In its two years of existence, The Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health has become a strong voice for autism and early childhood mental health issues in the state and region.

The Center serves as the NJ Autism Center of Excellence Coordinating Center, overseeing and offering support, providing networking opportunities and promoting collaboration for and with nine clinical research sites throughout the state. This is funded under a grant from the Governor's Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Autism of the New Jersey Department of Health, in partnership with the Center for Research and Evaluation on Education and Human Services and the departments of Computer Science and Mathematical Sciences. The Center recently received an enhancement award of $1.35 million, bringing the five-year grant to $2.835 million.

In additional grant news, the Center received a two-year, $720,000 grant from the NJ Department of Children and Families to create the Keeping Babies and Children in Mind project, which offers infant and early childhood mental health training and supervision to multidisciplinary professionals in the 10 counties affected by Superstorm Sandy.

In additional grant news, the Center received a two-year, $720,000 grant from the NJ Department of Children and Families to create the Keeping Babies and Children in Mind project, which offers infant and early childhood mental health training and supervision to multidisciplinary professionals in the 10 counties affected by Superstorm Sandy.

Child Development programs continue, led by Linda Garofallou, an Infant and Pediatric Massage Therapist. This is the third gift from the Floreks, and Ms. Garofallou provides infant and pediatric massage workshops and services through the Center's Community Presence and Partnership Programming.

The Center continues to offer an array of professional development and training programs for the community. It has developed and provided training in curricula for the Child Welfare Training Partnership at Montclair State, and is taking the lead in developing a national curriculum framework in infant and early childhood mental health. Two campus conferences are also sponsored by the Center: The Global Prenatal Initiative: 9 Months to Peace, in association with the United Nations, discussing the importance of prenatal and perinatal practices towards global peace; and the annual Todd Ouida Children's Foundation Conference, focusing on the importance of the professional development of the early childhood practitioner.

The staff of the Center has been recognized for their outstanding work for children and families. Dr. Gerard Costa, Director, was awarded the annual Lucille Weistuch Early Childhood Special Education Award from the New Jersey Division for Early Childhood (NJDEC). Kaitlin Mulcahy, Associate Director, was elected President of the New Jersey Association for Infant Mental Health. In addition, Dr. Costa and Ms. Mulcahy became the first awardees of the New Jersey Association for Infant Mental Health Competency Guidelines and Endorsement System in New Jersey.
The faculty, staff and students in the Human Services programs at Montclair State University work each day to create novel solutions to community problems, model and invent innovative practices and engage in and publish cutting-edge research. They serve as leaders and partners in creating neighborhoods of promise that support the intellectual, social, physical and psychological well-being of children and families.

Our faculty and programs remain on the cutting edge of human services in the areas of public health, nutrition, counseling and family studies. For example, Dr. Yanyan Li has received a grant from Panasonic Consumer Electronics to explore the advantages of the inverter microwave oven over traditional microwave ovens and other cooking methods.

Dr. Stephanie Silvera received a prestigious grant from the National Cancer Institute to study the relationship between race, ethnicity, individual-level socioeconomic status, demographics, and area-level characteristics and low-income women’s perceptions of access to cancer screenings.

Through a grant from the Hilton Foundation, Dr. Lisa Lieberman is conducting an evaluation study of the Inwood House’s Adolescent Family Life Program, examining the efficacy of its continuum of care for pregnant and parenting teens.

Dr. Robert Reid has received a grant from the Department of Health and Human Services to develop the infrastructure of an anti-drug coalition targeting at-risk racial and ethnic minority adolescents in Paterson’s 1st Ward. As a collaborative effort between Montclair State University and a diverse group of community stakeholders, the Paterson Coalition Against Substance Abuse introduces evidence-based environmental prevention strategies to meet the goals of the Drug Free Communities Grant Program to increase community collaboration, and reduce substance use among youth aged 12–17.

And, these are but a limited sample of all the terrific things being accomplished by our students, faculty and staff in the human services.

In this issue of our College newsletter, you will learn about our important work in play therapy, athletic training and sports medicine, intimate partner violence and the factors that influence the overall health of individuals. I invite you to read more about these initiatives in the pages that follow.
Deeply committed to advocating for underrepresented populations in mental health services, Dr. Angela Sheely-Moore implements conceptual knowledge and practical application in the areas of multicultural counseling, school counseling and play/filial therapy. Play therapy is an empirically supported, developmentally appropriate, therapeutic counseling intervention for young children. Due to children’s inability to think in abstract concepts, toys are utilized to convey children’s words, and play is understood to be their language. In filial therapy, parents are trained in play therapy principles and procedures and are asked to apply these newly learned skills in structured practice sessions at home using a special kit of toys.

The overarching question for a large portion of Dr. Sheely-Moore’s research involves testing the utility of play and filial therapy approaches as a culturally-responsive intervention for underserved populations, especially for ethnic minorities living at or below the poverty level. She also examines the implementation of counseling services in less-stigmatized (and more accessible) settings, such as schools. School-based counseling interventions often serve to promote optimal development for school-age children, as well as enhance school-parent-community relationships as parents and caregivers serve as agents of change within a strengths-based counseling approach.

Through her research, Dr. Sheely-Moore has found that the parent-child relationship in play therapy is a powerful one. She also has found that play and filial therapy applied to low-income, ethnic minority children and families in school settings reduces students’ disruptive behaviors and reduces parent-child relationship stress. These findings are important since they serve as a catalyst for evidence-based mental health interventions for underserved and under-researched populations. Training significant individuals in a child’s life, such as parents, to utilize the humanistic approach of play therapy has been reported to produce stronger results than traditional play sessions between therapist and child-client. Sharing these play-based skills to parents within the schools can serve as a bridge to promote social-emotional and academic development in an accessible and less-stigmatized setting.

Dr. David Middlemas obtained his EdD from Rutgers University, his MA from the University of Nebraska at Kearney, and his BA from Muhlenberg College in Natural Science and Mathematics. He is a Professor in the Department of Exercise Science and Physical Education, where he serves as the program coordinator for the BS in Athletic Training.

Making an Impact in Athletic Training Education

To perform successfully, students in Athletic Training education must demonstrate their understanding of the information, skills and techniques they have learned and be able to incorporate that information and those skills into evidence-based practice. Dr. David Middlemas conducts research on the assessment of clinical expertise and how students learn in the clinical setting in the field of Athletic Training and Sports Medicine. His investigations into teaching and evaluating clinical competence have involved collection and analysis of certification examination data and clinical contact time as well as qualitative assessment of self-regulatory behaviors. He has also compared student performance in computer-based versus traditional learning models, and examined methods used to evaluate clinical competence, critical thinking, clinical decision making and development of expertise.

When evaluating clinical education, Dr. Middlemas attempts to better understand which methods of evaluating clinical competence in Athletic Training are the best indicators of the student’s ability to apply their didactic and practical learning in clinical practice. To get to this underlying question, Dr. Middlemas and his research partners investigate factors such as how Athletic Training competencies relate to cognitive taxonomies, or ways to classify levels of understanding and multiple intelligences. They also investigate the development of expertise, similarities in how novices and experts think, critical thinking and clinical decision making.

Evaluation of the methods used in assessing clinical competence found that there were benefits and problems with a number of approaches. Factors that negatively impact a student's ability to be competent in an actual clinical setting include differences between the assessment method and clinical practice, psychometric problems, space requirements, faculty time commitments and cost. While there is some value to methods such as the use of simulated patients and problem-based practical examinations in non-clinical settings, these methods were not as effective as practice in an actual clinical setting. Results also indicated that the ability of individuals to self-regulate their learning behaviors is affected by the environment, the individual’s experiences and goals and the sources of the feedback they receive.

These results are important, as each additional step in the investigation of how students learn in the clinical setting and how to best assess them provides information that will help Athletic Training as a healthcare profession. Identifying strengths and potential weaknesses or issues with evaluation methods in use today allows educators to develop assessment tools that better address the learning outcomes as defined by the National Athletic Trainers’ Association.

Dr. Middlemas has published his recent research in the International Journal of Athletic Therapy and Training, the Athletic Training Education Journal, the Journal of Athletic Training and Sports Health Care, and the Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology. Dr. Middlemas is the recipient of the Athletic Trainers’ Society of NJ Distinguished Service Award and the Dan Libera Service Award for Outstanding contributions to the Board of Certification, Inc.
**Intimate Partner Violence: How Leaving Relationships Impacts Family Dynamics**

Dr. Lyndal Khaw conducts research on the dynamics and effects of intimate partner violence (IPV) on families. IPV is considered a serious public health problem in the United States, affecting one in four women in the U.S. (National Institute of Justice, 2006). The Center for Disease Control (2010) has also identified IPV as one of the leading preventable causes of death among U.S. women ages 15 – 44.

Within this broad field, Dr. Khaw focuses on three primary areas: IPV against women, specifically within a relational and family context; the process of leaving abusive partners; and what happens after women leave abusive relationships. While most IPV research has focused on how and why women stay in abusive relationships, research on the process of leaving is relatively new. In studying the leaving aspect of the relationships, Dr. Khaw explores the effect of how leaving impacts family relationships and dynamics. There is a common misperception that abused women are safe after separating from their partners. Dr. Khaw's research examines abused women's co-parenting experiences and the ways in which they protect themselves and their children from further harm and intrusion from their former partners.

Dr. Khaw's approach to studying the process of leaving represents a unique theoretical integration of three distinct empirical literatures (i.e., the process of leaving, family systems theory and the Stages of Change Model). Coming from a family studies background, she has always been interested in exploring the effects of the process of leaving on family relationships and dynamics, and conversely, how changes in these family systems affect women's decisions to leave.

In her research, Dr. Khaw has examined changing relational boundaries, family roles and dynamics in the process of leaving within the Stages of Change Model. This Model was originally used to understand the five stages people go through to quit addictive behaviors (e.g., smoking) but has more recently been used to explore the stages of leaving. Using an array of methods, including qualitative interviews, family diagramming, situational analysis and grounded theory, Dr. Khaw interviewed 25 abused mothers who were in different stages of leaving their abusive partners. Through these interviews, she examined mothers' perceptions of changing boundaries (also known as boundary ambiguity) in relation to their decisions to leave, stay with or return to their abusive partners. She also explored the role of mothering in mothers' processes of leaving.

As mothers moved through the various stages of leaving, they experienced different changes in their perceptions of family boundaries. For example, in the first stage of change, when a mother was not yet ready to leave her abusive partner, she was in denial about her situation and perceived her family boundaries to be intact (boundary clarity). Conversely, in the middle stage of change, when a mother may be more emotionally ready to leave her partner, she perceived more boundary ambiguity in her family system. After she had left her abusive partner and remained separated from him, she once again perceived boundary clarity by renegotiating boundaries that excluded her former partner.

The second main finding of Dr. Khaw's study was that perceptions of both boundary clarity and boundary ambiguity impacted mothers' decisions in the process of leaving. For example, throughout the middle stages, when mothers perceived more boundary ambiguity, they were in a state of limbo. Twenty-three of the 25 mothers in the study had cycled through periods of being emotionally absent from their partners while physically in the relationship (which prompted them to leave), and being emotionally reconnected with their partners while physically apart (which prompted them to return). This complicated cycle of leaving and returning eventually pushed most mothers to permanently leave their partners.

These findings add to the growing body of literature showing that leaving is very much a process that most often involves multiple stages and attempts before they are able to permanently separate from their partners. For most women, leaving an abusive partner is tremendously difficult. Unfortunately, not many people understand why that is the case. In hopes that her research will shed light into the complexity and nuances of this process, Dr. Khaw has shared her findings through several regional and national media outlets, including CNN and Chicago Public Radio. Her research has also been published in the *Journal of Family Theory and Review* and *Family Relations*. 
Dr. Ndidiamaka Amutah is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Health and Nutrition Sciences. Her research interests include community-based participatory research, health disparities, the impact of stress and racism on infant mortality, low birth weight and preterm birth in women of color, HIV/AIDS and the social determinants of health. She earned her PhD at the University of Maryland, her MPH at the George Washington University, and her BS at Rutgers University. Prior to joining the faculty at Montclair State University, Dr. Amutah completed a two year, post-doctoral fellowship funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation that focused on community-based participatory research and health disparities.

Dr. Ndidiamaka Amutah

Health Disparities in Maternal and Child Health

Research conducted by Dr. Ndidiamaka Amutah focuses on addressing the social determinants of health as they relate to communities of color. Specifically, she is interested in Maternal and Child Health across the lifespan, and has conducted research on various aspects of reproductive health such as infant mortality and preterm birth, HIV/AIDS prevention for African American girls, and sources of social support for HIV positive women.

Dr. Amutah’s recent research, designed to answer questions that reflect the needs of the community, has examined the role of the community in supporting women throughout their pregnancy, and how racial discrimination and the physiologic effect of stress impact women with regard to infant mortality and preterm birth. This research speaks to the health disparities and inequities that communities of color face as a result of bearing a disproportionate burden of HIV/AIDS cases.

Through her research, Dr. Amutah found that communities of color are incredibly resilient and adept at addressing health disparities. Given the proper context and resources, women can serve as ambassadors of HIV prevention and link people to programs and services. Her findings suggest that programs aimed at improving the reproductive health of women of color should focus on the social factors that affect women’s health, such as access to quality and culturally competent providers. These findings are important because they add to the scientific literature and dissemination of information about health disparities and maternal and child health related work. They also serve as an indicator of the importance of conducting sustainable, asset-focused, community-based research within and for communities of color.

Dr. Amutah has published her work in the Journal of Maternal and Child Health and in The Qualitative Report. She also is the recipient of a grant through the Research Education Institute for Diverse Scholars (REIDS) Program at Yale University, and is studying the relationship and communication characteristics between daughters and their HIV-positive mothers, as predictors of unsafe sexual behaviors and HIV risk of the adolescent. Additionally, this study will examine other key influences on mother-daughter communication; including the future aspirations of the adolescent females, and the mother’s communication with her daughter with regard to her HIV-positive status, as well as mental health related issues such as anxiety and self-efficacy.

Dr. Meena Mahadevan and Dr. Ndidiamaka Amutah, both in the Department of Health and Nutrition Sciences, have collaborated on an exciting interdisciplinary project. Together, they have been working on developing interventions that not only help participants more efficiently manage the complications associated with having multiple chronic diseases, but that are also culturally competent, and that strengthen and support an individual’s existing psychological, environmental and social networks. Last year, the Well of Hope Community Development Center, Inc. in Paterson, NJ, was awarded a grant from the City of Paterson Department of Health and Human Services to pilot an innovative program titled Project THANKS: Turning HIV/AIDS Into New Knowledge for Sisters. Drs. Mahadevan and Amutah served as the lead grant writers and are the Principal Investigators for this project. Their goal was to offer HIV-positive ethnic minority women a dynamic care plan with components that focus on personal control and self-esteem, thereby providing an avenue by which they can regain control over their bodies and achieve nutritional rehabilitation. Project THANKS has been a great success in its early stages. The program has been awarded funding again for 2014-2015.
Dr. Meena Mahadevan, an Assistant Professor in the department of Health and Nutrition Sciences, obtained her PhD from Pennsylvania State University, her MHE from the University of Georgia, and her MS from SDNT Women’s University in India. Her research examines the influence of the socio-ecological factors on an individual’s food choices and overall nutritional health. She completed a two-year post doctoral fellowship at Fordham University. The project, funded by NIH’s National Institute on Drug Abuse, focused on the health risk behaviors of substance abusers at risk for HIV.

The Effects of Social, Cultural and Environmental Factors on Overall Health

Dr. Meena Mahadevan's work involves using qualitative methods to understand how the daily contextual factors unique to a population group intersect to impact their overall health. Her research interests combine the fields of public health, nutrition, anthropology and sociology. She focuses on using a socio-ecological model to understand the factors influencing the health and nutritional status of individuals with chronic conditions including HIV, diabetes, hypertension and heart disease. The data generated from this research helps provide the empirical foundation necessary to develop interventions aimed at promoting better dietary practices and reducing health disparities among some of the most vulnerable groups in society including African Americans with HIV and substance abuse disorders, impoverished South Asian immigrant women with low literacy levels and the elderly.

The primary goal of Dr. Mahadevan's research is to examine how the daily food choices, eating and exercise patterns and other health practices of a target population are influenced by their lifestyle, environmental, psychological and sociocultural factors. A better understanding of the nature and pathways by which these forces interact to impact a group's behaviors can contribute to improved public policies and programs aimed at preventing disease risks among them.

Through her research, she has been able to demonstrate the complexity of the various factors that may contribute to a group's increased vulnerability to poor health and nutritional outcomes. For instance, the influence of individual factors such as demographic and socio-economic variables (e.g., biological vulnerability, physiological changes and limited economic resources for food purchases), and disease symptomology (e.g., fatigue, food aversions, and lack of appetite) on their food choices and nutritional health may be mediated by the characteristics of the environment of the neighborhoods in which they live (e.g., lack of healthy food availability and inadequate access to educational resources), as well as the nature of and salience of their interpersonal networks (e.g., rigid cultural and lifestyle food norms and lack of social support from family, friends and care providers). The environmental and interpersonal inadequacies may have a direct impact on their food choices and nutritional health, while at the same time, they may contribute to poor psychological health (e.g., depression, anxiety and a diminished sense of self-efficacy in their ability to sustain a healthy diet). The psychological factors, in turn, may partially mediate the influence of the environmental and interpersonal network factors on their ability to make healthy food choices, and their willingness to seek treatment to improve their nutritional health status. These findings suggest that future intervention research that considers the various ways in which the aforementioned factors might intersect to affect a group's ability to engage in healthy behaviors can play a critical role in positively influencing its overall health and quality of life.

People often have multiple chronic conditions, which add a layer of complexity to their health status. For instance, as a result of continuing advances in harm reduction and antiretroviral treatment, HIV-positive substance abusers are able to live longer today, and lead a quality of life with measurable health benefits. Unfortunately, certain antiretroviral medications are associated with a cluster of metabolic abnormalities that increase their risk for other chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, especially among women. Similarly, among South Asian women, the stressors associated with immigration combined with other challenges such as poor English-speaking skills, social isolation, lack of knowledge and skills, and feelings of disempowerment have been shown to result in depression, an over-dependence on low-cost and low-nutrient-dense foods and reduced physical activity. These conditions ultimately result in a larger burden of comorbidities and associated nutritional complications among them. Although most community-based organizations offer basic health services, few programs and services address the specific needs associated with having multiple chronic diseases simultaneously. All of this presents a major public health challenge for preventing and remediating malnutrition in these groups.

Dr. Mahadevan has published her research in the Health Education Journal, the Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics, Perspectives in Public Health, and Ecology of Food and Nutrition and has presented papers at national conferences, including the Annual Meeting and Exposition of the American Public Health Association, The Society of Nutrition Education and Behavior Conferences and the International Conference on Food Studies.
Alumna Profile: Bette Simmons

Dr. Bette Simmons had such a positive experience working in residence life as an undergraduate student at Thiel College and as a counselor for a social service agency, that she decided to pursue a career in counseling and student affairs.

A graduate of Montclair State University's MA in Counseling program, Dr. Simmons currently serves as the Vice President of Student Development and Enrollment Management at the County College of Morris. Looking back on her experience in the Counseling program, Dr. Simmons recalls the emphasis on taking advantage of professional experiences available during her time within the program. She took that advice, and accepted a position at the County College of Morris at the beginning of her career. “It was this exposure that solidified my career path in higher education as I was able to translate what I was learning in the classroom to the practical experience of the job.” Being able to connect experiences in the work setting with a structured program helped guide Dr. Simmons’ career choices and instilled within her the desire to continue to pursue counseling in the student affairs sector.

Even though Dr. Simmons has worked at the County College of Morris for her entire career, she has worked in a myriad of areas in higher education. Dr. Simmons was a college counselor, the Assistant to the President/Affirmative Action Officer, the Assistant Dean of Students and the Vice President of Student Development and Enrollment Management. As the senior student affairs administrator at CCM, Dr. Simmons supervises the staff and programs in Academic Advisement, Admissions, Athletics, Campus Life, Career Services and Cooperative Education, Counseling Services, Enrollment Services, Financial Aid, Health Services, Records and Registration, and the Women’s Center.

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) recently named Dr. Simmons a Pillar of the Profession. The award is presented by NASPA to honor professionals who have distinguished themselves as leaders, teachers and scholars in student affairs and higher education. She is also the recipient of the Morristown Neighborhood House Distinguished Volunteer Award (2010), the Morris County Phenomenal Woman of the Year (2009), Thiel College Distinguished Alumni Award (2008), the NASPA Latino/a Knowledge Community Award for outstanding support and encouragement of Latinos in higher education (2007), the New Jersey College Health Association Award in support of the promotion of college health (1998) and the Displaced Homemaker Network of New Jersey, Inc. Award for outstanding contributions to women and families (1995). She received her doctorate in higher education administration from Seton Hall University.

According to Dr. Karen Pennington, Montclair State's Vice President for Student Development and Campus Life and former NASPA President, “Dr. Simmons is an excellent example of what it means to be a dedicated professional. She has made a long-standing commitment to the needs of students in the community college and has helped to provide many students with the tools needed to transfer and complete the bachelor’s degree. Montclair State University is privileged to enjoy a great cooperative relationship with the County College of Morris and that is in no small way due to the work and student development focus provided by Dr. Simmons.”