedly become the largest child and adolescent mental health conference in the U.S.,” said William E. Pelham Jr., director of the Center for Children and Families and founder of the MICAMH Conference. “We are honored to be able to host this conference with the help of our partners and to have the top experts in the country once again be a part of this distinct event.”

The MICAMH Conference was hosted by the Center for Children and Families and co-sponsored by The Children’s Trust, Miami-Dade County Public Schools and Society of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology (SCCAP).



Nearly 500 mental health professionals came together.

Students from across the nation receive training in child mental health at FIU

By Rosanna Castro & Ayleen Barbel-Fattal

The Summer Treatment Program at the Center for Children and Families is an eight-week program that provides treatment for children and families struggling with ADHD and related behavioral, emotional and learning challenges.

The internationally lauded program provides 360 hours of treatment per child in just eight weeks — the equivalent of seven years' worth of weekly one-hour sessions.

In addition to the clinical staff, the program depends on paraprofessional counselors — typically psychology undergraduate students — to help carry out the day-to-day activities at camp and help implement evidence-based treatment plans focused on improving problem-solving, academic performance and social skills.

Haley Dacks is one of those counselors. For the past four years, Dacks has dedicated each summer to working with children in the Summer Treatment Program. While undertaking intense 12-hour days, she wore many hats — from starting out as a classroom aide and classroom co-coordinator to being a lead research assistant and counselor. Each of these positions that

Dacks held played an important role in helping the children improve their home life and preparing them for the upcoming the school year.

“My favorite part of being in this program is seeing how much these kids can improve in just eight weeks,” Dacks said. “Seeing their progress, how happy the parents are, and seeing the kids happy and making friends, which is often difficult for children with ADHD, is the most rewarding feeling.”

On average, 75 percent of the undergraduate students who work with the STP come from universities from across the country, and Dacks is just one of nearly 1,000 undergraduate and graduate students who have received training during the summer at CCF since the treatment program moved to FIU in 2010. Faculty and staff at the center carry out supervision and oversight of the program, while students work closely with the children to help them improve their behavioral skills, self-esteem and academic achievement.

The STP was founded in 1980 by William E. Pelham, Jr., director of the center and professor of psychology. The STP has been replicated at many sites worldwide including Harvard University, the Cleveland Clinic, University of Kansas Medical Center, Florida State University, Chicago, Nashville and Japan.



Counselors use evidence-based techniques to help participants improve problem-solving and social skills.

“The STP is one of the top training programs in the United States for students seeking a career in clinical child psychology,” Pelham said. “I am proud that we have been able to train some of the top child psychologists in the world through this program here at FIU.”

In South Florida, the STP has successfully helped over 3,000 children and their families. Through research and clinical work, it is leading the way in providing therapeutic services and treatments for ADHD and other behavioral problems, anxiety and fears, academic and social skills, trauma and more.

“What makes our program unique is not only the high quality treatment provided for the whole family, but the opportunity for us to train the next generation of mental health providers in evidence based treatment,” said Erika Coles, clinical director of the center and director of the Summer Treatment Program. “The hands-on training and experience that students get in the program simply cannot be matched by sitting in a classroom.”

Dacks is now in the process of becoming a licensed mental health counselor and is currently working as a therapist at ABC's for Success. She hopes to one day be able to implement a program similar to the STP where she can help children reach their full potential and have a better chance at succeeding in the future.

Training future mental health professionals

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

can pursue specialized tracks with faculty that are among the best clinical and developmental researchers in the world.

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

Graduate students can pursue specialized tracks with faculty that are among the best clinical and developmental researchers in the world.

129 graduate and more than 590 undergraduate students trained



Child and Adolescent Clinical Science Doctoral Program

Acosta, Juliana
Altszuler, Amy
Barroso, Nicole
Bechor, Michele
Blizzard, Angela
Bose, Deepika
Bry, Laura
Buitron, Victor
Campez, Mileini
Cheatham-Johnson, Randi
Chou, Po-Hun (Tommy)
Cornacchio, Danielle
Coto, Jennifer
Cristello, Julie
Cromer, Kelly
Cummings, Logan
Dale, Chelsea
Duperrouzel, Jacqueline
Feinberg, Leah
Franz, Annabel
Garcia, Alexis
Gilbart, Erika
Gregg, Della
Hartley, Chelsea
Hays, Jason
Hederman, Erin

Heflin, Brynna
Heyman, Perrine
Hong, Natalie
Landis, Taylor
Little, Kelcey
Macphee, Fiona
Magarino, Loreen
Merrill, Brittany
Morris, Stephanie
Morrow, Anne
Moses, Jacqueline
Ogle, Robert
Oullette, Rachel
Pacheco-Colon, Ileana
Poznanski, Bridget
Ramos, Marcela
Rodriguez, Raquel M.
Ros, Rosmary
Sanchez, Amanda
Sollenberger, Nathan
Tenenbaum, Rachel
Vaclavik, Daniella
Ward, Anthony
Yeguez, Carlos
Zambrana, Katherine
Zhao, Xin (Alisa)

Professional Counseling Psychology Program

Acevedo, Adriana
Ardilla, Yessica
Arroyo, Rebecca
Bonventre, Nicholas
Broche, Rachel
Brozovich, Kaitlin
Caine, Kayla
Castellon, Nestor
Couch, Maria
Eraso, Pablo Cano
Escobar, Monica
Figueroa, Bianca
Fuentes, Gian
Game, Nathalie
Garcia, Ilan
Gustave, Altagrace
Hart, Michelle
Hernandez, Katherine
Hernandez, Melissa
Hernandez, Vanessa
Herrera, Aileen
Hodgson, Sidney
Johnson, Ajai
Jones, K'nisha
Landa, Alexis
Ley, Amanda
Lobo, Rosario Pintos
Lopez, Luis

Magloire, Williana
Maldonado, Santiago
Mallory, Camille
Manresa, Odette
Martinez, Jose
Martinez, Lisette
Monteagudo, Javier
Mujica, Lucila de
Murillo, Adriana
Perez, Yanier Rodriguez
Perkins, Alexia
Potes, Sergio
Raksin, Shulamis
Ruben, Vivianne
Ruiz, Ericka
Saavedra, Michelle
Salinas, Daniela
Santos, Christian
Silberman, Danielle
Soto, Carol Rios
Sotolongo, Lissandra
Spencer, Darryon
Taque, Jose
Tellez, Daniel
Thomas, Haley
Thorson, Isabel
Troya, Sarah
Turner, Nicole
Velasquez, Cinthia



Teachers can help reduce mental health problems in children, study finds

By Rosanna Castro

School-based mental health services delivered by teachers and staff can significantly reduce mental health problems in elementary-aged children, according to a study by researchers at FIU's Center for Children and Families.

The implications are significant considering approximately 30 to 40 percent of youth in the U.S. will be diagnosed with at least one mental health disorder by adolescence.

"More than half of children in the U.S. who receive mental health care receive those mental health services in a school setting, which makes educators frontline mental health providers for affected children," added the study's senior author, Jonathan S. Comer, professor and director of the Mental Health Interventions and Technology (MINT) Program at FIU's Center

for Children and Families. "Our findings are encouraging in showing how—with sufficient training and support—mental health services can be quite effective when delivered by school-based professionals who are naturally in children's lives."

The researchers examined 43 studies that evaluated nearly 50,000 children who had received school-based mental health services. They looked at the effectiveness of those services targeting various conditions including anxiety, depression, and attention and substance use problems.

A small number of services evaluated in this study pull children out of classrooms to receive individualized treatment. Many school-based treatment models require that teachers learn and deliver a social emotional mental health curriculum separate from their academic instruction. Other school-based treatment models blend behavioral and mental health services into classroom instruction. For example, a teacher might divide their classroom students into competing teams that get points for appropriate behavior and good listening during instructional times.

The authors found that mental health services blended into routine academic instruction in the classroom are particularly effective, compared to pull-out services or implementation of a separate mental health curriculum altogether. If left untreated, mental disorders first appearing during

the elementary school years tend to persist into adulthood and are associated with impaired social functioning, suicidality, substance misuse, criminality, lower education and occupational attainment, and lower quality of life.

"Treating children in schools can powerfully overcome issues of cost, transportation, and stigma that typically restrict children from receiving mental health services," said lead author Amanda Sanchez, M.S., at FIU's Center for Children and Families.

Other study findings show school-based services targeting child behavior problems have been more effective than other services targeting child attention problems, mood and anxiety problems or substance use. Moreover, treatments that are implemented multiple times per week are more than twice as effective as treatments that are only implemented on a weekly (or less) basis.

Further research is needed to understand how to best apply the findings from this study to optimize school-based mental health services for the very large number of students in need.

The authors caution that many schools—particularly those in low-resourced communities—do not have the personnel or expertise to implement quality mental health services without additional support and partnerships with mental health professionals.

In order to optimize the success and sustainability of school-based mental health services, the authors call for increased support, training and resources for schoolbased staff.

The study was published in the Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (JAACAP).



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