

HDFS NEWS

Family, Nutrition & Exercise Sciences (FNES) Department
Human Development & Family Science Newsletter - 2021



Dear Human Development and Family Science Students and Alumni,

We are delighted to share with you the 2021 HDFS Newsletter which, as usual, includes program updates and information on our students' and alumni's achievements!

We hope you and your families have been doing well during the COVID-19 pandemic. The massive lockdowns during the pandemic have underlined the key role that families have in helping individuals and society thrive and survive. This also emphasized the importance of our human development and family science field in preparing professionals able to empower families to grow and flourish.

Thank you very much for keeping in touch with us, and please stay safe and healthy!

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IN THIS ISSUE:



2 Faculty Updates



5 Alumni News



6 Alumni Spotlight

Human Development & Family Science Program News

This year we have been working on transforming the Specialization in Human Development and Family Science into a major on its own, a change that is in line with programs around the country. Thus, students will be graduating with a degree in Human Development and Family Science.

Many thanks to our CUNY Office Assistant, Ms. Jennifer Tang!



Jennifer Tang

Jennifer Tang is a CUNY Office Assistant who works with students at the Family, Nutrition & Exercise Sciences Department to help them with their class registration, major declaration, and various academic related issues so that students are on track to be awarded the degree they are pursuing.

After earning her mathematics and education degrees from Queens College, Jennifer went to work in the private sector for almost a decade before returning to CUNY, both to work as an employee and to pursue her Master of Science in literacy education (MSEd). During her first ten years in the private sector, Jennifer worked as an insurance underwriter, as a customer service representative for an importer, and for a customs

brokerage. In 2007, Jennifer returned to Queensborough Community College to work as a CUNY Office Assistant for the Office of Institutional Advancement, handling alumni services and various fundraising events for student scholarships.

Jennifer brought her CUNY experiences to Queens College in 2015. In the FNES department, she has worked with the advisors to develop tools and methods to better monitor students' academic progress and help students in achieving their academic goals.

Many Thanks to Mr. George Giannopoulos, Senior College Laboratory Technician!



George Giannopoulos

George Giannopoulos, MS, a Senior College Laboratory Technician (CLT) at the FNES department, has a diverse background. He's worked as a restaurant owner, an olive and orange tree farmer, and as an adjunct instructor teaching undergraduate level classes in physiology of muscular activity as well as exercise, balance, and weight control. His duties at the department include budget-related issues and maintenance of the food laboratory equipment and green house and garden areas.

As a former restaurant owner who saw firsthand the food waste which occurs in restaurants, he got involved in the seasonal maintenance and upkeep of the FNES herb and vegetable garden. While the produce is used in the food laboratories by the Nutrition, Dietetics and Food Management programs, he initiated a small-scale composting project to provide the students with the opportunity to develop a "no waste" behavior. George has a Bachelor of Science in physical education and a master's in cardiac rehabilitation. He is currently a PhD candidate in sports medicine since his passion for sports is perpetual.

Faculty Updates

Dr. Elizabeth Riina continues her research on the social and cultural contexts for parenting and child development. She was awarded a PSC-CUNY grant for 2021–2022 to examine the development of parenting stress among low-income unmarried mothers. In this work she seeks to understand how parenting stress changes over time and with child development. This work will also aim to identify sources of support in families' social contexts that help to reduce parenting stressors.

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Dr. Elizabeth Riina

Riina published several articles in 2020 that focus on the role of family and community factors in parenting qualities. In a study published in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* she explored the implications of adolescent adjustment for coparenting. Her findings suggest that adolescent social anxiety and behavioral problems predicted later coparenting conflict. A study published in the *Journal of Community Psychology* examined the role of neighborhood context for parenting in Latinx families, finding that neighborhood supports have different implications for parental warmth and conflict depending on generational status.

In personal news, Riina and her family welcomed a daughter, Audrey, in August 2020. She joins Natalie (5) and Calvin (2).

Dr. Mihaela Robila received the 2020 Florence Kaslow Distinguished Contribution to International Family Psychology Award from the American Psychological Association, Division 43 Family Psychology.

Robila was invited to participate and discuss “Social determinants of mental health and policy responses in the area of family and relationships” at the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Improving Youth Wellbeing and Mental Health: The Role of Inclusive Social Policies, organized by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs in November 2020 (Virtual).

Student News AAFCS Student Club

Dr. Riina is the faculty adviser for the student club. Our club meetings have been on hold for the past year due to the pandemic, but we are looking forward to having guest speakers as soon as on-campus

activities resume. We strongly encourage HDFS alumni to come visit and share information about their post-graduate pathways with current students. If you are interested in being a guest speaker, please contact Dr. Riina at eriina@qc.cuny.edu.

Congratulations to our 2021 Student Awardees!

Ernie Henriquez has been awarded the 2021 **FNES Award** for high scholarship and future promise in Human Development and Family Science.

Kiana Cheng has been awarded the 2021 **Anne Whelan Dwyer & Patrick Andrew Dwyer Award** for significant professional service to the Human Development and Family Science Program.

Kyounghee Youn has been awarded the 2021 **Estelle Rosenzweig Scholarship** for high academic achievement in the Human Development and Family Science Program and community engagement.

Students' Professional Development

Gabrielle Gunther: “I work at a special purpose private school at Woodfords Family Services. I work as a teacher’s assistant in the K–2 program. I previously worked at Quality Services for the Autism Community (QSAC) at their after-school program as a therapy assistant. In the summer, I plan on applying to a graduate program in Educational Psychology with a concentration in applied behavioral analysis at the University of Southern Maine.”

Alesha Barton is currently working as a life coach at Forestdale Inc. Foster Care Agency. Alesha is helping youth ranging from ages 14–26 to gain independent living skills and connect with a caring adult.

Michael Tacuri: “I volunteered at The Open Door Inc, (TOD) a faith-based non-profit organization where their mission is to empower immigrants to their full potential to be successful in integrating, participating, and contributing to society. The Open Door has many programs that are available to the immigrant community including English as a second language, Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC), computer literacy, and children’s literacy. During the pandemic, I was given the opportunity to volunteer and participate in the event Conversation Partners under the English as a Second Language program. This is a monthly event that transitioned to Zoom because of the pandemic. As a conversation partner, you make an impact by helping the English language students practice their conversation skills and help strengthen the community at The Open Door. Volunteers are paired with small groups of 2–3 TOD students to allow everyone the chance to participate in the conversation session. Being a volunteer during the pandemic allowed me to gain experience in my field and learn more about the importance of a community. Being able to help the immigrant community further improve their English skills has opened my mind more to the struggles the immigrant community faces today.

“I was also a student intern at St. Paul’s House Inc., which is another faith-based non-profit organization that is focusing on creating a safe community in Hell’s Kitchen and breaking down social barriers set against the homeless community. During my time there, I was working in various programs that are offered to the community of Hell’s Kitchen such as Neighborhood Food Pantry, Creighton’s Cafe, Heartbeat Family Group, and Movie Night.

“For the Neighborhood Food Pantry program, bags of food are packed and given out to those who are in need within Hell’s Kitchen every Tuesday morning.

“I also cooked and served meals in the Creighton’s Cafe (soup kitchen) program every week on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. People can come and get coffee and pastries. As they wait for the main dish, there is a session of worship and service for those who wish to listen.

“For the Heartbeat Family Group, I worked with children in the community and prepared food and activities every Friday evening. Children varied in age from 6 to 14 years old. The movie night program was held on the last Tuesday of every month where people could come in for free pizza, snacks, and drinks while a movie is playing. Because of the pandemic, the movie night program was shut down, but accommodations were made using safety guidelines to continue to run the food pantry and soup kitchen program. For example, all interns and volunteers wore gloves and masks and handed out the meals and bags of food through the door. Sanitary kits were also given out to those who needed them. Heartbeat Family Group transitioned online to keep everyone safe.”

Steve Corona: “I recently became a peer counselor for the Student Services and Peer Counseling Program. I had the opportunity to minor in the program as well. I work with my new fellow peers to fully understand the concept of counseling. In addition, we also meet people from each department that is here at QC and get to fully know what their role is and the services they provide on campus for our students. Throughout the semester I worked one-on-one with an upper peer who has been in the program in order to better hone my skills as a peer counselor. I also participate in the Peer Office, which is currently running through Zoom. The Peer Office is available for any QC student who would like to come and discuss any stress they have had in their daily lives”.

HDFS Student Spotlight



Aiman H. Mehar

Aiman Mehar volunteered at New York Presbyterian-Queens Hospital. She volunteered for various programs including the Child Life Program, Greeter’s Program, and the OT/PT Mobility Program working alongside NYP’s exceptional team of healthcare providers. It was through her volunteer experience that she developed an interest in the field of occupational therapy.

She believes that the HDFS program and her minor in psychology, provided her with the best background knowledge when it comes to enforcing resiliency in her approach to holistic healthcare. Currently, she is a teacher assistant at St. Mary’s Children’s Hospital, working alongside pediatric occupational therapists and early education teachers to address the physical, cognitive, psychosocial, and sensory components of her students’ educational needs. In the fall of 2021, Aiman embarks on her journey to become an occupational therapist as she begins her professional studies in the MS program of Occupational Therapy at NYU-Steinhardt.

Alumni News

Emely Arias (2020): “After graduating, I immediately started my job hunt and was hired as a case manager at Elm York Assisted Living. It’s been an interesting learning curve, but HDFS has definitely equipped me well. As a case manager, I assist residents with a variety of situations ranging from helping with Medicaid/Medicare applications, to dealing with Social Security benefits. I make sure they all have benefits active, annual evaluations, pre-screening/intake assessments, or I just listen to any problems they have—whether personal or with other residents—and help mediate the situation. I’ll be going for my graduate studies next fall. The top school on my list is Long Island University, hopefully following the forensic social work path.”

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Shana John-Cortes

Shana John-Cortes (2017):

“I cannot believe it has been three years since I have graduated. What a journey it has been! After graduating, I continued my studies, receiving my master’s in social work from New York University. During my time there, I was placed at Self-help Community Services where I provided one-on-one therapy to seniors in their homes and ran a monthly group.

“My second internship was at Gouverneur Skilled Nursing Facility, where I did intake and discharge planning. After I graduated, I was fortunate enough to get a job working at Self Help Community Services as a housing social worker for older adults. I provide services ranging from enrollment in Medicaid, Medicare, SNAP, and other entitlement services. I love working with older adults. Although working from home has been challenging during this pandemic, my motto is to think outside the box and continue to provide services for those in need.”

Rebecca Heller (2016): “Since graduating with my master’s in mental health counseling in 2018, I have been working towards my 3,000 licensing hours. Over the pandemic I was lucky enough to find my current job at MindFit Group Therapy, which is a service provided by Mindful Urgent Care (MUC).



Rebecca Heller

“MUC’s mission is to provide affordable and same-day psychiatric care. I had started my position as a per-diem group therapist in May 2020, and by January 2021 it developed into a full-time position and a promotion to Coordinator of Mental Health Services for MindFit Group Therapy and the title of Lead Therapist. Currently I am facilitating 12 group sessions per week, including conducting 10+ initial consultations and managing the administrative duties.”

Shanet Rampersaud (2016):

“As a member of the Mental Health Service Corps, I work as a clinical social worker and psychotherapist at Child & Adolescent Outpatient Psychiatry of Elmhurst Hospital. In collaboration with psychiatrists, I provide long-term psychotherapy and complete psychiatric evaluations for youth between 5–18 years of age. I am responsible for their treatment plans, safety plans, and discharge summaries as well as referrals. I also provide crisis intervention by bringing patients to Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Room (CPEP) or by referring patients to the Partial Hospitalization Program. Due to the pandemic, I provide in-person and tele-mental health sessions to patients. Occasionally, I work with patients who receive family therapy at the same time for additional support.”



Shanet Rampersaud

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Shavany Reid (2018): “I am currently in the Hunter-Bellevue School of Nursing accelerated nursing program. My goal is to become a family nurse practitioner with a focus on women’s health. I’m also working in a group home for women with developmental disabilities where I help them with their activities of daily living (ADLs) and how to become more independent in their home.”



Shavany Reid

Kiara Rivas (2020): “I am currently a program assistant at the Coalition for Hispanic Family Services (CHFS) in Brooklyn. I work directly with the director of Family Foster Care and have gained so much knowledge about the foster care system in New York City. Due to COVID, I was not able to work directly with our clients. However, I have helped organize family park visits so the children in our care are still able to see their birth parents during this unpredictable time.

I work a blended schedule, which means I am in the office three times a week and the other two days I work virtually. The pace is slower than it was pre-COVID, However, it is giving me time to learn more about the agency and what it stands for. When the agency allowed clients



Kiara Rivas

inside the building for in-person visits, I organized the family rooms and made sure there were 15-minute intervals so rooms could be cleaned after each visit. There has not been a lot of consistency, but it helped me adapt to constant changing environments, which I believe is such an important tool to have. The work for our families never ends, so it was amazing to see how our team was still able to continue their work through all the changes. I was also amazed at the measures the agency took to not only ensure the safety of our families, but the safety for their employees. It feels great to be in a work environment where it’s not all about the money but the quality of work for our families, especially our children in care.

Before working in CHFS, I was volunteering in the Children’s Advocacy Center in Queens. I supervised kids in the waiting area when their parents went inside the family rooms to speak with social workers.”

Julie Zhen (2014): “I am in the social work field, and I have continued my passion in working with the geriatric population in a subacute nursing and rehabilitation facility/nursing home. I am currently working at

Gouverneur Skilled Nursing facility. My role primarily revolves around care coordination and discharge planning after hospitalizations. I love what I do and meeting people from all walks of life. I plan to stick with it for a while.”

**Alumni Spotlight:
Sofia Lopez (2004)**



Sofia Lopez

Sofia Lopez graduated from Queens College Family and Consumer Studies program in 2004. After graduating with her bachelor’s degree, she began working in the Child Care Division at The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, a non-profit human services organization. In this role, Sofia assisted home-based family child care providers by offering training, monitoring, and coaching visits and guiding them through the process of obtaining a child care license.

Sofia has worked in the field of early care and education for over 16 years, facilitating training, coordinating professional development events and conferences for family child care providers, and teaching preschool children. She is a SUNY PDP approved Health and Safety Trainer and American Red Cross CPR/First Aid trainer. In addition, she has taught a variety of child

continued from page 6

development classes including social and emotional development, positive discipline, language development, routines and schedules, and family child care business management.

In 2015, Sofia graduated from Queens College's Early Childhood Education Program, where she obtained a Master of Arts in teaching and the NYS teaching certification for Early Childhood

Education, Birth Through Grade 2. While attending graduate classes, she taught pre-kindergarten students at The Garden School, Inc.

Currently, she works at the Day Care Council of New York as the director of the Child Care Resources and Referral Division. She oversees the department's contracts that provide direct services and grants to day care centers and home-based family child

care providers as well as the child care information and referral unit which provides families with information about child care resources in New York City. Sofia's academic interests continue to be children's early childhood education, mental health, children's literature, creative arts therapy, and holistic health for children and families.

Congratulations to All our 2021 Graduates!!!

"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader."

— John Quincy Adams



