

# MSPPP *rapport*

DECEMBER 2004

## President's Message

We have just completed several weeks that highlight children. Whether through a festival of lights; the light of a star leading wise men to a manger; or the beacon from a red nosed reindeer, the stories and rituals of the holiday season instruct and delight our young and young at heart. An overused cliché correctly describes children as our future, but their vulnerability demands that we assume responsibility for their growth and development.

In the U.S., about 20 percent of young people between nine and 17 years of age have a diagnosable mental illness and estimates suggest that six to nine million children suffer from a severe form. Problems with depression, anxiety, disruptive behavior, and the sequelae of family instability and substance abuse are far too common children's stories. Where illnesses such as cancer and diabetes receive considerable attention from the medical community and philanthropists, issues of violence and homicide receive much less. Yet, these claim more lives in this age group and are the number one cause of death for young men of color. Where mood disorders, acculturation, divorce and abuse interfere significantly with a young person's capacity to attend to studies, our government disproportionately funds questionable achievement tests like MCAS and largely neglects the psychological barriers to learning.

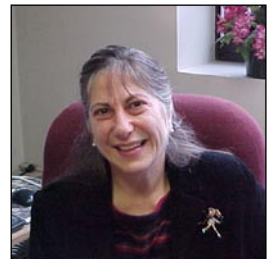
Despite the wealth of our nation, more than 70 percent of children in need of mental health services remain untreated! Our former Surgeon General in his Report on Mental Health (Satcher, 1999) tells us that we have excellent evidence that supports the efficacy of mental health treatments for children, but an inadequate supply of professionals to deliver them.

Two years ago, several MSPP students and a faculty member began to work with the school counselor at our local high school in West Roxbury. In the first year, mental health referrals increased exponentially and, when a tragic death occurred in the community, our group was familiar and in place to provide needed crisis counseling to students and faculty. In addition to traditional roles, as child psychologists, MSPP students are being trained for careers in pediatric

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## School Psychology—rewarding, demanding and in demand

"My days are a whirlwind. I walk in the door at seven-thirty and fasten my seatbelt because so much happens in a day," says Lou Cannon, PsyD, an MSPP alumna who has been the school psychologist for the Rockport high and middle schools for the past seven years.



Lou Cannon, PsyD

In the course of a day, Cannon counsels kids individually and in groups; consults with parents by phone, in person, and in team meetings; coaches teachers to solve classroom problems and become better mentors; responds to crises ranging from bullying to the death of a teacher; and does psychological testing to pinpoint learning and emotional problems.

"A school is a community within the larger town and national community. As a school psychologist and member of the school community, life touches you in all its dimensions everyday and in ways that wouldn't happen in private practice," says Cannon, who worked in hospital and community mental health settings before going back to MSPP to train as a psychologist. "When I graduated I was interested in working with adolescents and in my home community of Rockport, but wanted to make sure that my clinical skills were not wasted. They were not!"

In the past, school psychologists spent much of their time testing kids. Now—although testing is still an important part of the job—the need for clinical expertise is great and growing. "For instance, today

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## Save the Date!

**MSPP 30th Anniversary Gala  
Friday Evening, June 3, 2005**

Mark your calendar for the MSPP 30th Anniversary Gala, to be held on Friday evening, June 3, at MSPP. The Gala will honor our accomplishments and help us to build greater visibility and raise funds for the future. Ticket information and other details will be announced in the spring. The event is co-chaired by two alums—Anne Waters, PsyD, alumna and faculty member and Charlie Hogan, PsyD, and new board member.

## Researching violence towards children, MSPP faculty member advances prevention



Ed De Vos, EdD

To function as fully informed clinicians, psychologists must know how to evaluate and apply the latest findings in psychological research. A solid foundation in

statistics is, of course, imperative to the understanding of research, and MSPP students are fortunate to gain their statistical expertise from Edward De Vos, EdD, a dedicated teacher and a highly regarded researcher in the area of violence and children.

De Vos has served on the MSPP faculty since 1987. He is also on the faculty of Harvard Medical School and is the director of the Center for Violence and Injury Prevention at Education Development Center (EDC), an internationally recognized organization that addresses critical challenges in health, education, learning technologies, adult education, institutional reform and social justice.

The Center for Violence and Injury Prevention assesses the myriad of factors contributing to intentional and unintentional injuries in children. In addition to identifying risk factors, the Center develops and evaluates preventive interventions through work with school systems, criminal and juvenile justice systems, public health, health care providers, social service agencies and community-based organizations.

Under De Vos' direction, the Center is involved in over 20 projects in the United States and abroad focusing on such issues as the link between domestic violence and child abuse, the effectiveness of violence prevention programs for high-risk youth and child-rear seating in automobiles. Given his global view of child violence, we wondered: Are today's children more at risk than those of previous generations?

"In the past decade we've had many high profile child sexual abuse cases as well as incidents of terrible school violence," he says. "But these examples of trauma, while visible

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## Study of life span development challenges students to think outside the box



Shyamala Venkataraman, PhD

Gaining exposure to a wide range of psychological theories and applications is one of the many advantages of an MSPP doctoral education. The broad-based curriculum helps

doctoral students acquire a range of conceptual and practical tools. It is this aspect of training that many MSPP alumni say contributes to their career success.

For instance, all first-year MSPP students are required to build a foundation in developmental psychology. In the course titled Life Span Development, students begin to appreciate the complex interplay of biological, cognitive, emotional and social changes that occur from infancy through aging.

Students hone these skills under the tutelage of Shyamala Venkataraman, Ph.D., a passionate champion of the use of developmental psychology in the clinical realm. Venkataraman is a clinical psychologist whose background encompasses a developmental orientation and research in child development. In her

class, students become acquainted with the normative data in areas ranging from temperament to moral development.

With this conceptual foundation, says Venkataraman, students have a fuller understanding of the context of their patients' lives and individual variability. "How people develop in certain areas—or fail to develop—plays an enormous role in clinical assessment. Students are encouraged to appreciate the forces of human development and adaptation, paying equal attention to strengths and vulnerabilities," she says.

Venkataraman is an enthusiastic teacher who uses a variety of techniques to engage her students. Current and former students, as well as MSPP staff, bring their infants and young children to class for observation and discussion. She also uses videotapes and guest speakers on a variety of topics. Students discover the use of play therapy as the natural medium for intervention with young children. To address death and dying as a topic in class, students are asked to bring in material—such as a poem, a story or folk tale—that symbolizes death. Such learning activities help students consider the cultural context of the meanings of various life stages, thus anchoring the course to everyday life. ■

# More than 150 participate in Third Annual Lucero Run

On Sunday, November 7 more than 150 participants completed the five-kilometer Lucero Memorial race/walk and raised over \$5,500 for the Dr. Cynthia Lucero Center for Health Psychology at MSPP. The annual event supports MSPP programs and commemorates the extraordinary life and legacy of the late alumna, Dr. Cynthia Lucero, a talented practitioner and marathon runner.

Established after Lucero's tragic collapse during the 2002 Boston Marathon and subsequent death, the Lucero Center is committed to the training of Spanish language psychologists who will provide essential services to the nation's growing Latino population—a mission Lucero informally began as a student. The Center also offers a special springtime lecture and a health psychology scholarship in Dr. Lucero's name. To date, more than \$32,000 has been raised to support the Center's work.

This year, 14-year-old Marissa Auerbach, the recipient of Lucero's heart, along with



*Can someone write a one line caption for this?*

her, attended the event. It was an emotional meeting between two families—the Luceros from Ecuador and the Auerbachs from Sharon, Massachusetts, seemingly worlds apart, but united by Cynthia Lucero's organ donation to a once very sick little girl who now flourishes in body and spirit.

In his welcome to the Lucero and Auerbach families and all the event participants, MSPP President Nicholas Covino said there is "no greater gift than the gift of life. Cynthia was such a strong proponent of organ donation, it's more than fitting to have Marissa and her family with us today."

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## The psychology of divorce: children's needs



Sanford Portnoy, PhD

Over one million children are newly affected by divorce on an annual basis. For some children, their stress predates separation due to chronic high conflict in the home. For the

majority of children, there also appears to be little emotional preparation for their parents' separation and they react to the separation with distress, anxiety, anger and shock. In addition, most children are inadequately informed by their parents about the separation and divorce. (Kelly and Emery-2003)

"Earlier research showed effects of divorce to be very damaging to children, but recent data focuses on the resiliency of children and their capacity to rebound if we know how to help them do it," says psychologist Sanford Portnoy, PhD, director of The Center for Study of Psychology and Divorce at MSPP. "The most important finding is that if parents get along well enough and co-parent effectively after the divorce, the kids will do much better," he adds.

For over 20 years, Portnoy has focused on changing the divorce process in order that divorcing couples go through divorce productively and in healthier ways, which ultimately affect the children. He works closely with divorcing couples with children, taking them

through several steps, including the developmental needs of children and how conflict in divorce affects them. He then personalizes the situation to discuss the couples' own children, by looking at their particular needs. Often they discuss such things as how and when to tell the children about divorce, co-parenting after divorce, and how to keep children out of the middle of a divorce.

Portnoy has become involved in national and local movements, including the Collaborative Law Counsel of Massachusetts, which promotes non-litigative divorce in order to calm down the process and protect the children. But in his capacity as director of The Center for Study of Psychology and Divorce, Portnoy is developing programs with extensive outreach to many populations. He points out that given the divorce rate in our population, virtually every mental health professional treats some clients going through divorce. The Center has just completed a series for mental health practitioners and in April will offer a daylong workshop on roles for mental health professionals in divorce and how to build a divorce practice.

Under Portnoy's recent direction and collaboration with Suffolk University Law School, lawyers and judges are being educated on the psychology of divorce as it intersects with the legal system, as well as child development research in divorce, and helping divorcing couples with developmentally sound co-parenting plans. ▀

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medicine and juvenile justice where the need for mental health services is great. Our graduate Psychopharmacologists are now able to partner with pediatricians to create medical and psychological services to meet the psychiatric needs of children in their practices.

The stories in this Rapport will introduce you to some of the people at MSPP who take care of children and those who train our students to assume professional careers in the service of

young people. In the course of the next several years, you will see child-related programs growing as MSPP endeavors to fulfill its social responsibility to train practitioners to meet the mental health needs of our community in this most important area.

We hope you had a Happy Holiday season and wish you and your families the best for the New Year.

Nicholas A. Covino  
President

## School Psychology cont'd from page 1.

there are many more kids diagnosed with mental health problems, such as autism, bipolar disorder and depression,” says Cannon, adding that issues such as drug abuse, suicidality, and precocious sexuality all seem to be on the rise, and occurring at earlier and earlier ages.

Anxiety is another issue. “We are all aware of national trends in school violence, and we all lived through 9/11. These kinds of events move the ‘red line’—the line where kids go into crisis. They lower the threshold for most children and especially for those already at risk,” she says, noting that having family members in the military can also lower the threshold.

While the need is growing, the number of skilled school psychologists is not. “There is a serious national shortage,” says Bob Lichtenstein, PhD, who is a nationally certified school psychologist and the director of program development at MSPP. “Increasing demand, a limited number

of training programs and the graying of the workforce are some of the contributing factors,” he says.

“On the other hand, the federal government—through ‘No Child Left Behind’ and the new special education law passed just last month—is heightening the expectation that every child have an opportunity to receive a quality education, founded upon scientific research-based practices, in a regular classroom. This makes it even more critical that school psychologists be trained to deal effectively with a myriad of issues involving learning, diversity and program development,” Lichtenstein adds.

For recent graduates of four-year colleges, allied health professionals or doctoral level clinicians searching for challenging and rewarding work with children and families, school psychology may be the ideal choice,” according to Lichtenstein.

Says Cannon, “This is a job that is demanding of both head and heart. If you want to know you are doing something meaningful, this is it.”

## Researching violence cont'd from page 2.

and graphic, are not the greatest risks to our children. Unintentional injuries are far more common, and this includes car injuries (either inside the vehicle or as a pedestrian), bicycle accidents or drownings. In many ways, children are safer now. Public policies addressing car seats, air bags, bike helmets, second-hand smoke and lead paint have all contributed to the safety of our children.”

According to De Vos, the most satisfying part of his work is helping to “tear down barriers” between complex systems to enhance child safety. “Schools,

parents, communities, law enforcement and government must work together to address difficult public health issues,” he says.

In his MSPP statistics courses, De Vos tries to impart knowledge as well as an appreciation of how research can help clinicians, from private practice to public policy. “To succeed in the short term and become lifelong learners, clinicians need to be informed consumers of research. In the grand scheme of things, research helps us understand the world and puts us in a better position to advocate and make informed decisions.”

## Lucero Run cont'd from page 3.

“Dr. Lucero embodied the passion and commitment of psychology as a true helping profession and is remembered by friends and family as an energetic, high achieving professional who cared deeply about her patients and society,” he said.

Lucero also had an acute appreciation of the psychological impact of cancer on its victims and their families, and she used her dissertation as an opportunity to examine how running for others can facilitate the grieving process for those who have lost loved ones to the disease. In addition, she used her marathon running skills to raise

money for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society as a participant in the Society’s Team in Training program.

The Third Annual Lucero Memorial Run was the culmination of weeks of volunteer work by MSPP students, staff, alumnae and friends.

The overall winner in the men’s division was Chris Mitchell of Boston. The overall women’s winner was Karin Bryan of Westborough. The event generated a front-page, *Boston Globe Metro* feature piece, coverage by WCVB-TV and WHDH-TV, and stories in several weekly publications.