

October 31st, 2014 Annual Fall Forum

The Center for Children and Families (CCF) presents its fifth annual Forum on “Ensuring Children’s Success in School: Effective Teacher-Child Interactions in Early Education” on Friday, October 31st at The University of Texas at Dallas. The keynote speaker is Robert Pianta, Ph.D., Dean of the Curry School of Education at The University of Virginia, Founding Director of the Curry School’s Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL), and Director of the National Center for Research in Early Childhood Education. Dr. Pianta’s prolific work focuses on teacher-student interactions and relationships and the components of effective teaching and learning. He is the author of the CLASS observational assessment tool used by Head Start programs across the country. Other presenters will include Alan Cohen, Executive Director of Early Childhood Education for DISD and a focus on implications for public policies supporting effective schools and children’s success. More information about the Forum schedule and registration can be found at ccf.utdallas.edu.



CCF-Affiliated Research Review

The Center for Children and Families is committed to shining the spotlight on its family and child development research. Here is a sample of our center-affiliated researchers and the work they are doing:

The Think Lab (Dr. Candice Mills): studies how children and adults think about and learn from the world around them. Current projects examine how preschool- and elementary school-aged children think about what others are likely to know, and how this influences their learning as well as how children determine whether to answer questions themselves or seek help from others.

The Family Research Lab (Dr. Jackie Nelson): studies emotional components of family relationships and children’s development. Current projects investigate daily experiences of family stress and parent-child conflict interactions.

The Developmental Neurolinguistics Lab (Dr. Mandy Maguire): studies how children learn language and how the brain processes language. Current projects examine individual differences in children’s word-learning abilities and how children’s brains are engaged during successful and unsuccessful word-learning.

Our Research: The Playful Learning Project

CCF’s “Playful Learning Project,” seeks to understand how participation in our *Juega Conmigo* (Play With Me) playful-learning program for bilingual, low-income children and their parents impacts parental feelings of self-efficacy and developmental abilities of children between the ages of 2 months and 4 years. We have recently begun to collect age-standardized measures of developmental milestones and communicative development to make pre- and post-*Juega* comparisons. Through our programs, and collecting careful metrics of effectiveness, we expect to impact both short and long-term positive developmental outcomes for at-risk children and families in Dallas.

Research participation opportunities are available. Center-affiliated researchers are also available for speaking engagements through CCF’s Speaker’s Bureau. Contact Rachel Berglund (rachel.berglund@utdallas.edu) for more information.

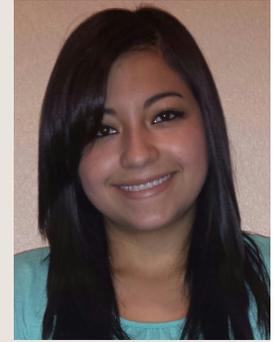
Staff and Volunteer Spotlight



Maria Maese joined CCF in February as a volunteer. She moved to Texas three years ago from Mexico. She received her bachelor's degree in Psychology from the University of Monterrey. Maria is taking her last semester in her Master's program in Interdisciplinary Studies. In the Fall, she will start a new Master's in Human Development and Early Childhood Disorders. She is currently working in

Dr. Owen's lab on the Preschool Readiness Project as a child assessor. She has also been doing developmental screenings with CCF and enjoys working with children and families.

Dulce Martinez is an undergraduate Psychology student at the University of Texas at Dallas. She joined CCF in the summer of 2013 as a volunteer making phone calls interviewing the parents enrolled in the *Juega Conmigo* program. Now a research assistant, Dulce



enters data and assists with various program-related tasks while continuing to do phone interviews. Dulce also began working on the Preschool Readiness Project (led by Dr. Owen) in the summer of 2013. Her roles in the project have primarily included transcribing and coding among other functions. Before joining CCF, Dulce was the Historian of the Scottish Rite Hospital for Children Club at UTD. She is fluent in Spanish and English and has much experience with children, having helped raise her 9 nieces and nephews. After completing her Bachelor's degree, Dulce plans to continue her education in graduate school by pursuing a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology.

Rebecca Conklin joined CCF last fall as the administrative work-study. She is a 2nd year Master's student in UTD's Psychological Sciences program, and also works as a research assistant in the Family Research Lab, where she is involved in studies on family stress and conflict. Before she decided to pursue her Master's degree, Rebecca worked in social services for the state of Texas.



Dr. Ana-Maria Mata-Otero received her Ph.D. in Psychological Sciences from the University of Texas at Dallas in 2009. Both her research and clinical work are motivated by a desire to enhance the quality of life of low income ethnic minority children. She has a strong interest in the developmental effects of play on school readiness, and in more general issues involving cultural influences on child development. As program evaluator, Dr. Mata-Otero is developing evaluation protocols for *Juega Conmigo*, ensuring that the services provided further the mission of the Center for Children and Families. As clinical lecturer, Dr. Mata-Otero currently teaches graduate courses on the importance of play, culture and families, and assessment of infants and young children. Prior to coming to the U.S. in 1992, Dr. Mata-Otero lived in Venezuela and France, leading to her interest in child development in the context of diverse cultures and in promoting culturally sensitive approaches to working with children and families.



Juega Conmigo Expansions Update



In an effort to reach a greater number of high-need families in Dallas, our *Juega Conmigo* program recently expanded from our first site in Bachman Lake to an additional three sites in the Dallas area. The expansion has given many more families access to needed services. The *Juega Conmigo* program, which means "Play with Me" in Spanish, is a bilingual playful-learning class for parents and their children ages 0-3. The curriculum is designed to enhance the foundation of children's school readiness by supporting sensitive, growth-promoting parenting and parental efficacy and the emergence of children's self-regulatory skills, including focused attention, cooperation, turn-taking, and impulse control. The class has met weekly at the Bachman Lake public library for the past three years. In January, the classes expanded to the Vickery Meadow and Pleasant Grove communities, with the assistance of dedicated, trained volunteer facilitators. We opened a fourth class in east Plano in May. A fifth *Juega Conmigo* program is scheduled to open in September, to work with younger siblings of Plano's Head Start participants and their parents, to help lay stronger foundations for these children's success.

2014 Spring Lecture Series Review

Our 6th annual Spring Lecture Series on “Surviving and Thriving in Adolescence” wrapped up in April with over 250 students, practitioners, parents, and researchers attending over the series. This year’s speakers highlighted research aimed at helping a diverse group of adolescents succeed in their development. The series kicked off in January, with Dr. Emily Tobey presenting on the challenges of educating deaf teenagers. In February, Dr. Sam Ehrenreich presented a lecture on “Adolescents’ Text Messaging and the Development of Antisocial Behavior.” The lecture focused on findings from the on-going Blackberry Project study and addressed both antisocial text messages and the much more common pro-social text messages teenagers send to one another. Following him was Dr. Alex Piquero, Professor of Criminology, who presented research on preventing juvenile offenders from living a life of crime. The series wrapped up in April with CCF faculty member Joanna Gentsch, whose talk centered on what research has shown about communicating with children and teens about sexuality. Next year’s 2015 Spring Lecture Series will follow this Fall’s Forum theme on effective teacher-child interactions in early education.

Infant Development Program Screening Fair a Success



In order to reach a greater number of families and to provide a multitude of screening services at once, we recently offered our first Screening Fair in the Vickery Meadow community of Dallas. CCF developmental specialists, UT Dallas audiologists, and pediatric residents from Children’s Medical Center partnered to provide hearing screenings, developmental screenings, developmental guidance, and resource information to 38 families in one day. The Screening Fair offered a unique opportunity for families to engage with developmental and medical professionals, ask questions about their child’s development, and receive referrals for further services, if needed. Comments from participants about the event included: “It is very important to be informed and learn about activities to help my child’s development,” “I learned that every child’s development is different,” “I learned the importance of paying attention and checking if my child sees and hears well.” A series of Screening Fairs are being planned for the coming year in other high-need areas of Dallas.



From Dr. Joanna Gentsch’s talk

The best time to start talking about sex and sexuality with children is *as soon as they ask*. While some of these suggestions may need to be modified based on the age of the child, the general issues apply. Below are some pointers to help make the conversations easier:

- ▶ Try to avoid laughing or a lecturing tone. If you are overly serious, flippant, condescending or appear embarrassed, children will sense this and might avoid asking in the future.
- ▶ Even if the question is “cute” avoid repeating it to others when the child is around.
- ▶ Answer their questions briefly and honestly. Use age appropriate language. When you have answered, don’t feel the need to go into other details.
- ▶ Share information via “teachable moments” - these vary across developmental stages.
- ▶ Learn to follow your child’s cues and see if they need or want to know more. Ask, “Do you understand?” or “Is that what you wanted to know?”
- ▶ Repeat the same message at other times when warranted.
- ▶ Listen to your child’s responses and reactions and also try to respond when others share information.
- ▶ Find ways to better understand your own views and values and how they may influence your communication with your child.
- ▶ While it’s important to share information on risk, try to avoid using fear to teach or moralize in that context. Save those messages for a more values-based on-going dialog.
- ▶ Spend time with your child and teen and learn more about what they are watching/hearing/reading.



From the Director

The Center is continuing to grow and strengthen in its impact and influence, with the support this past year from the Andrew & Lillian A. Posey Foundation and The

Dallas Foundation, gifts from individuals, and our dedicated staff and volunteers. Talented student contributions from UT Dallas have been particularly important in our *Juega Conmigo* expansions and the implementation of our Screening Fair, in collaboration with pediatric residents from Children's Medical Center. Our newest *Juega Conmigo* program, set to open this Fall in Plano Head Start, brings exciting opportunities to study the program's impact on children's early foundations for learning. Working with the younger siblings of the school's Head Start participants and their parents, we will have the opportunity to compare developmental outcomes when these children transition into Head Start for children who have and have not experienced *Juega Conmigo*. We're excited about these possibilities. Stay tuned!

- *Margaret T. Owen, Ph.D., Robinson Family Professor, Director, Center for Children and Families*

Advisory Council Members 2014-2015

- Sylvia Allgaier
- David Brown
- John Castle
- Barbara Einsohn
- Marion Flores
- Sadie Funk
- Sue Gainer
- Paula Larsen
- Patty Miller
- Lisa Oglesby Rocha
- Melanie Rubin
- Norma Stone

The Center for Children and Families was established in 2008 with a generous grant from the Meadows Foundation. Our heartfelt thanks are extended to the individuals, foundations and organizations that have given and aided us in our vision.

How to Give

As we work toward implementing the Center's vision, our community outreach programs and our child and family research need your support. To learn more about giving to the Center for Children and Families or how to designate your gift, contact Pagett Gosslee, CFRE at pgosslee@utdallas.edu or 972-883-2837.



We are an important resource for children and families with your support.

Center for Children and Families
 The University of Texas at Dallas
 800 W. Campbell Road, GR 41
 Richardson, Texas 75080
 972.883.4782
cctf@utdallas.edu
cctf.utdallas.edu


Center for Children and Families
 Promoting optimal family and child development