



FRC

FAMILY
RESILIENCY
CENTER



Annual Report
January - December 2015

Letter From the Director



I am delighted to present the 2015 annual report of the Family Resiliency Center (FRC). It has been a banner year for the center in terms of growth in research, extending our reach across the state and nation, and influencing the lives of families and the next generation of researchers.

A highlight of the year was the Food and Family Conference we hosted in Chicago to celebrate the first five years of the Christopher Family Foundation Food and Family Program. This program provides seed grant monies to faculty investigators who work on interdisciplinary teams to identify ways to strengthen families around the topic of food. Over the past five years, several important projects have been developed, including identifying the effects of a weekend feeding program for food-insecure children on school attendance, examining how parents perceive picky eating, and creating novel ways to reach Spanish-speaking families to promote healthy eating and active lifestyles. These projects have involved investigators with exper-

tise in agricultural economics, family social science, sensory science, human nutrition, pediatrics, and extension, to name a few. A key element for the success of these projects is the collaborative relationships established among the researchers. Together, they are able to solve complex problems that they would never be able to address alone.

As we look to the future, these collaborations allow us to translate important scientific findings to the public and stakeholders. Promoting healthy eating from birth, reducing childhood hunger, and protecting children from environmental risks are all topics we actively work on every day. We look forward to sharing our progress in the coming year.

— Dr. Barbara Fiese

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\$3.4

Million USDA NIFA grant awarded to the Abriendo Caminos research project.



170

Families and their children observed in the Mealtime Strategies for Picky Eating Behaviors research project.



\$7.8

Million in current support for the FRC.



30

Affiliate members of the FRC. A complete listing of affiliates can be found at go.illinois.edu/FRCaffiliates.



100+

Attendees to the inaugural Food and Family Conference.



17

Members of the STRONG Kids and I-TOPP teams who shared the College of ACES Team Award for Excellence.

Food and Family Lab

A New Look

Over the past year, the Family Resiliency Center has developed a new website and visual identity. In order to better reflect our center's mission, we're rebranding ourselves as **a food and family lab**, which encapsulates the exciting research findings that our center produces.

Our transdisciplinary research teams explore connections between food and family life and focus on dynamic projects that generate original and pragmatic research to inform public-policy makers, researchers, and the general public. We utilize the best methods and exercise the highest research standards to develop simple, easily digestible truths for families.

Check out our newly launched website at go.illinois.edu/FRC to see more of the center's work.

Following are some of the highlights that occurred during the past year and some of the exciting things to come.

Food and Family Conference

To expand the conversation about the challenges that arise from feeding children in multiple settings, the Family Resiliency Center and the Christopher Family Foundation brought together some of the nation's leading experts in human nutrition, obesity research, and child and family health to the **Food and Family Conference**. The conference celebrated the first five years of the Food and Family Program at the University of Illinois. Held on September 17th at the University Club in Chicago, Illinois, the event featured a wide range of topics, including pediatric nutrition, picky eating,

- ▼ *Dr. Laurie Kramer, Dr. Barbara Fiese, Dean Robert Hauser, and Doris Kelley Christopher at the Food and Family Conference in Chicago, Illinois.*





▲ *Drs. Angela Wiley and Margarita Teran-Garcia at the Abriendo Caminos kickoff reception.*

immigrant families and acculturation, and school and child care programs.

Attendees explored the connections between food and families in positive ways, the challenges and solutions to promoting healthy eating, and the difficulties that come from feeding children in multiple settings. At the conference, the FRC announced that it will be awarding seed grant funding through the Christopher Family Foundation Food and Family Program. We expect to fund up to three proposals for \$50,000 each, with the grant period beginning on June 15, 2016 and lasting for 18 months.

Abriendo Caminos Receives 3.4 Million USDA NIFA Grant

This past year, University of Illinois researchers and FRC affiliates Drs. Margarita Teran-Garcia and Angela Wiley were awarded a five-year, 3.4 million USDA NIFA grant for **Abriendo Caminos**, a research project that aims to decrease childhood obesity rates in Hispanic populations. In announcing the funding, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack said that one-third of American children are overweight or obese, making this issue one of the greatest health challenges facing our nation.

This project, which is based on the Abriendo Caminos pilot study supported by the Christopher Family Foundation Food and Family Program, seeks to develop an effective, low-cost obesity prevention program (available in both Spanish and English) that can be disseminated by educators and community agencies in four sites across the U.S. and in

Puerto Rico. One of the benefits of the FRC's Food and Family Program is that it provides researchers with the opportunity to generate research results that can then be turned into more widespread support. Referencing the new project's original pilot study, principal investigator Dr. Teran-Garcia says, "Abriendo Caminos has been successful in changing the behaviors that lead to childhood obesity in this growing segment of the U.S. population."

Abriendo Caminos is a six-week workshop series that will promote healthy dietary behavior patterns and basic knowledge of nutrition; positive family interactions, including shared family mealtimes; and active living in low-literacy, low-income Hispanic families.

Ultimately, the project promises to significantly increase basic knowledge of nutrition and dietary health with the immediate beneficiaries being Hispanic-heritage children ages 5 to 18 years old. Says Dr. Wiley, "Our preliminary findings indicate that participants in Abriendo Caminos eat more fruits and vegetables and drink less sugary beverages after participating in the program."

Food and Family Conference presentations can be viewed at go.illinois.edu/foodandfamily-conference.

Postdoctoral Associate Receives NIFA Fellowship

FRC postdoctoral research associate Kate Speirs was awarded a National Institute of Food and Agriculture Postdoctoral Fellowship from the United States Department of Agriculture. The \$150,000 grant will support the **Improving Feeding Practices in Child Care Settings** project through 2016.

The project will study early childhood obesity and seek to enhance the nutrition and health of young children by improving feeding practices in child care and educational settings. “Because many preschool-aged children eat a significant amount of meals while in non-parental care, early child care and education programs are influential for obesity prevention,” says Speirs. However, a comprehensive understanding of child care providers’ feeding practices is lacking.

“Because many preschool-aged children eat a significant amount of meals while in non-parental care, early child care and education programs are influential for obesity prevention.”

— Dr. Kate Speirs
Postdoctoral Research Associate

This project will combine research, extension, and education into a multi-pronged approach to better understand these feeding practices. After completing the research, the project will develop online materials to help child care providers use responsive feeding practices that will be used in a transdisciplinary research methods course to educate undergraduate students about research and extension programming.

Mealtime Strategies for Picky Eating Behaviors

Picky eating may seem like a never-ending war for many parents. And even though it may be difficult to define, many parents would agree that they know picky eating when they see it. Now, research at the University of Illinois is beginning to show definable preferences and mealtime behaviors for picky eaters. Simply put, not all picky eaters are alike.

Supported by Nestlé/Gerber Nutrition and the Family Resiliency Center’s Food and Family Program, the **Mealtime Strategies for Picky Eating Behaviors** research team, led by principal investigators and FRC affiliates Drs. Sharon Donovan and Soo-Yeun Lee and graduate student Virginia Luchini, observed 170 families and recorded their childrens’ mealtime struggles.

According to the project’s research team, if we can identify why some children are such finicky eaters, then targeted strategies for parents can be developed, bringing some much-needed peace to family dinners. Says Donovan, “If we better understand the behaviors that parents associate with picky eating, we can develop specific recommendations targeted at those behaviors. Not all picky eaters are created equal.”

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— Dr. Sharon Donovan
Principal Investigator

The team investigated differences in picky eaters’ and non-picky eaters’ behaviors and food selections and noticed that the behaviors were not the same in each child. However, the study suggests that patterns are emerging that can be used to characterize different types of picky eaters. The researchers’ long-term goal is to develop specific strategies for the different types of behaviors for parents to try.

Research also showed that picky eaters react differently to common foods and behaved differently at mealtimes than children whose parents said their children weren’t choosy. Significant differenc-

◀ *Postdoctoral research associate Kate Speirs (far right) with graduate student research assistants.*



es existed between the two groups, with the behavior of picky eaters ranging from simple suspicion of an unfamiliar food to cringing, crying, and gagging. Said Lee, “Non-picky eaters on average were perceived by their parents to have consumed more of the meal and had higher acceptance scores for most of the foods evaluated. They also displayed significantly fewer negative behaviors—they were more willing to come to the table to eat and participate in mealtime conversation.”

Ultimately, the research team aims to develop strategies for how to engage each type of picky eater into trying new foods. As Dr. Donovan says, “A parent’s response to pickiness can determine how bad the behavior will be and how long it will persist. Don’t let every meal become a battle.”

Hunger-Free Summer Hub Project Evaluation Started

Recently supported by Feeding America through the generosity of ConAgra Food Foundation, the **Hunger-Free Summer Hub (HFSH) Initiative** is examining how food banks can strategically partner with organizations in their community to increase access to and participation in summer feeding programs, and how other feeding efforts might impact summer feeding. Feeding America has selected three food banks to participate in this initiative. The Family Resiliency Center will be conducting a cross-site evaluation of the HFSH initiative.

This project will help food banks and communities identify how they can best partner to address summer feeding and fight child hunger in their communities.

“A parent’s response to pickiness can determine how bad the behavior will be and how long it will persist. Don’t let every meal become a battle.”

**— Dr. Sharon Donovan
Principal Investigator**

STRONG Kids and I-TOPP Win Excellence Award

The past year showcased the dynamic research teams that the FRC brings together. Using a cells-to-society approach in developing plans to prevent childhood obesity, the many researchers on the **STRONG Kids** and **I-TOPP** teams received the College of ACES Team Award for Excellence in April.

The staggering amount of problems brought on by childhood obesity for individuals, families, and society need solutions from a variety of experts. Both the STRONG Kids and I-TOPP programs utilize comprehensive approaches to the study of childhood obesity. These programs examine how genetics, family, child care, and other factors contribute to the development of childhood weight imbalance, obesity, health behaviors, and health beliefs. Along with campus initiatives, STRONG Kids and I-TOPP have reached out to families in over 30 child care sites in central Illinois, training care providers, coordinating healthy feeding practices, and monitoring physical activity.

The shared award is a recognition of the passion and dedication of the 13 faculty members and four academic professionals from two colleges and across five departments who make up this unique collaboration.

✔ *STRONG Kids and I-TOPP members shared the College of ACES Team Award for Excellence.*



Educating Future Researchers

Award-Winning Teaching

Dr. Barbara Fiese won the **2015 John Clyde and Henrietta Downey Spitler Teaching Award** for her inventive curriculum and exceptional teaching methods. Holding The Pampered Chef Endowed Chair in Family Resiliency, Dr. Fiese strives to help students develop knowledge that will strengthen families. She has been very successful involving undergraduate students in research through HDFS 494, an advanced research methods course. The course offers students the opportunity to experience field-based research projects.

Dr. Fiese doesn't shy away from new teaching methods, either. In the past two years, she has been working with colleagues at Purdue University and California State University, Fresno, on a flipped classroom format of the 494 course. Most of all, Dr. Fiese deserves recognition for the innovative ideas and valuable teaching methods she uses.

Three FRC Students Selected for Teach for America

More than 16 million U.S. children grow up in poverty. One in three of those children won't graduate high school, and of those who do, only 18% will enter a four-year college. Only 9% will obtain a bachelor's degree by the age of 25.

In order to facilitate more educational equality, Teach for America (TFA) enlists and develops the nation's most promising young professionals to teach in impoverished communities for two years. The recruitment process is extremely competitive, but this year, three HDFS 494 students—Tanis Klingler, Jordyn Fishman, and Erin Tompkins—were selected to serve.

Each of the students has a unique reason for entering the program. For Jordyn Fishman, service is her driving force. "I have a passion for working with younger kids and their families as well as being a part of the non-profit world," says Fishman. "This is

▼ *Dr. Barbara Fiese teaching the FRC's STRONG Kids (HDFS 494) class.*



Student Spotlight: Pia Gomez



Pia Gomez

has always had a passion for nutrition, and she reinforced that passion while taking HDFS 494. “Being in STRONG Kids, I was learning more the overall effects that nutrition can have on a child in the long run,” Gomez said. STRONG Kids allowed her to go

The FRC strives to include undergraduate students in research projects. One of those students, senior Pia Gomez, an Animal Science major, has been involved with the STRONG Kids research project since her sophomore year.

Born in Peru and having moved to Illinois with her family when she was eight, Gomez

into a family’s home and measure the height and weight of both child and mother every few months.

Her work has taught her how to collect biometric data, work in a collaborative environment, and use different statistical tests. Her research, which was showcased at the University of Illinois Undergraduate Research Symposium, focuses on the correlation between family factors and the food environments with regards to nutrition.

Her favorite experience with the study was watching the growth of newborns. She specifically remembers a family that recognized her from her first visit two years later. “There is just something amazing about the connection that happens with the families since it is such a personal project,” Gomez says.

something that will tie in all my interests of working with kids, their families, and these communities that really need the help.”

Tanis Klingler chose this path because of her love of physics and desire for a challenging experience. As for Erin Tompkins, TFA’s call for educational equality is an inspiration. “Every child deserves a quality education, so I applied to TFA to work toward this,” she says. And Fishman adds, “We have such impoverished communities and kids across this country who don’t have access to the resources that I’ve been so lucky to have throughout my entire life.”

Before entering the classroom, new TFA corps members are trained for several weeks in effective teaching practices. By learning to develop strong partnerships with their students, students’ families, and communities, corps members can dramatically increase the opportunities available to their students in school and in life. For instance, many students lose interest in science during high school, so Tompkins hopes to make her class highly engaging so students will appreciate the subject more: “Many students overlook the variety of careers in the STEM fields, so I hope to encourage them to consider these fields.”

TFA members don’t just teach their students; they learn from them and the overall experience. At the end of two years, they’ll use those lessons as they choose their path forward. Says Klingler, “It’ll drastically change what I know about myself and what

I know about the world. And that’s what really attracted me to it in general. It’s really going to push the boundaries of my own limits and help me develop new skill sets.”

HDFS 494 Students’ Professional Skills

The FRC strives to prepare students for their professional lives after their undergraduate career has been completed. As a part of that mission, HDFS 494 students gathered at the Illini Union in April for a crash course in business dining etiquette. Led by Elizabeth Reutter of the Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition, students learned about a variety of professional dining topics, such as the difference between social and business etiquette, appropriate dinner conversation topics, navigating a formal place setting, and using utensils properly.



Elizabeth Reutter leading a dining etiquette session with STRONG Kids students. ➤

The Autism Program

Lack of State Support

It's been a difficult year for **The Autism Program (TAP)** at the University of Illinois. In April 2015, Illinois lawmakers announced that grant funding for social programs would be suspended to help close a budgetary gap. TAP at Illinois was among those programs to lose support.

TAP is the only parent training and education facility dedicated to autism in the community. According to TAP Director Linda Tortorelli, losing the program would be quite a blow for the community—it has provided hundreds of consultations for parents and educators, and it has conducted training for thousands of people, including teachers, first responders, and health care workers.

Excellence, Innovation, and Creativity



The FRC is proud of Linda Tortorelli, coordinator of TAP. This past year, Linda was the recipient of the **College of ACES Professional Staff Award for Innovation and Creativity**. Throughout all of the challenges that the program has faced in

Linda Tortorelli the past, TAP has continued to be a strong fiber in the vibrant fabric of our community. Whether it's creating materials for local teachers or providing consultation services to parents, TAP is a critical part of our community, and Linda is one of the driving forces behind it.

All of TAP's services are free, and the staff members are available and willing to help anyone with ASD, regardless of age. "We have had groups for teens and adults, and we support other professionals in the community who work with adults," says Tortorelli. "People with ASD want the same things that everyone else wants—meaningful relationships, employment, and involvement in their communities—that contribute to a happy life."

TAP Helps Local Teachers

Students with ASD have communication deficits that may impact their ability to express themselves effectively. Visual supports can be very powerful tools to help increase independence and understanding for students with autism because they allow students time to process what they are being asked to do. A supply of learning materials can take years to accumulate, however, and many teachers haven't had time to collect these materials.

Seeing this need in the community, TAP hosted the **Make It and Take It** event. Fueled by flavored coffee and pastries, teachers from the local community and TAP staff and interns gathered at Christopher Hall to create different types of learning aids for classroom use. The happy participants cut, stapled, glued, taped, and colored a wide assortment of learning aids—such as flash cards and word cards—while classic rock 'n' roll music poured out of the stereo system.

The event was a hit with participants. Says one local teacher, "I just want you to know that all the visuals and all the help you and your staff have given me is truly invaluable. The workshop was an effective way to make a difference in the lives of students with ASD."



▲ *TAP interns creating free visual supports for local teachers.*



4,000

Parents and professionals served in the TAP resource room.



2,000

Sets of educational materials created for use in homes, schools, and offices.



500

Individual consultations provided to professionals facing crisis situations.



50

Comprehensive diagnostic evaluations for Medicare-eligible children.



115

Internship opportunities provided to undergraduate and graduate students.



\$230,000

Worth of staff time student interns have provided over the last two years—equivalent to over half the support received from the state.

Sources of Support

Project	Funding Agency	PIs	Amount	Dates
Current Support: \$6,995,185*				
Food and Family Program	Christopher Family Foundation	Fiese (PD)	\$750,000	2016-2019
Hunger-Free Summer Hub Evaluation	Feeding America	Fiese (PI)/ Koester (Co-I)	\$162,000	2015-2018
Illinois Transdisciplinary Obesity Prevention Program	USDA/NIFA	Donovan, Fiese, Buchner, Johnson	\$4,500,000	2011-2016
Improving Feeding Practices in Child Care Settings: An Integrated Project	USDA/NIFA	Speirs	\$148,373	2014-2016
Improving the Health of Hispanic Children and Their Families With a Community-Based Curriculum: Abriendo Caminos	USDA/NIFA	Wiley (Co-PD), Teran-Garcia (Co-PD)/ Fiese (Co-I)	\$3,341,706	2015-2020
Novel Methods to Assess the Effects of Chemicals on Child Development	NIEHS/EPA	Schantz (PI)/ Fiese (Co-I)	\$743,106 supporting the COTC (\$7,621,069 supporting the Illinois CEHC)	2013-2017
STRONG Kids 2: A Cells to Society Approach to Nutrition in Early Childhood	Dairy Research Institute	Fiese, Donovan	\$1,100,000	2012-2017
Transdisciplinary Obesity Prevention Program—Undergraduate	USDA	Fiese (PD)/ Teagarden (Co-I), Hammons (Co-I)	\$750,000	2013-2016

Project	Funding Agency	PIs	Amount	Dates
Pending Support: \$2,414,577				
Clearing the Path for Hispanic Undergraduate Students: Mentored Research and Experiential Learning to Reduce Childhood Obesity	USDA/NIFA	Fiese	\$268,515	2015-2017
Essential Ingredients for Healthy Mealtime Interactions	NIH	Fiese	\$2,146,062	2015-2019
Completed Support: \$1,273,695				
Food and Family Program	Christopher Family Foundation	Family Resiliency Center	\$900,000	2010-2015
Mealtime Minutes	The Pampered Chef, Ltd.	Family Resiliency Center	\$100,000	2010-2015
Out of School and Summer Feeding Program Evaluation	Walmart Foundation	Fiese (Co-PD), Koester (Co-PD)/ Gundersen (Co-I)	\$273,695	2014-2015

*Exclusive of I-TOPP funds awarded to Food Science and Human Nutrition.

Staff and Advisory Board

FRC Staff



DR. BARBARA FIESE, DIRECTOR

A Professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies and The Pampered Chef Endowed Chair in Family Resiliency, Dr. Fiese has been the Family Resiliency Center Director since August 2008. Her research explores topics such as family mealtimes, family routines, household food insecurity and child well-being, child obesity prevention, and child and family health. Dr. Fiese received her PhD from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1987.



BRENDA KOESTER, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

As the Assistant Director of the Family Resiliency Center, Brenda Koester is involved in everything from supporting research projects, staff supervision, directing policy work, assisting with grant writing and budgeting, directing media and communication efforts, and coordinating public engagement. She holds a BS in Speech Communication and an MS in Labor and Industrial Relations from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



HANNAH HABEEB, PROJECT COORDINATOR

A member of the Family Resiliency Center since February 2014, Hannah Habeeb is a project coordinator overseeing several research projects, including the Hunger-Free Summer Hub Evaluation, Children's Outreach and Translation Core, and Sprouts. Hannah holds a BS in Human Development and Family Studies and completed independent research with FRC affiliates as an undergraduate student. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in Organizational Leadership from Lincoln Christian University.



ELIZABETH MOSLEY, OFFICE MANAGER

Office Manager Elizabeth Mosley assists with the day-to-day operations of the FRC and is an integral member of the team. Elizabeth holds an EdM in Educational Policy Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



DR. SALMA MUSAAD, RESEARCH BIostatisticIAN

Research Biostatistician Salma Musaad, MD, PhD, has more than 10 years of experience in clinical research, including 1.5 years in ophthalmology and stem-cell research; 4 years in molecular epidemiology in academia; and 4 years in clinical research organizations focusing on clinical trials and public health research.



JEN THEMANSon, PROJECT COORDINATOR

As the STRONG Kids 2 Project Coordinator since 2011, Jen Themanson helms one of the FRC’s flagship research projects. In her role, she develops data collections, oversees statistical analysis, and develops research skills in undergraduate students. Jen has a BS in History Secondary Education and MEd in College Student Personnel Administration from Illinois State University.



TYLER WOLPERT, VISITING COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

Tyler Wolpert has been the Visiting Communications Specialist for the Family Resiliency Center since September 2014. He works with the faculty and staff of the Family Resiliency Center to plan and implement communications efforts. Tyler holds a BA in English from Illinois State University and is currently working toward an MPA from the University of Illinois at Springfield.

A complete staff listing along with bios can be found at go.illinois.edu/FRCstaff.

FRC External Advisory Board

ROBIN BROWN, Midwest Dairy Council

GARY EVANS, Cornell University

JEREMY EVERETT, Texas Hunger Initiative

ANDREW FULIGINI, UCLA

MARLENE SCHWARTZ, Yale University

ELAINE WAXMAN, Urban Institute

THOMAS S. WEISNER, UCLA

Complete profiles of the external advisory board can be found at go.illinois.edu/FRCadvisory.



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