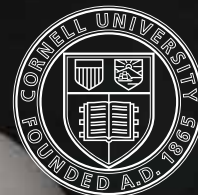


Human ECOLOGY

Translational
Research

Nurse-Family Partnership
Helps Families Succeed
page 8



Volume 38, Number 1
2010

Published by the New York State College
of Human Ecology at Cornell University

Alan Mathios, PhD
Rebecca Q. and James C. Morgan Dean,
College of Human Ecology

John Lamson
Assistant Dean, Communications

Ted V. Boscia
Assistant Director, Communications

Cornell's College of Human Ecology publishes
this magazine to illustrate how its programs
address complex societal issues to improve
the human condition. This mission of human
improvement is accomplished through faculty
initiatives in research, outreach, and teaching—
with an emphasis on an ecological perspective,
collaborative projects, and multidisciplinary cur-
ricula within and across five academic units: the
Department of Design and Environmental Analysis;
the Department of Fiber Science & Apparel Design;
the Department of Human Development; the Depart-
ment of Policy Analysis and Management; and the
Division of Nutritional Sciences, a unit shared with the
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. The college
includes the Family Life Development Center and the
Bronfenbrenner Life Course Center.

ISSN 1530-7069. Published by the New York State
College of Human Ecology. Third-class postage paid
at Ithaca, N.Y.

Reprinting: Unless otherwise noted, permission is granted
to reproduce material appearing in this magazine upon
notification of the editor, provided that full acknowledg-
ment is made of the source and no change is made without
approval.

Printed in U.S.A.

Produced by the Office of Publications and Marketing
at Cornell University

Writers: Ted V. Boscia, Sheri Hall, Lauren Gold,
Krishna Ramanujan, and Susan Lang

Editor: Liz Bauman

Designer: Laurie Ray

Photography: Cornell University Photography, Amelia Panico,
iStock

Change of Address: To assure uninterrupted delivery, write to Cornell
University, College of Human Ecology, Box HE, Ithaca, NY 14853-4401
(email: j638@cornell.edu) a month in advance of your move and provide
old and new addresses. Annual subscriptions for two issues: \$20 a year.
International, \$26. Canada, \$24. Write to Cornell University, College of
Human Ecology, Box HE, Ithaca, NY 14853-4401.
Allow six weeks for subscription fulfillment. Back issues: \$10.

©2010 Cornell University

Cornell University is an equal opportunity, affirmative action
educator and employer.

5/10 5:1M EL 100229

What's

Farmers Market

Story page 21.

InShort 2



From Insight to On-Site

Faculty's research findings are
translated into programs and
policies to improve people's lives.

4

Cover Story Nurse-Family Partnership

Young, low-income mothers and
their children lead healthier,
more prosperous lives.

8

Prevailing over Pain

Human Ecology faculty help
hundreds of thousands of
New York City seniors cope
with persistent pain.

12

*Translational research: The process of applying ideas,
insight, and discoveries generated through basic
scientific inquiry.*

—National Institutes of Health

Leveraging Insights from Research to Improve People's Lives

A gap often exists between the research knowledge generated by academics and the creation of programs, treatments, and technologies that promote human health and well-being. The model of “translational research” is a highly promising way to bridge these worlds of science and service, and we’re fortunate that the College of Human Ecology is a national leader when it comes to research translation. We have outstanding experts in science and outreach who take research findings and move them out to people who need them. Our faculty members are strongly rooted in specific disciplines, but engage in research, teaching, and outreach initiatives that integrate multiple disciplines and are focused on real-world challenges. These experts are networked across New York with trained educators in every county through Cornell Cooperative Extension, giving us unparalleled opportunities for dissemination of research knowledge.

This issue of Human Ecology shares a few of our stories and shows what translational research means to some of the people who practice it as well as those who benefit from it. From chronic pain among New York City’s older population to teenage mothers in Elmira, from obesity prevention in rural upstate counties to positive youth development in Latin America and beyond, the College of Human Ecology is using translational research to move research findings into creative applications that advance and improve the human experience.



Karl Pillemer
Hazel E. Reed Professor of Human Development
Professor of Gerontology in Medicine, Weill Cornell Medical College
Associate Dean for Extension and Outreach, College of Human Ecology



inside.

Gaining Ground on Obesity

Human Ecology is partnering with communities to build environments and change behaviors so overweight kids and adults can get fit.

16



Bronfenbrenner Conference Investigates Best Ways to Translate Research into Policy and Practice

20

Families Encouraged to Eat Well, Eat Local, Eat Together

21

New Blog Bridges the Gap between Research and Real Life

22

Whitlock Blogs on Youth and Mental Health for Psychology Magazine

23



Afterword EFNEP Celebrates 40 Years of Delivering Nutrition Education to Limited-Resource Families

25

In Short

Many lack the math skills to make good health decisions

Valerie Reyna, professor of human development, is the lead author of a new paper in the November 2009 issue of *Psychological Bulletin* that reviews the research on patients' ability to understand and apply numerical information related to their health care. The paper suggests patients in medical offices should be screened for sufficient numerical skills to weigh their medical options, because studies indicate that more than 93 million Americans do not have the math skills necessary to make well-informed decisions about their medical care. Reyna recommends that experts develop interventions to help those at high risk for using inaccurate information to make health decisions.

+ = - ÷

Professor and alumnus attend Copenhagen global climate conference



Frongillo

Ying Hua, assistant professor of design and environmental analysis, and alumnus Dominic Frongillo '05 joined a delegation of 22 Cornellians at the 15th United Nations Climate Change Conference in December 2009.

Hua, an appointed member of the China Green Building Council, studies strategies for the design, construction, operation, and management of built environments that have the potential to mitigate the risks and consequences of climate change. Frongillo, the coordinator of Tompkins Energy Conservation Corps for Cornell Cooperative Extension, traveled to Copenhagen as part of SustainUS, a nonprofit group of young people involved in sustainable development.



Students design innovative garments for the aging

Students in the course Textiles, Apparel, and Innovation designed winter boots that improve circulation and a jacket with built-in headphones for people in wheelchairs, among other products to improve the lives of senior citizens and the disabled. The course is taught by Juan Hinestroza, assistant professor of fiber science & apparel design. To help the students develop their concepts, local senior citizens and people with

disabilities attended classes throughout the semester. This year's projects are so impressive that some of the design teams have filed invention disclosures, the first step to applying for a patent.

Evans studies stress, poverty, and brain development

Environmental psychologist Gary Evans, the Elizabeth Lee Vincent Professor of Human Development and of Design and Environmental Analysis, received a \$1.4 million grant to examine whether growing up in poverty leads directly to differences in brain structure and function in adulthood. The study, in collaboration with researchers at the University of Michigan, will examine 52 young adults—a subset of a group that Evans has been following closely in another study for more than 15 years.

The researchers will use functional magnetic resonance imaging and psychological and physiological tests to examine three key brain areas—the hippocampus, prefrontal cortex, and amygdala—that are thought to be affected by childhood poverty.



Conference examines aging and sustainability

The first Cornell Conference on Aging and the Environment kicked off a major new push to consider the effects of America's aging population in the context of the environment. The conference, organized by Karl Pillemer, associate dean for extension and outreach, brought together researchers from across Cornell (including Weill Cornell Medical College) and around the country. The group discussed three main topics: the potential impacts of climate change on the elderly, environmental volunteerism among older adults, and the environmental impact of various living settings for the elderly. The College of Human Ecology, the Bronfenbrenner Life Course Center, and the Cornell Institute for Translational Research on Aging co-sponsored the conference.



NIH honors Qian with New Innovator Award

For his work on nutrient signaling and adaptive stress responses in cells, Shu-Bing Qian, assistant professor of nutritional sciences, has won a five-year \$1.5 million New Innovator Award from the National Institutes of Health. The award—given for “highly innovative projects that have the potential for unusually high impact”—will fund a study by Qian in misfolded proteins in cells, a leading cause of neurodegenerative disorders and other human diseases. To investigate neurodegeneration, Qian and his colleagues aim to engineer an enzyme that tags proteins to be destroyed.



Bricker teaching her class

Leadership students learn how to award grants to nonprofits

In the course Leadership in Nonprofit Environments, Human Ecology students gave out a total of \$10,000 in grants to three local nonprofits after learning how to evaluate funding requests, measure the impact of community programs, and make decisions as a group. Out of 26 proposals requesting a total of \$101,008, they chose to award \$4,800 to the Alternative Venture Fund Community Tax Program to help low-income tax filers; \$2,000 to Opportunities,

Alternatives, and Resources for programs to assist former inmates; and \$3,200 to the Village at Ithaca Family Advocacy Project for programs for special-needs children. Brenda Bricker, a lecturer and the former director of leadership and undergraduate research in Human Ecology, taught the course.



Energy bike demonstration at an Energy Fair

which has hosted more than 70,000 New Yorkers at energy conservation workshops and educated more than 9 million people at public exhibits since its founding in 2003. Laquatra would like to see the program, a collaboration between Cornell Cooperative Extension and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, emulated nationwide.

Program helps consumers reduce energy use and save money

With a few small steps, homeowners can slash their energy bills by hundreds of dollars annually and limit their carbon dioxide emissions significantly, argues Joseph Laquatra, professor of design and environmental analysis, in the December 2009 issue of the *Journal of Extension*. Laquatra helped found the Consumer Education Program for Residential Energy Efficiency,

Interior design program reaccredited

Cornell's interior design program—the only such program in the Ivy League—has been reaccredited by the Council of Interior Design Accreditation. The accreditation certifies that the program, which is in the Department of Design and Environmental Analysis, meets the most rigorous standards for interior design education and that students at Cornell clearly demonstrate an understanding of the principles of sustainability, the implications of designing in a world market, and the theories of human behavior. The rigorous review process and the subsequent report reaffirmed the quality and depth of Cornell's interior design program, said Shelia Danko, professor and chair of the department.



Meador and Wethington lead talk on translational research

On February 11, more than 40 Human Ecology faculty, staff, students, and extension professionals met to discuss how the College and Cornell Cooperative Extension can turn basic research into real-world practice and policy. Elaine Wethington, associate professor of human development and sociology, and Rhoda Meador, the College's associate director of outreach and extension and assistant director of the Bronfenbrenner Life Course Center (BLCC), presented models for translational research and led a wide-ranging discussion about the differences between applied and translational research, how to engage with community partners on projects, and funding for collaborative research.

"It is important to break down disciplinary silos and get extension staff and researchers partnering even more," Meador said. The Family Life Development Center and the BLCC sponsored the event.

To watch this presentation:
<http://tiny.cc/WD7kX>

Faculty's research findings are translated into programs and policies to improve people's lives.

From Insight to On-site

The idea has been around nearly as long as human beings have been doing research: what is the best way to use our discoveries to help people better their lives?

While the concept is centuries old, only in the past decade has the field called Translational Research emerged as an important priority among academics and organizations that fund research.

"Translational research is a good buzzword," explained Karl Pillemer, the Hazel E. Reed Professor of Human Development and associate dean for outreach and extension. "It states clearly that there needs to be people around who can take the insights of basic research and move them out to the people who need them."

A large part of Pillemer's job is to spearhead the College's work in translational research and to make sure that work ultimately reaches citizens in New York and across the nation.

With an infrastructure that facilitates the dissemination of research findings and a close relationship with Cornell Cooperative Extension, Human Ecology is an ideal place for this kind of work.

"At Human Ecology, we have this fantastic extension system that helps faculty who are doing phenomenal research more easily get their work translated into programs and policies," Pillemer said.

Here's a look at six Human Ecology faculty members and a frequent collaborator from Weill Cornell Medical College and how they view the field of translational research.



Kay Obendorf

Kay Obendorf

Senior Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Education, Professor of Fiber Science & Apparel Design

Obendorf's lab develops materials and fabric that can be used for protective clothing and for improving air quality, and she conducts basic research on detergency and fabric care.

Projects:

- Self-decontaminating fiber formation for protective materials
- Development of antimicrobial materials using an environmentally sustainable approach

"At the College of Human Ecology, we are good at translational research because it is part of our very definition. We have always been a multidisciplinary college with a land-grant mission that includes extension and outreach along with research and teaching.

"Translational research is like a bridge that connects basic research to the community. It also brings information back from the community to inform future research. The work that Martha Van Rensselaer and Flora Rose did decades ago was all a precursor to what we call translational research today."

Translational research: The process of applying ideas, insight, and discoveries generated through basic scientific inquiry.

—National Institutes of Health



Carol Devine



Dr. M. Cary Reid

Carol Devine

Professor of Nutritional Sciences

Devine's research focuses on understanding how working women and men, especially those in low-income families, integrate work, family, and food choices, and the effect of those choices on overweight and obesity. Her outreach work is focused on creating food and physical activity environments in workplaces and communities that promote healthy eating and active living to prevent weight gain, obesity, and chronic diseases, particularly breast cancer.

Projects:

- Small Changes and Lasting Effects is an intervention study of mindful eating, positive emotions, and self affirmation to ascertain what best leads to weight loss in individual, family, and faith-based settings in Harlem and the South Bronx. (Read more on page 17.)
- Images of a Healthy Worksite is an environmental intervention trial aimed at weight gain prevention in a large industrial worksite.
- Small Steps Are Easier Together is an intervention that helps small worksites in rural communities improve their environments for healthy eating and physical activity.

“The College of Human Ecology and the larger Cornell community have such wonderful collaborators in the biological and social sciences. There are psychologists, sociologists, economists, and experts in so many other fields that help us understand the whole picture, so we can bring all of the pieces together to help people. We're all interested in helping human beings.”

Dr. M. Cary Reid

Associate Professor of Medicine and the Joachim Silberman Family Clinical Scholar in Geriatric Palliative Care at Weill Cornell Medical College

Dr. Reid is a medical doctor focused on improving pain management among older adults. He also studies the epidemiology and treatment of substance abuse disorders in older persons.

Projects:

- The Translational Research Institute on Pain in Later Life is a center funded by the National Institutes of Health that supports the translation of basic behavioral and social science research findings into treatments, intervention programs, and policies that improve the health and well-being of older adults who suffer from or are at increased risk for pain (see page 8 in this issue).
- A project with the Arthritis Foundation seeks to adapt an evidence-based pain self-management program for use in senior centers serving minority elders in New York City.

“There is no standard definition for translational research that tells you where we are with this emerging field. I define it as research that explicitly focuses on translating evidence and knowledge from one venue to another and involves generating knowledge at the community or practice level that feeds back to inform basic research. Translational research is not unidirectional but includes research that goes in both directions—from bench to bedside to practice, as well as practice to bedside to bench.

“Across the nation, insufficient attention has been paid to translating research into practice. As a nation, we are spending billions of dollars annually to generate new information, but we do not have mechanisms in place to translate this knowledge efficiently so that the maximum number of individuals benefit. The Cornell Institute for Translational Research on Aging has been a leader in the field, and Cornell continues to advance our understanding of the science of translation.” > > >



Nancy Wells

Nancy Wells

Associate Professor of Design and Environmental Analysis

Wells researches the effects of nature on health and psychological well-being. Her outreach projects include creating opportunities for children and older adults to spend time outdoors. She also incorporates translational research into her classes to teach students about the growing field.

Projects:

- Urban Forest Adventures is a collaboration with Cornell Cooperative Extension funded by the U.S. Forest Service to connect youth in Tompkins County with nature.
- Students in Wells's class DEA 661: Environment and Health take on "Bridging the Gap" projects each year to create evidence-based educational materials to address a health issue in the local community.

"To me, our basic mission is taking our research and using it to make a difference in people's lives—that could be through impacting public policy, practice, or design. That concept is so much at the core of the values of Human Ecology. There's institutional support for being innovative and integrating research, teaching, and outreach."

For more information:

Charles Brainerd
cb299@cornell.edu

Carol Devine
cmd10@cornell.edu

Rachel Dunifon
red26@cornell.edu

Kay Obendorf
sko3@cornell.edu

M. Cary Reid
mcr2004@med.cornell.edu

William Trochim
wmt1@cornell.edu

Nancy Wells
nmw2@cornell.edu



Charles Brainerd

Charles Brainerd

Professor of Human Development

Brainerd is an experimental psychologist focused on the area of human cognition, memory, and neuroscience. His research is focused on three main areas: how memory and cognition impact the law, children in the legal system, and the effects of aging and the diseases of late adulthood on cognitive processes.

Projects:

- Low-Burden Tools for Improving Prediction and Diagnosis of Cognitive Impairment in Aging
- Trichotomous Processes in Early Memory Development, Aging, and Neurocognitive Impairment: A Unified Theory
- Remembering in Contradictory Minds: Disjunction Fallacies in Episodic Memory

"I am a basic scientist. My work follows where theory and data take me. When I reach a point in my research where I have something to share, the College provides a mechanism that makes it very easy to get that information out.

"In the areas in which I work, there's a great need for applying new information in the field. In the court system, less than 10 percent of cases have physical forensic evidence available that bears on guilt or innocence, and in half of those cases it can't be used. In most cases, the evidence is what people remember and reports of what people remember. So we have to be able to understand and explain human memory, and then apply that to our legal system.

"Another area in which I work is looking at dementia and cognitive impairment in older adults. In that area, there's a great need for the development of instruments to identify people as soon as possible so that as treatments become available, we'll be better able to help those people."



Rachel Dunifon



William Trochim

Rachel Dunifon

Associate Professor of Policy Analysis and Management and Department Extension Leader

Dunifon's research explores child and family policy including the influence of welfare reform and other policies on the well-being of children, how conditions of the low-wage labor market influence family life and children's development, and the role of grandparents in the lives of youth.

Projects:

- Relatives Raising Youth is a five-year project funded by the William T. Grant Foundation studying the role of grandparents in the lives of youth.
- Nonstandard Work Schedules and Child Development is a project funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development that explores the influence of maternal work conditions, especially those found in the low-wage labor market, on children.

"I have a research and extension appointment at the College, which means that I spend about half of my time sharing Human Ecology research with practitioners and policymakers in New York. That role has actually shaped my own research. The whole reason I got involved with studying grandparents and their roles in raising children is because I was hearing from people in the community that this was a growing issue.

"Since we've been studying grandparents, there have been opportunities to provide them materials that help them to raise their grandchildren. For example, we were hearing from grandparents that they didn't understand the different types of technology teenagers are using. So we created a very simple handout that explains what things like MySpace and Facebook are. It gives the grandparents some information to begin a dialogue with their grandchildren.

"When researchers are aware of and open to what's important to people in the community, this can take research in different and interesting directions. Ultimately, that openness to input helps to integrate research and the real world."

William Trochim

Professor of Policy Analysis and Management, Director of Evaluation for the Weill Cornell Clinical and Translational Science Center, and Director of Evaluation for Cornell Cooperative Extension

Trochim's research is in applied social research methodology, with an emphasis on program planning and evaluation methods. He has developed a number of methodologies used in the behavioral, social, and medical sciences.

Projects:

- As the director of evaluation for Weill Cornell Clinical and Translational Science Center, Trochim is working to develop systems for evaluation of large, biomedical research initiatives.
- He is actively engaged in research with the National Science Foundation incorporating systems approaches in the evaluation of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics education programs.
- In his role as director of evaluation for Extension and Outreach, Trochim is helping Cornell Cooperative Extension create methods for extension professionals to evaluate their programs.

"Translational research is the juncture between how we as a society learn and how we use what we learn. In the past few decades we have discovered that it is taking far too long to translate what we've learned into practice. On average in biomedical research, it takes 17 years from an initial idea to getting that idea into practice. Many biomedical researchers wait their entire careers before something they discovered early on actually gets used. Translational research encourages this to happen faster while not sacrificing quality or cost. This requires integrating systems of researchers and practitioners.

"The College of Human Ecology is ideally positioned to play a key role in the field of translational research because we are all about how humans function in systems within their environments. The issues we are trying to overcome are ultimately human issues. This translational work will not be successful without the human ecology being addressed." ● ● ●



Nurse-Family Partnership: Success Based on Science

Sarah Burnett was a freshman at Alfred University when she found out she was pregnant. She was scared and didn't know what to expect, but she knew she wanted to keep the baby. So she dropped out of school and moved back to her mother's house in Elmira, N.Y.

Since four months into Burnett's pregnancy, nurse Mary Pat Learned has visited the teen. During Burnett's pregnancy, Learned would check her vital signs and give her advice about staying healthy, including tips on coping with the near-constant nausea that Burnett battled. Once Burnett's daughter, Lilyana, was born in September, the visits focused on the baby's health and development as well as Burnett's well-being.

"Teen moms definitely need a program like this," Burnett said. "This is my first baby, and I had no idea what to expect. You have other people, like your mom, who try to give you advice. But it's just better to hear it from someone else, someone with expertise who is trying to help you."

Decades of scientific research—including a host of studies conducted at Cornell's Family Life Development Center—show that Learned's visits will help both Lilyana and her mother lead healthier, more prosperous lives. Learned's work is part of a program that became the Nurse-Family Partnership, a nationwide effort to improve the lives of disadvantaged moms and their children.

That program began in the late 1970s as a single experiment conducted by David Olds, a Ph.D. graduate in the Department of Human Development, and the staff of the Comprehensive Interdisciplinary Development Services (CIDS) human service agency in Elmira, N.Y.

Since then, more than 30 years of randomized controlled studies have shown that the program improves prenatal health, prevents child abuse and neglect, reduces the arrests and convictions among mothers and their children, and improves school-readiness among children. Today, the program has reached more than 110,000 families in 29 states. And it remains one of the few intervention programs in the nation that is based on rigorous scientific research.

"This is a preeminent example of using research to impact policy and programs," said John Eckenrode, director of the Family Life Development Center (FLDC) and co-author of several studies that have followed the original group of children enrolled in the program. "Right now, there is a major focus on evidence-based practices. This is one of the first programs in the country that was tested and replicated. As a result, it's had a national impact." > > >



From the start, federal agencies including the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have granted millions of dollars for studying the Nurse-Family Partnership. In addition, major foundations such as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the W.T. Grant Foundation funded research studies on the program. And independent research groups including the RAND Corporation and the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation analyzed the program's cost effectiveness.

Today, the program is able to reach hundreds of communities across the nation through an assortment of funding from federal, state, and local government organizations including Medicaid, the Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant, Healthy Start, Early Head Start, the Administration for Children and Families, tobacco settlement funds, and state and local general revenue funds.

This year, President Barack Obama has proposed a new, mandatory federal funding stream to create a national home-visitation initiative based on the Nurse-Family Partnership for low-income and at-risk children and families.

Beginnings in Elmira

The Nurse-Family Partnership started in the 1977 when Olds, Ph.D. '76, partnered with CIDS in Elmira to find out if they could use nurse home visits to make a difference in the lives of children born to young, poor mothers.

Olds had taken a part-time job at CIDS while he worked on his Ph.D. so that he could work more closely with children. There, executive director John Shannon gave him the go-ahead to develop a program to reach out to low-income, young mothers and test it rigorously.



“One of the original ideas was that the sooner you could reach children with potential developmental disabilities, the better you would be able to help them,” Shannon said.

That original program included most of the same elements that are still present today:

- The program worked with first-time mothers to promote healthy behavior patterns before the negative ones could take hold. The first pregnancy is when mothers are most receptive to outside help and advice.
- It used nurses to visit the families at home. Research has shown that families trust nurses more than other professionals to give advice and provide care to babies.
- Visits began during pregnancy to influence prenatal factors that shape children's development and well-being, such as maternal nutrition and substance abuse.

The original study enrolled nearly every low-income mother in Elmira having a first baby. Nurses visited the mothers in the treatment group during pregnancy and at least twice a month until the children were two years old to provide health care advice, check on the babies, and refer the mother to other community services.

Georgie McGrady, a nurse home visitor in the original trial, said it made new mothers feel special to have a nurse visiting. “We’d go in with a positive attitude and let people know we were there to help them,” she said. “We could follow up and make sure the mothers got the help they needed. I found it very rewarding.”

But the job was challenging at times, as well. McGrady, who is African-American, clearly remembers being assigned to one family who hung a Confederate flag outside of their home.

“I was a little hesitant to go in there, but it was my job,” she said. “So I walked in and sat down. The mother was happy to have me there. The next visit, I said to the father, ‘Hey, haven’t you got rid of that flag yet?’ Wouldn’t you know, he eventually took that flag down. Once they got to know me, they didn’t see me as a black nurse. They saw me as someone who was there to help.”

Proven results

The original Elmira study followed families until the children turned four years old. In the low-income, unmarried group of mothers who received nurse visits, the incidence of child abuse and neglect was only 4 percent, compared to 19 percent in the group that did not receive nurse visits. In addition, mothers who were smokers and visited by nurses smoked 25 percent fewer cigarettes during pregnancy and had 75 percent fewer pre-term deliveries than did mothers who smoked and did not receive nurse visits.

Cornell researchers—including Eckenrode and FLDC researchers Jane Powers, Charles Izzo, and Chuck Henderson—also conducted a follow-up study when the children turned 15 years old. In that study, they found:

- 46 percent fewer reports of child abuse and neglect.
- 69 percent fewer maternal arrests among low-income, unmarried mothers.
- 44 percent fewer behavioral problems among mothers due to alcohol and drug abuse.
- 83 percent more workforce participation by mothers by the time the child was four years old.

The 15-year-old children born to low-income, unmarried mothers also had fewer arrests and convictions, fewer sexual

partners, smoked less, and used less alcohol. A follow-up study conducted by Cornell researchers at 19 years found that girls whose mothers participated in the program were less likely to have been arrested and convicted of a crime. And those who were born to high-risk mothers were less likely to have had a child and used less public assistance.

Studies have also shown the program yields economic benefits, Eckenrode said. It costs about \$7,000 per child for the duration of the program. That investment produces benefits valued at about \$41,000 per child.

“The studies conducted by the Nurse-Family Partnership team over the years show that providing parents of young children with strategies that improve parental competencies and the early learning environment are promising ways to reduce health and developmental problems across the life course and associated costs to government and society,” Eckenrode said.

Olds together with Eckenrode and his Cornell team of staff and graduate students just finished collecting data for a study of the original participants at age 27. The team is still processing the data and will produce results later this year.

Although the results from the Elmira study were positive, Olds did not want to roll out the program nationally until it proved successful outside of primarily white, rural communities. He went on to replicate the studies in Memphis in 1991 and in Denver in 1995, where more African-American and Hispanic mothers participated. In the Denver study, he tested whether mothers visited by nurses were any more successful than those visited by paraprofessionals with only high school educations.

In each study, mothers and children visited by nurses fared the best. Mothers were more likely to enter the workforce and had fewer pregnancies before the child's second birthday. And children had better language development and fewer days of hospitalization due to injury.

Today, Olds is director of the Prevention Research Center for Family and Child Health at the University of Colorado, where he continues to research ways to improve the Nurse-Family Partnership model and consult with other nations who want to implement similar programs. He also serves as an advisor to the independent Nurse-Family Partnership non-profit organization, which works to help communities across the country implement the program.

Cornell collaborates with nurses

In addition to their work in conducting studies, staff from the FLDC have had extensive contact with the CIDS nurse home-visitors to provide guidance about how to maximize their impact during their short time with mothers and to offer advice on particularly difficult situations.

The nurses encounter problems of all varieties: unsafe homes, substance abuse, poor nutrition, and occasionally violence in the family. At a recent meeting, one nurse raised the question of how to address a mother who thinks it is okay to discipline her child by hitting. FLDC Research Associate Charles Izzo was on hand to weigh in.

“This is one of the most difficult situations you'll face because it's a deeply-rooted family value,” said Izzo, who had



brought fresh-baked bread to the meeting. “The more you challenge it, the more she'll dig in her heels to defend that position. That doesn't create the openness that you need to maintain with her. Instead, listen for her to tell you about times when spanking hasn't worked or about how bad she feels after she spans her child, and then reflect that back to her to amplify her awareness that it isn't working for her. It's subtle because you don't want to come across as saying, ‘I told you so.’”

The exchange amplifies two central tenants of the program: each visit is driven by the needs of the mother and

focuses on the positive aspects, however small, in the mother's life and then builds on them.

“Everyone has strengths, so we try to look for that,” said Joan DeLaney, a nurse visitor in Elmira. “Is the mom going to school? Is there food in

the house? Is the heat on? Sometimes, you have to stretch, but you can always find something positive to say.”

Another huge part of the program's success is providing consistent mentoring for the mother, Learned said.

“We show up no matter what else is happening in the mother's life and give her our undivided attention,” she said. “We do a lot of positive parenting to the mother, and that makes a real difference. We do encounter some pretty difficult situations. But in the end, there are more success stories than not.” ● ● ●

For more information:

John Eckenrode
jje1@cornell.edu

www.nursefamilypartnership.org



Alan Abrahams tickles the ivories to manage chronic pain.

Human Ecology faculty help hundreds of thousands of New York City seniors cope with persistent pain.

Prevailing over Pain

Alan Abrahams, a 79-year-old living in the Murray Hill neighborhood on Manhattan's east side, turns to Duke Ellington and George Gershwin to tune out his chronic pain. He plays jazz standards at his 110-year-old Chickering studio grand piano in the corner of his apartment, and the aches from his arthritis, bursitis, and spinal stenosis fade.

"I'm not bad, but I can guarantee there wouldn't be any money in my tip jar either," he said. "I've found that the greatest pain relief is my mind. If I come up with diversions for my mind, the pain becomes much more bearable."

For Susan Heller, 82, relief doesn't come as easily. She can barely write because of her arthritic fingers, and she endures back, leg, and hip pain from a fall that nearly paralyzed her a few years ago. Sitting hurts. Standing hurts.



Susan Heller struggles daily with her pain, though reading helps to take her mind off it.

Walking hurts. Cold weather, rain, humidity—all of them intensify her pain.

Physical therapy and an assortment of medications help keep Heller's discomfort at bay, but most times "the pain takes over," she said. "No matter what you try to do to make it go away, it's always on the back of your mind, if not the front. It comes back at you every time."

Abrahams and Heller are two of hundreds of thousands of seniors in New York City coping with persistent pain and suffering its harmful physical, social, psychological, and economic consequences. It forces a complex arithmetic, as they weigh the effect to their bodies, minds, and bank accounts of prescription drugs, exercise routines, physical therapy, surgeries, and other treatment plans. Left untreated, chronic pain can lead to more crippling conditions and rob the elderly of their independence.

With such seniors in mind, the College of Human Ecology and Weill Cornell Medical College (WCMC) have partnered with the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health to establish the Cornell-Columbia Translational Research Institute on Pain in Later Life (TRIPLL), a community-based center for improving pain prevention and management in people age 65 and older, with a special focus on ethnic minorities. Funded by a five-year, \$2 million grant from the National Institute on Aging, TRIPLL researchers aim to understand and overcome the barriers to pain management in seniors and to speed

behavioral, social science, and medical research into clinical practices, intervention programs, and policies. TRIPLL emphasizes non-pharmaceutical treatments, such as regular exercise and mental stimulation, as well as strategies older adults can use at home to alleviate cancer-related and non-cancer pain.

"Poorly treated pain has profound consequences for older adults," said TRIPLL director M. Cary Reid, a geriatrician at WCMC who cites estimates that as many as 40 percent of seniors living independently in the U.S. suffer from chronic pain. "It can and all too frequently does lead to a decline in one's physical function, quality of life, and overall health. Unfortunately, older adults and their doctors often dismiss chronic pain as part of aging, causing it to be neglected. With TRIPLL, we want to raise this overlooked issue and improve how we treat pain in older adults."

TRIPLL arose from the Cornell Institute for Translational Research on Aging (CITRA), a College of Human Ecology initiative to link Cornell researchers with New York City senior care providers that has been funded by the National Institute on Aging since 2003 as an Edward R. Roybal Center for Translational Research on Aging. (TRIPLL continues as a Roybal Center, one of 13 nationally.) With its special focus on persistent pain, TRIPLL builds on CITRA's existing ties with front-line staff caring for the elderly at senior centers, hospitals, and retirement communities to include home health care > > >

agencies and nursing homes. Through this research-ready network, which includes partnerships with Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, the Hospital for Special Surgery, and the Visiting Nurse Service of New York, it reaches more than 300,000 elderly New Yorkers in the city's five boroughs.

"The array of scientific disciplines united in TRIPLL is truly amazing," said TRIPLL co-principal investigator Karl Pillemer, Human Ecology's associate dean for extension and outreach. "It ranges from basic medical researchers to social scientists interested in evaluation. And coupled with the scientific expertise is an active and engaged network of community partners who make sure we don't stray too far from real-world concerns."

Those concerns are sure to differ depending on which of New York City's 176 zip codes a patient calls home. TRIPLL researchers can study firsthand how race, class, cultural differences, and other factors influence chronic pain. Reid points out that, along with old age, minority status is a risk factor for undertreated pain.

"Being based in New York allows us to interact with people from a rich array of multicultural neighborhoods," Reid said. "Cultural factors can lead people not to report pain or might affect what treatment plans they choose. We can investigate how these differences contribute to health disparities."

Elaine Wethington, TRIPLL co-principal investigator and professor of human development and sociology, called New York City the "ideal living laboratory" for treating persistent pain in the elderly.

"If you went to a retirement community in central Florida, or almost any other location, you would not see such a diverse group of seniors as you do in New York," Wethington noted. "Within New York itself, you'll find that a method that works in one neighborhood would fall flat in another. That also means that we can discover what works for different populations and translate our findings to many different parts of the country."

Behavioral studies show promise

In a pilot study funded by TRIPLL, Corinna Loeckenhoff, assistant professor of human development, is applying theories from behavioral economics to understand how seniors view their options for pain management. In particular, she is examining how temporal discounting, the idea that we place lesser value on far-off rewards compared

to more instant payoffs, alters pain treatments in seniors.

"Research shows that, for monetary outcomes, older adults are typically more patient than younger adults—they are willing to wait for a reward that doesn't come right away," Loeckenhoff said. "We want to see how that translates into pain management. What are people's thought processes as they are presented with an option that reduces pain immediately, such as medication, but could have long-term unwanted side effects? What about an exercise routine that's



uncomfortable and painful initially, but leads to greater long-term benefits? We want to find out to what extent age differences contribute to these kinds of decisions."

The pilot studies program, which seeds innovative research projects by young investigators, is a key component of TRIPLL. In 2010, two such projects have received \$10,000 in funding: Loeckenhoff's study, and a trial attempt to train physical therapists to use cognitive behavior therapy with elderly patients who have had joint replacement surgery. The latter will test a more holistic approach to pain management that has shown promise in initial studies.

"Unfortunately, there are many evidence-based treatments that can help alleviate pain in older adults, but they don't know about them or have access to them, or doctors are unaware of them," said Wethington, director of TRIPLL's pilot studies program. "The expectation is that the projects will become self-sustaining as the investigators collect strong data that merit additional funding from outside sources."

Like other aspects of TRIPLL, the pilot programs have a strong base in the community. This spring, Loeckenhoff is beginning focus groups with New York City residents afflicted with chronic pain and doctors and physical therapists to understand how they perceive pain

management. The cognitive behavior therapy study will collaborate with 15 physical therapists in the New York metro area and extend to 60 of their patients.

Rhoda Meador, associate director for outreach and extension and associate director of the Bronfenbrenner Life Course Center, called TRIPLL's deep ties to the community a "model for how translational research is done."

"It is critical to link our research findings to real-world contexts and then back again," said Meador, adding that TRIPLL formed because of feedback from caregivers and seniors concerned about the negative effects of chronic pain. "With an issue as complex as persistent pain, you'll have many more successful outcomes if you focus on the issue as

"Chronic pain can lead to a loss of independence, and displace seniors from their homes and communities. This is not a preordained pathway, but unfortunately it's quite common for pain to lead older adults to isolate themselves, bringing on further negative health impacts."

—M. Cary Reid

more than a medical problem alone, but a problem that needs input from the social and behavioral sciences—and from the community. TRIPLL is a perfect example of how all sides in the process can strengthen each other."

For people like Susan Heller who find their pain inescapable, it also represents a potential path to renewed independence and greater health.

"I'm always hopeful for a better option for dealing with the pain," she says. "I'm normally very healthy, but the pain slows me down in so many ways. I'm glad that there's a chance something more can be done about it." ● ● ●

For more information:

Karl Pillemer
kap6@cornell.edu

M. Cary Reid
mcr2004@med.cornell.edu

Elaine Wethington
ew20@cornell.edu

<http://trippl.org>

Pain Sidelines People

In more than 20 years as a geriatrician, the past seven at Weill Cornell, M. Cary Reid has seen persistent pain overtake the lives of many of his otherwise healthy patients. The debilitating effects are so common and sudden that Reid refers to it as a "downward spiral."

One of his patients, a woman in her 90s with severe arthritis, opted against joint replacement surgery, not wanting to undergo an invasive procedure so late in life. Soon, her pain inhibited her from physical therapy and exercise, and she did not respond well to medication. Due to inactivity, her muscles weakened, eventually leading to unsteadiness on her feet and several damaging falls. Within a year, she could no longer walk and had to enter a nursing home.

"Chronic pain can lead to a loss of independence, and displace seniors from their homes and communities," Reid said. "This is not a preordained pathway, but unfortunately it's quite common for pain to lead older adults to isolate themselves, bringing on further negative health impacts. As many as one in three older adults limit their physical activities because of pain."

Before persistent pain clouded her life, 82-year-old Susan Heller enjoyed seeing Broadway shows with her husband, traveling to far-off lands such as Australia, or just driving her car. Now, she struggles daily with leaving her Upper East Side home.

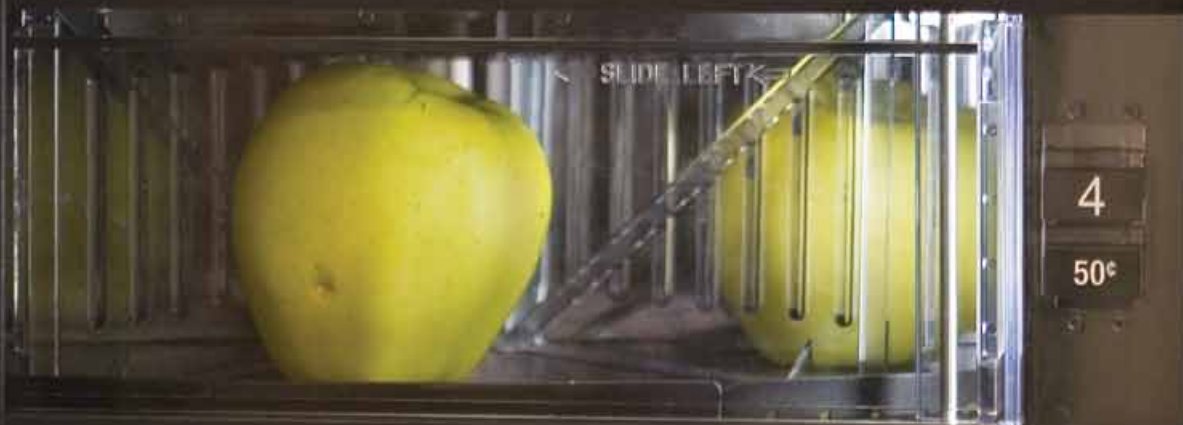
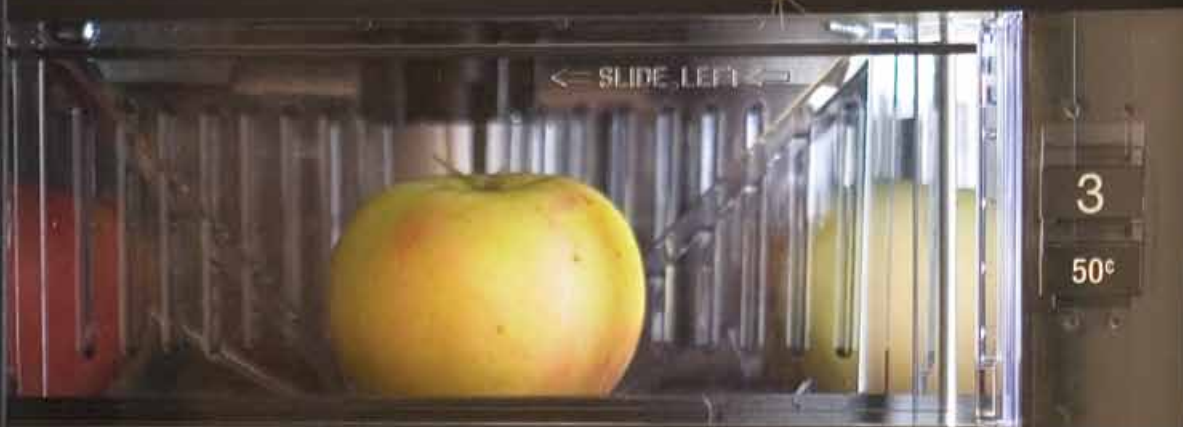
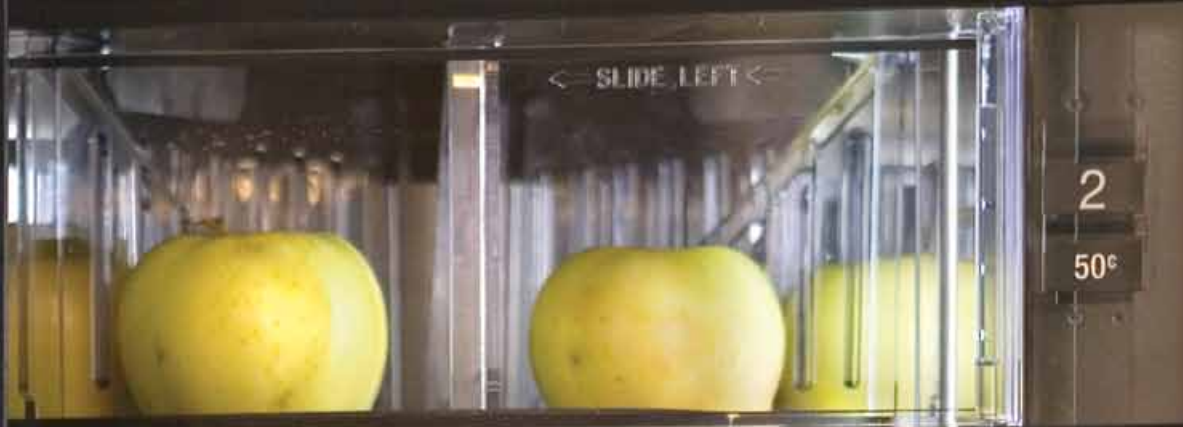
"I have to push myself to go anyplace or do anything," Heller said. "Because of the pain, I don't get the same enjoyment out of activities as I used to. A lot of times, it's easier not to do anything."

For 79-year-old Alan Abrahams, he cannot get out in damp weather because it cuts short the battery in his electric wheelchair. It prevents his favorite pastime: meeting with others, his primary pain diversion aside from tickling the ivories.

"I'm a people person," he said. "I like to get out and talk to people. But it's difficult when it's raining or snowing, and I become isolated."

Both say that relieving their pain is far more complicated than swallowing a pill. Abrahams will save his medication for nighttime, when his pain comes on strongest as he lies in bed without a way to distract his mind. Heller tends to take her medicine as it's needed. Both of them are wary of side effects, which can sometimes be as unsettling as the pain the pills are meant to treat. Neither wants to endure another surgery and long recuperation to try to cut off the pain at its source.

Older adults often must consider such risk-reward tradeoffs when consulting with their doctors about a treatment plan. To date, however, few studies have been done on how age influences a patient's decision-making about pain management and prevention.



At community workshops, extension professionals teach parents how to get their kids to eat better and exercise more.

Human Ecology is partnering with communities to build environments and change behaviors so overweight kids and adults can get fit.

Gaining Ground on Obesity

In February 2010, first lady Michelle Obama launched Let's Move, a national campaign that taps parents, community leaders, school teachers, and others to help kids eat better and exercise more. Within a generation, the initiative seeks to solve the epidemic of childhood obesity, a condition that has more than tripled among American youth in the past 30 years and contributes billions annually to health care costs. Because of our nation's growing girth, some scientists believe that children may now face a shorter expected lifespan than their parents, a first in American history.

In the College of Human Ecology, faculty members and extension professionals are already moving on numerous interventions to help children—and adults—maintain a healthy weight; these include:

In rural and urban counties across New York, the Collaboration for Health, Activity, and Nutrition in Children's Environments (CHANCE) program educates low-income parents and community partners about behavioral and environmental changes they can make to keep kids fit. Cornell NutritionWorks, a web-based continuing education program for nutrition and health practitioners, offers an online course that trains professionals around the globe to transform their local communities to encourage healthier habits. Small Changes and Lasting Effects (SCALE), part of a new initiative funded by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, seeks to help obese African Americans and Latinos in Harlem and the South Bronx lose weight by making small behavioral adjustments. > > >



"For some, if you ask them to turn off the TV while they're eating, they may wonder what planet you're from. They have a hard time buying a link between TV and eating too much."

—Carol Devine

Together, these College of Human Ecology programs uncover the environmental factors and personal behaviors that lead to obesity in kids and adults, while also testing and sharing evidence-based interventions for healthier living. Rooted in communities large and small, they also advance the idea that collective action, not just individual changes, is necessary to overcome obesity.

The best CHANCE

When CHANCE began in 2005, staff members focused on teaching parents with kids ages 3 to 11 how to get their children active and eating nutritious meals. Through a series of workshops with parents in eight New York counties, they also stressed the importance of acting as role models for kids, who are more likely to eat right and exercise regularly if they see the grown-ups doing the same.

“CHANCE takes practices that we know to be helpful for families and individuals to maintain a healthy weight and combines that with advice on improving parenting skills,” said Tisa Hill, CHANCE program coordinator and extension associate in nutritional sciences. “We are showing parents what is proven to work, but also how to actually make those changes within their own families.”

Program leaders soon realized they could extend their reach by partnering with daycare centers, schools, libraries, and other community groups to transform so-called obesogenic environments, areas where a lack of healthy alternatives nudges residents toward poor diets and sedentary lifestyles. In New York City, they have guided communities toward the Healthy Bodegas Initiative, which encourages stores to stock and advertise healthier foods, such as fresh produce, low-fat milk, whole-grain breads, and canned foods without added sugar or salt. Upstate, in rural Jefferson County, CHANCE participants remade their neighborhoods through small grants—many between \$100–\$500 apiece—for community improvement projects. One funded a garden at a local daycare center; another offered food stamp users vouchers for a farmers market.

“In these cases, we have seen very effective interventions driven by the needs of the local community,” Hill said.

Hill and a team of nutritional sciences faculty have nearly completed a comprehensive, eight-lesson curriculum based in part on feedback from front-line staff about what tactics work best for parents and community partners. In July, they plan to present the course materials, which are in English and Spanish, at the Society for Nutrition Education annual conference.

“There are very few other curricula out there in these areas, and ours is the only one that is fully integrated with advice on parenting,” she said.

“While it is great to teach kids to eat better, we also need to change the context for those behaviors and the social norms. In some areas, kids can’t play outside or walk to school, because it’s not safe. Or their school vending machines carry only soda and junk food.”

—Christina Stark

Professionals go online

While CHANCE is aimed directly at parents, NutritionWorks reaches dietitians, extension educators, community nutritionists, and other public health professionals with online offerings on more than 100 topics, about one-third of them focused on obesity. To date, more than 7,500 professionals from 104 countries have registered as NutritionWorks members. The program’s centerpiece is “Preventing Childhood Obesity: An Ecological Approach,” a six-week, in-depth course facilitated by Christina Stark, NutritionWorks program leader and senior extension associate in nutritional sciences.

The course, which has reached more than 300 professionals since it launched in 2006, helps participants develop an action plan to address childhood obesity in their communities using a collaborative, ecological approach. They learn how to assess various factors that contribute to excessive weight gain in children locally, and then seek out partners to help create more health-promoting environments in homes, schools, and neighborhoods.

“While it is great to teach kids to eat better, we also need to change the context for those behaviors and the social norms,” Stark said. “In some areas, kids can’t play outside or walk to school, because it’s not safe. Or their school vending machines carry only soda and junk food.”

For many course participants, some of whom log on from as far away as Mexico, the Philippines, or Egypt, designing community-based interventions to address childhood obesity can be challenging. Stark urges them to include city and regional planners and school administrators in innovative partnerships.

“It’s a different way of thinking about the problem,” Stark said. “By the end of the course, they realize that solutions won’t come from one nutritionist, one teacher, or one town official. They’ll come through collaboration.”

Small changes tip the SCALE

Similar ideas will be tested by SCALE, which, in one planned study, will examine how behavioral interventions targeted at blacks and Latinos compare across three settings: the individual, family, and faith-based groups. The research team, which includes Human Ecology faculty and researchers at Weill Cornell Medical College under a larger grant known as Obesity Related Behavioral Intervention Trials, plans to try out mindful eating strategies that could lead to small, sustained improvements in eating habits and physical activity.

Elaine Wethington, professor of human development and sociology, is the lead Ithaca researcher on the study. Along with professor of nutrition Carol Devine and food psychologist Brian Wansink, professor of applied economics and management, they will promote simple techniques to

nudge people toward healthier behaviors, such as eating with the television off or storing healthy foods in plain sight and burying junk foods in their pantries.

The ideas have worked in Wansink's Food and Brand Lab, but may be challenged by external pressures. For that reason, SCALE researchers also will examine if social support from churches and family networks can help people stick to their



weight loss interventions when challenges arise.

"If you're living in the South Bronx and working two jobs just to keep body and soul together, will you have time to plan how to get balanced meals and exercise?" Wethington

wondered. "We will test how people deal with everyday stresses and interruptions, and whether having a group of people to lean on helps make a difference."

Devine, who will help design the interventions and the study's dietary measures, anticipates that some techniques that work in the lab might not transfer well to people's homes.

"For some, if you ask them to turn off the TV while they're eating, they may wonder what planet you're from," she said. "They have a hard time buying a link between TV and eating too much."

In past studies in Rochester, N.Y., and small rural communities, Devine has found that poor working conditions, such as long or irregular hours, often lead to poor diet choices and low dietary quality. With SCALE, she is excited to see how these factors influence people's health in a diverse setting like New York City.

"This is a complex project, where we are trying to translate these interventions that have worked in one setting into another," Devine said. "It is a great example of how we can bring together the expertise in behavioral and social sciences that we have in Human Ecology with the medical research occurring at Weill Cornell. It's not something we could have done on our own." ● ● ●

For more information:

John Cawley
jhc38@cornell.edu

Carol Devine
cmd10@cornell.edu

Tisa Hill
tfh3@cornell.edu

Christina Stark
cms11@cornell.edu

Brian Wansink
bcw28@cornell.edu

Elaine Wethington
ew20@cornell.edu

www.fnec.cornell.edu/Program_CHANCE.cfm

www.nutritionworks.cornell.edu

Cawley Calls for Anti-obesity Policies to Weigh Economics

Before moving on specific anti-obesity strategies, Cornell economist John Cawley urges lawmakers and advocates to review the evidence on program effectiveness and costs to avoid policies that won't work or will waste money.

In "The Economics of Childhood Obesity," published March 2 in the journal *Health Affairs*, Cawley, associate professor of policy analysis and management, argues that government spending should focus on programs that offer "the biggest bang for the buck."

"There is widespread recognition that childhood obesity is a problem in need of attention and resources," said Cawley, who has served on the Institute of Medicine's Committee to Prevent Childhood Obesity. "But it's a bit of a Wild West, anything-goes environment when it comes to creating anti-obesity programs and policies. With limited resources to spend, it would be counter-productive to rush into programs that are not cost-effective and won't provide the greatest return on investment."

Cawley also reports results from the 2009 Empire State Poll conducted by the Cornell Survey Research Institute that show public support for anti-obesity policies hinges greatly upon how the issue of cost is framed. With no mention of costs, 92 percent of 800 New Yorkers polled agreed that the government should improve nutrition in school cafeterias. However, when people were asked whether taxes should be raised to improve nutrition in school cafeterias, support falls by more than half, to 41 percent.

The paper also describes the economic contributors to, and consequences of, sharply rising childhood obesity rates in recent decades and describes the economic case for government interventions. In 2008, obesity added more than \$27 billion in costs to Medicare and Medicaid, which are funded by taxpayer dollars, and it contributed \$49 billion to private health insurer costs. Therefore, Cawley wrote, it makes sense for government to reduce and prevent obesity to limit these costs imposed on the general population.



Elaine Wethington and Rachel Dunifon

Bronfenbrenner Conference Investigates the Best Ways to Translate Research into Policy and Practice

Eighteen scholars from universities and government agencies across the nation gathered at Cornell for the Second Biennial Urie Bronfenbrenner Conference to discuss a topic on the minds of social scientists: the best ways to use basic research in real-world practices to improve people's lives. The conference was held October 22–23, 2009.

“More rapid and effective research translation is a major goal of the National Institutes of Health Roadmap and other federal research initiatives,” said Elaine Wethington, associate professor of human development and co-director of the Cornell Institute for Translational Research on Aging, which co-organized the event titled, “Improving the State of Americans: Prospects of Translational Research in the Social and Behavioral Sciences.”

“Bringing experts on translational research to Cornell and facilitating deep and lively discussion across social science, health, and policy disciplines may encourage social scientists on campus to form multidisciplinary teams to address important social issues in new and creative ways,” Wethington said.

The conference, co-organized by Rachel Dunifon, associate professor of policy analysis and management, covered such topics as the best way to define and foster translational research among the social sciences and examples of translational research in the field.

“It was a wonderful opportunity to bring top scholars to Cornell to talk about the process by which we have successfully, and not so successfully, translated research beyond the walls of the university,” Dunifon said.

Kathleen Ziol-Guest, assistant director of the Institute for Children and Poverty in New York City, presented her work that shows how using proven methods to make sure that children receive child support payments would improve the child support system across the country.

David Almeida, a human development professor at Pennsylvania State University, recommended that researchers partner with companies to develop such research-based interventions as supervisor training to reduce work-family stress in lower-income families.

Charles Brainerd and Valerie Reyna, both Human Ecology professors of human development, advocated using behavioral research to improve the accounts of eyewitnesses in criminal cases. They presented numerous examples of how research on eyewitness testimony has been successfully translated for use in the judicial system.

The conference used the Scandinavian Model: papers were presented at the conference by someone other than their authors. The American Psychological Association will publish a book based on the papers.

The conference was supported by the Bronfenbrenner Life Course Center, the Institute for the Social Sciences, the Family Life Development Center, the Cornell Population Program, and the College of Human Ecology's outreach and extension. ● ● ●

Families Encouraged to **Eat Well, Eat Local, Eat Together**

Families who eat a home-cooked meal that includes local foods generally eat better while also helping to sustain their local economy, according to Christine Olson, professor of nutritional sciences.

Now Olson has teamed up with Cornell Cooperative Extension to create a program that encourages families to prepare dinners at home with locally grown produce. Eat3, short for “Eat Well, Eat Local, Eat Together,” was rolled out in 20 New York counties in summer 2009.

“This is a unique nutrition program in that its messages go beyond what to eat and urge families to consider where their food comes from and the social settings in which food is consumed,” Olson said. “Eating a home-prepared meal that includes locally grown foods generally leads families to eat more fruits and vegetables, more dairy and whole grains, and fewer soft drinks.”

The program was piloted in 2008 in six counties by the Healthy Start Partnership, a multi-county coalition of health and nutrition professionals promoting healthy weights in child-bearing women and their infants. At that time, it was funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Because of the initial success of Eat3, Helene Dillard, director of Cornell Cooperative Extension, provided funding for the 2009 campaign, which spread to families via such venues as farmers markets, county fairs, community garden programs, and local newspapers.

From July to November, the campaign promoted two healthy recipes each month—such as corny chili with apple-filled squash—emphasizing child-friendly foods that take advantage of local, seasonal produce. In addition, Cooperative Extension staff distributed postcards and refrigerator magnets to remind families to eat nutritious food together.

The campaign also features a web site—<http://eat3.org>—where families can enter a monthly drawing for grocery store gift certificates, post comments, and find additional recipes and nutrition information. ● ● ●





Karl Pillemer and Rhoda Meador

New Blog Bridges the Gap between Research and Real Life

For almost all of human history, people have faced a singular problem: a lack of information about how to cope with the challenges of daily living. But over the past 20 years, and especially in the past five years with the explosion of digital media, people now have more information than they are able to process.

Professor Karl Pillemer and Senior Extension Associate Rhoda Meador have created a new blog called “Evidence-Based Living” that addresses that problem, and helps Cornell Cooperative Extension professionals and the general public sift the science from the fluff.

“Now more than ever, people need help separating the good scientific information from the bad,” Pillemer said. “We are all about assessing the scientific evidence on human problems and looking at how to use it every day.”

Pillemer is the Hazel E. Reed Professor of Human Development and the associate dean for outreach and extension in the College of Human Ecology. He also holds positions as a faculty member at the Weill Cornell Medical College and as the director of the Cornell Institute for Translational Research on Aging. Meador is the Associate Director for Extension and Outreach in College of Human Ecology.

The idea for the blog emerged out of Pillemer’s more than 20 years of focusing on outreach.

“As a professor with responsibilities in the Cooperative Extension system, I’ve always thought about ways to move scientific findings from universities out to people and communities who can use them,” he said. “Today, the field is

called translational research. It is all about taking basic research and ‘translating’ it into interventions and educational programs to improve people’s lives.”

In the blog, Pillemer and Meador delve into research findings, media stories, and anecdotes from their own life experiences to explore:

- the relationship between research and real-life,
- how to create a better marriage between science and service,
- how professionals are using research to improve the human condition, and
- how their work can improve both your work and your life.

For Pillemer, the topic is personal as well as professional.

“For as long as I can remember, I have been interested in how research can be applied to human problems in the real world,” he said. “I’m the kind of person who goes straight to the self-help aisle in the bookstore. My family rolls their eyes when I read them the most recent study reported in the newspaper. And I do try living ‘the evidence-based life’ whenever I can.”

You can read Pillemer’s and Meador’s reflections on evidence-based living—on such topics as reaching youth through their electronic devices, brushing up on your “research readiness,” deciding what to eat, and even using evidence to better understand basketball—at

<http://evidencebasedliving.human.cornell.edu>. • • •

Whitlock Blogs on Youth and Mental Health for Psychology Magazine



In “Youth and Consequences,” a new blog for *Psychology Today*, Janis Whitlock, research scientist in the Family Life Development Center, sheds light on adolescent mental health in the new millennium. Her monthly posts have examined everything from cutting and other forms of self-injury among youth, to the fissures in the collective American psyche that may have influenced last year’s shooting rampage at Fort Hood, to the interplay between addiction and the search for happiness in teens.

“I see promoting dialogue related to issues that bridge science and everyday life and experience as central to my work and professional passion,” Whitlock said. “*Psychology Today* is a great venue for this, and the blogging environment allows for intellectual freedom.”

In November 2009, Whitlock explored the growing narcissism among America’s youth, as more of their lives are laid bare on the Internet. To what extent does our reliance on technology contribute to such egotism? And in a culture of 24/7 news, unyielding blog traffic, social networking, and tweets, are today’s youth equipped to think deeply and analyze complex information in a meaningful way?

Whitlock thinks there is reason for concern, but unlike many, she is optimistic.

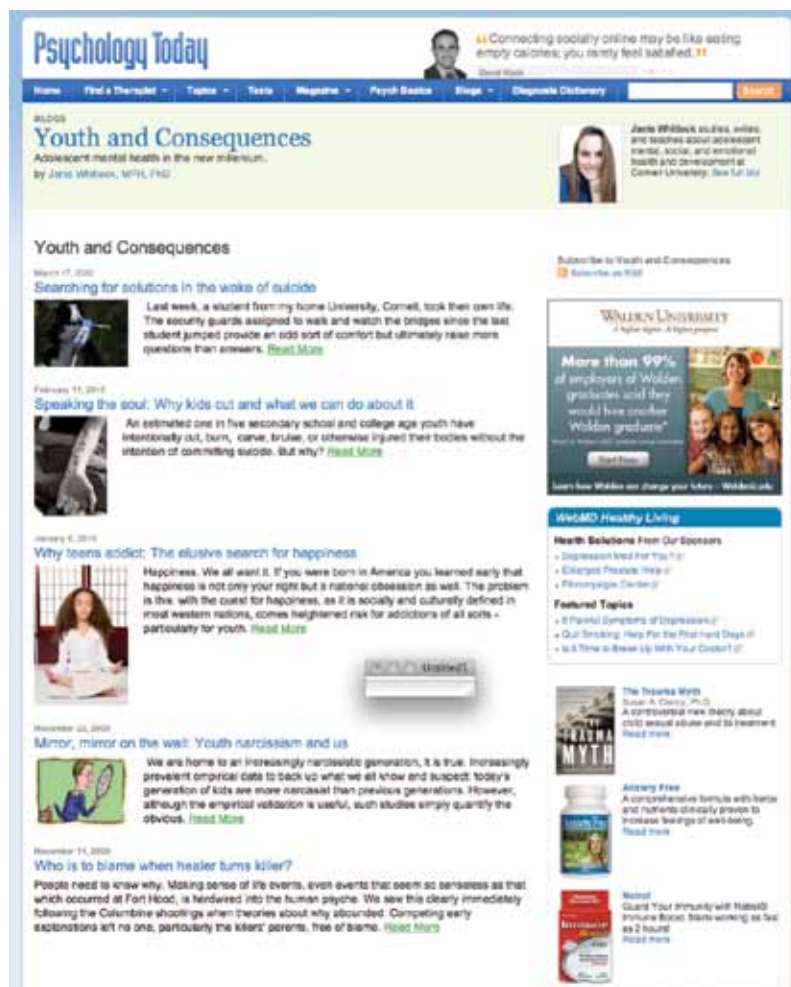
Rather than wring her hands with a kids-these-days lament, Whitlock explained how teens, in their online lives, gaze into a mirror that “reflects the dreams, innovations, and human agency of their elders.” Thus, any examination of how our wired society affects youth must also examine its implications for adults.

She concluded her blog entry on a hopeful note.

“We may be infatuated with the two-dimensional representation of self that is tweeted, IM’d, and Facebooked back to us in lightning-fast time, but we will inevitably tire of this too—for it will not satisfy the longing to connect with our deeper self, what my student identifies as the ‘natural and spiritual,’” she wrote.

“And, equipped with the consequent teachings of this age, we will discover . . . that human beings and brains are much more plastic than we thought. When our individual and collective success demands that we concentrate on something for longer than four seconds, our youth will be the first to lead us out of the tweeting age and into the next age—whatever it may be.”

Follow Whitlock’s *Psychology Today* posts at www.psychologytoday.com/blog/youth-and-consequences. ● ● ●





Lifting Latin American Youth out of Poverty

In many parts of the world, young people in poverty are running in place as they try to advance from adolescence to adulthood.

Their parents cannot provide financial support. Higher education is reserved for the elite. If they find work at all, it pays low wages and offers dim career prospects.

In Latin America, College of Human Ecology researchers are partnering with four local organizations to understand how exemplary local programs put such youth on a more promising track. Through the action research project Opening Career Paths: Youth in Latin America, they are exploring how to build or enhance social institutions to enable impoverished youth to become productive workers, active citizens, and nurturing family members.

Members of the Cornell research team include Stephen Hamilton, professor of human development and associate director of the Family Life Development Center (FLDC); his wife, Mary Agnes Hamilton, senior research associate and director of the Cornell Youth in Society Program; Davydd Greenwood, Goldwin Smith Professor of Anthropology; and three bilingual graduate research assistants. They are also examining how to reverse “structural lag,” a term to describe how schools and other institutions have not kept pace with the needs of those they serve.

“In many cases, these young people have not finished high school, and if they don’t do so by age 18, it’s all over in these countries. After that, there’s nothing for them,” said Mary Agnes Hamilton. “Through these programs, they can go back and get their diplomas or learn trades and skills that get them on course.”

The 18-month project, funded by a \$400,000 grant from the Jacobs Foundation in Switzerland, includes partners in Argentina, Mexico, and Colombia. The local programs reach out to marginalized youth, typically between ages 18 and 27, in urban and rural areas, from modern cities like Buenos Aires to the forgotten slums of Cali, Colombia.

The programs take different approaches: some help young adults finish their high school degrees and acquire vocational skills, while others encourage community service, restore relationships with family members, and introduce adult mentors.

“In these countries, it’s called life projects—working with young people expressly on the future of their lives,” Stephen

Hamilton said. “It’s not as simple as asking what you want to be when you grow up. It’s determining your aspirations and then laying out a realistic pathway for how to get there and what resources are needed. Young adults have ideas about what they want to accomplish, but usually little input and advice on how to get there.”

In prior research of youth organizations, the Hamiltons have identified three assets that are critical for poor youth to advance in society: a sense of purpose and agency, human capital, and social capital. They also found six common structural features among successful youth-oriented programs that help nurture these assets, ranging from strong public-private partnerships to opportunities for leadership and civic engagement.

The Cornell team reviewed more than 20 programs and visited about eight sites before selecting four partners that demonstrate many of these structural features. At a conference in January 2010 in Colombia, teams from each of the partner organizations met for the first time to network and learn about the action research concept, through which each organization created a plan to help youth bridge the gap between adolescence and adulthood.

“We asked the programs to identify and explore the questions that matter most to them,” Stephen Hamilton said. “It would be imperialistic for us to come into their countries and lay out the research questions we want to answer and to have them sit still and answer them. A one-size-fits-all approach wouldn’t work because each group has its own issues of local concern.”

The partners, with support from the Cornell team, are now moving forward with the action research process. This fall, the local teams, along with Cornell scientists and other outside experts, will meet at a synthesis conference to share their results, with the findings to be published in a book about strengthening institutions for young adults.

“In this project, we hope to test our conceptual framework for youth development, to see how it applies in different contexts and whether it can become a model for building youth programs in other places,” Mary Agnes Hamilton said. “It’s possible that the outcomes will be of interest to local policymakers in the United States and many other countries who are striving to give youth the support they need.” ● ● ●

Afterword

EFNEP Celebrates 40 Years of Delivering Nutrition Education to Limited-Resource Families

BY JOAN DOYLE PADDOCK AND JAMIE S. DOLLAHITE

The discovery of hunger in America during the 1960s resulted in political action and legislation by Congress. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) launched several pilot studies through Cooperative Extension to investigate strategies for addressing the nutrition and health needs of poor families. The effective model that emerged for providing nutrition education and skill-building utilized paraprofessional staff to teach nutrition to low-income families in their homes. Recommendations based on results of these pilot studies were the basis for initiating the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) in 1969.

EFNEP in New York just celebrated its 40th anniversary. While much has changed in the last 40 years, the program commitment and research-based delivery strategy have withstood the test of time. One unique feature of EFNEP that has remained constant is the method of program delivery: employment of paraprofessionals indigenous to the areas in which they work as the front-line educators. These educators continue to work with limited-resource families, either in small groups or one on one. Group nutrition education has largely replaced the home-visit model with about 80 percent of participants in New York state being reached in group settings. The remainder, primarily home visits, occurs in upstate rural counties where lack of transportation is an issue for participants.

Obesity is the nutrition-related health problem of greatest concern now, often occurring side by side with food insecurity among the poor. Chronic diseases, such as diabetes and obesity, plague our population, but the poor are particularly at risk. Americans have become more sedentary, the use of computers as a means of recreation has replaced active play for children, and making healthy food choices has become increasingly difficult. Calorie-dense (high-sugar, high-fat) foods are cheap and readily available. Fruits and vegetables, especially high-quality fresh fruits and vegetables, are far less available, and their cost has increased markedly. All this contributes to the difficulty of making healthy choices for everyone. The challenges to limited-resource families are especially difficult, and obtaining high-quality food must be

balanced with other priorities such as the increasing cost of heating in the winter and buying gas for transportation, rising rent, and family pressures such as single-parent families and parents working outside the home.

In 2009 alone, EFNEP served 6,304 adults in New York, representing 25,690 family members. We have learned from educators' experiences that young parents have few cooking skills and that "cooking from scratch" is only vaguely understood. Use of convenience foods high

in sodium, fat, and sugar are just that—convenient to prepare, have a familiar taste, and are acceptable to children. Using unfamiliar whole foods, taking time to prepare a recipe that requires cooking or baking instead of microwaving, and risking a negative reaction from family members are not things taken lightly by the EFNEP audience.

Working within this context is a challenging job for EFNEP educators. Yet the nature and quality of the success experienced by graduates of EFNEP show that change is possible, the benefits are long lasting, and the rewards are great. Hearing what participants have to say makes the challenges of this work worthwhile and motivates educators and supervisors alike.

For example, one participant said, "I wish I had taken a picture of my pantry before this class and then after this class. The difference is amazing. I thought I was eating healthy before, but I didn't realize how much better I could be doing."

Another excited participant reported, "I learned how to prepare a recipe as written." Others begin to use a meat thermometer to assure food safety and use coupons to save money. Many report giving up soda completely and learning to prepare easy, accessible snacks with vegetables that "everyone ate."

The current economic crisis has expanded the EFNEP target population and the need for the program continues. The experience of 40 years of successfully reaching participants where they are, with their unique strengths and challenges, provides a sound foundation for the future. EFNEP is just as important now, if not more so, than when it was first established in helping families through tough situations. ● ● ●



Human ECOLOGY

NOTE:

This is the first
of two issues of
Human Ecology
Vol. 38, 2010.



Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University

A Legacy of Research in Action

Helen Monsch (1881–1959) was a researcher and teacher at Cornell from 1918 until her retirement in 1947 as head of the Food and Nutrition Department in the College of Home Economics. She taught courses on the nutritional needs of pregnant and nursing women and infants. Monsch is shown here (second from left) teaching a dietetics course to nurses in 1918.

Monsch co-authored a book, *Feeding Babies and Mothers of Babies*, with her former student Marguerite Harper. In addition, she directed the film *For Health and Happiness* to further inform the public about the importance of scientific nutrition. Monsch researched and developed standards for child and infant feeding and nutrition at the Iowa University Children's Hospital, and during World War I she developed information on preparing low-cost diets for large families.