

FAMILY SCIENCE & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Department Newsletter

MAY 2026

Hidden in Plain Sight: Red Sand Symbolizes Human Trafficking Victims

The Red Sand Project, a powerful initiative aimed at raising awareness about human trafficking and its hidden-in-plain-sight presence in our communities, took place on campus in April. The project used a simple but striking visual method: participants poured red sand into sidewalk cracks to symbolize individuals who have “fallen through the cracks” of society and have become victims of trafficking.



A collaborative endeavor among the Family Science and Human Development Department, the Global

Center on Human Trafficking, and the Office of Community Resilience and Officer Wellness, this event unified the Montclair community in a shared effort to shed light on a frequently overlooked issue. Engaging participants in a hands-on activity created an opportunity not only for education but also for reflection and dialogue. Volunteers worked together to fill pavement gaps with red sand, sparking conversations among passersby and encouraging them to learn more about the realities of human trafficking.

In addition to the visual demonstration, the event featured “*Hope: Stories of Survival*,” a poignant documentary produced by the Salvation Army detailing the experiences of trafficking survivors. A panel discussion followed, which

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Department Chair's Corner

It's May - often the most anticipated time of the academic year! The sun is shining (most of the time), it's hot (but not too hot yet), and we are ready to roll into our much-needed reprieve from a grueling and busy academic year. For some in our community it may not have been just any academic year; it may have been THE academic year they have looked most forward to - the very last one. Indeed, to all of our graduating FSHD seniors and our doctoral students receiving their degrees this month, I hope you continue to make every moment count in these last few days of your academic journey. I look forward to celebrating and cheering you on alongside your families and loved ones, as you walk across the stage at Commencement on May 11th.



Dr. Lyndal Khaw

I have written previously that this time of the year can also be perceived as bittersweet, as some of you may be reaching the end of

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DATES TO REMEMBER

May 4

Spring semester ends

May 11

- CCHL Commencement
- Summer sessions begin

May 25

Memorial Day—no classes

**Enjoy Your
Summer Break!**

Social Justice Initiatives

Red Sand Project *(continued from page 1)*

included the voice of Christabelle Robinson, a lived experience professional who is passionate about transforming how survivors are valued and engaged within the anti-trafficking movement.

The Red Sand Project aligns closely with FSHD's mission to promote the well-being of individuals and families. Co-hosting this activity reinforced the Department's commitment to social

responsibility and advocacy, enabling everyone in the university to help create a visible symbol of awareness and be part of a broader movement dedicated to ending human trafficking and supporting those affected by it.

Overall, the event served as a meaningful reminder that even small actions can have a significant impact. ■



Pinwheels for Prevention

Spinning with hope, this blue and silver pinwheel garden was “planted” by the FSHD Department in April during Child Abuse Prevention Month, a time to raise awareness, support families, and further protect children. Each pinwheel symbolizes safe childhoods, and the bright future every child deserves.



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Assistive Technology: Tools to Improve the Everyday

Most Americans want to stay in their homes as they age. That's not a bad plan, but what if the home doesn't fit them as well as it once did? Aging can often be accompanied by a change in ability to manage and move around in the home. That's where assistive technology – better known as AT – comes in. Regardless of age or type of disability, there is likely an AT device that can help with everyday tasks.

What is AT?

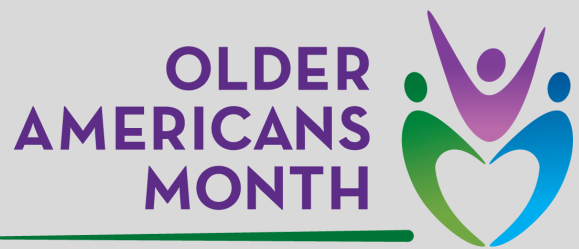
AT isn't a new concept. In fact, most people have probably used an assistive device without realizing it. Smartphones, voice command technology and certain types of software all fall under the AT umbrella. AT also includes plenty of low-tech devices, like adapted pencil grips for students with disabilities.



An ever-growing variety of AT tools can now help with household chores, work functions, mobility, seeing, hearing, learning and living independently in general. While these devices and technologies are designed to help older adults and people with disabilities, they can make life easier for anyone.

Examples of AT devices and tools include:

- Hearing aids
- Vehicle modifications, i.e., hand controls, wheelchair lifts
- Devices that help with bathing and eating
- Software modifications for those with hearing and visual challenges
- Equipment to help prevent falls, such as grab bars in a shower
- Eye glasses and magnification devices to help individuals with low vision
- Communication devices for those with speech disabilities
- Wheelchairs, walkers and other mobility devices



CHAMPION YOUR HEALTH: MAY 2026

Celebrated every May, Older Americans Month is spearheaded by the U.S. Administration for Community Living to recognize older adults' contributions, and reaffirm our commitment to supporting their health and independence, while also highlighting recent trends in aging.

The 2026 theme, *Champion Your Health*, underscores prevention, wellness, and personal responsibility as cornerstones of healthy aging. It encourages individuals to take an active role in managing and advocating for their health, accessing preventive care, and making informed decisions.

This year's commemoration focuses on evidence-based approaches, self-management, caregiver roles, and community partnerships that empower individuals to lead healthy lives. ■

Choosing the Right AT

Finding and acquiring AT devices can be an overwhelming task, but state Assistive Technology Act Programs help identify — and assist with accessibility of — tools and solutions to meet specific needs. The AT Act Programs also offer:

- Device demonstration and short-term loans to try equipment before purchasing
- Gently used devices at substantial savings
- Financing options

The [Richard West Assistive Technology Advocacy Center](#) serves as New Jersey's federally funded AT Act Program. To locate the program in other states, and find additional resources, visit the government's website at acl.gov/AT.

Other helpful resources include these websites for:

- [NJ Disability Information Hub](#)
- [Disability Rights New Jersey](#)

With more research and awareness around the importance of AT, the future possibilities for living independently in the place of one's choosing are almost limitless. ■

Source: ACL.gov

Student Perspective: Joy Has No Age Limit

By Noelani Brown, Class of 2028

Working in an Assisted Living community for almost three years has taught me the importance of life and death. As new residents move into Viva Senior Living at Cross Keys, we meet them at the end of their lives. My work family and I make it our mission to create a fun and positive environment that embraces the life they are living now. None of this would have been possible without the guidance of Business Office Director Joshua Williams, Marketing Director Stephanie Slimm, and Executive Director Ellen Scagnelli, who have taught me the importance of love and community in senior care and made me who I am today.

For older adults, making the big decision to move to a living community due to decline is scary. Making friends and adjusting to this new environment is also challenging, as it can take months to get used to a new living situation. I've interacted with so many residents who miss the homes they had to put up for sale, their families, and the trinkets they once collected. Many of these residents also don't receive letters or visitors.

I am a student worker in the Family Science and Human Development Department, majoring in Mathematics Education with minors in Gerontology and FSHD. When I discovered National Letter to an Elder Day – where cheerful notes are written to older adults – I suggested that the department sponsor it as a campus event. My goal was to brighten the day of those living in nursing homes and senior care facilities,

people who may be feeling alone, overwhelmed, or who just need a reminder that they are loved. While I came up with this idea, my supervisors Lisa Mills and Department Chair Dr. Lyndal Khaw, and my coworker Aya Ashkar, made it a reality. With tables in the Student Center lobby, we invited everyone passing by to write a quick note to someone they had never met. I would like to thank all the Montclair students and employees who participated in this amazing event and helped us create 181 letters that spread joy throughout senior living facilities.

When I chose to pursue the Gerontology minor offered by the FSHD Department, I made it my mission to support older adults. I think this minor is truly amazing because it has allowed me to pour my love into our community and promote this degree option. Watching people age shouldn't be a daunting task, but an opportunity to learn from others and help them enjoy the beautiful days they have left. In this mission, life, death, and everything in between becomes more beautiful every day. I encourage you to go out and interact with your local communities, whether it's through crafts, painting nails, or performing songs. Create the difference that brings you joy, comfort, and love.

February 26th was Letter to an Elder Day, but showing love, making elders feel included, and treating them with respect should not be limited to just one day. ■

MAY IS

National Foster Care Month

National Foster Care Month raises awareness of issues specifically related to foster care. It highlights the importance of engaging youth and helping them leave foster care with strengthened relationships, concrete supports, and opportunities.

It is also a time to acknowledge the parents, family members, foster parents, child welfare professionals, mentors, policymakers, and other members of the community — all those who help children and youth in foster care find permanent homes and connections.



Department Chair's Corner

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your “student era.” Many students are worried about what the future will bring, and wonder how they can make meaningful contributions or make a decent living with this degree. In fact, “What can I do with this degree?” is a question I get asked a lot, as a faculty and as a department chair. My answer is almost always, “Anything,” but I promise you that it is not a trick answer.

I have always been impressed with our alumni's abilities to take what they have learned here and integrate it into all kinds of career paths and opportunities. Back in March, I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to visit with five of my former FSHD students, including several who go way back to when we were still known as Family and Child Studies! Some of these alumni graciously came to my FSHD 315 *Community Engagement* course to speak about their professional experiences. During these visits, I learned about their lives beyond graduation and marveled at how vastly different their journeys had been. Take for example:

Jonathan Georges, PhD, (class of 2014) was a student athlete who had been on a career path in medicine, but has found much fulfillment in the public health field, in statewide health equity programming and advocacy work. He has, as of my writing, successfully earned his PhD in Public Health.

Andre Wilkins (class of 2015) started his career in a non-profit organization, working for seven years before deciding to go back into the classroom. He is now a Lead Teacher, teaching kindergarten in Paterson - and absolutely loving it!

Annalyce D'Agostino-Gavin (class of 2017) found passion in applying child development theories in the world of entrepreneurship, and started her own business creating and distributing useful tools to help young children regulate their daily life routines. She finds a full circle moment, now back here at Montclair working in the Feliciano Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation as a Creative Development and Innovation Strategist.

Lauren Hoicker (class of 2023) graduated from FSHD with a job offer in hand from the NJ Department of Children and



FSHD alum Jonathan Georges and Dr. Lyndal Khaw enjoyed a recent professor/student reunion on campus.



FSHD alumni Andre Wilkins, Lauren Hoicker and Annalyce D'Agostino-Gavin are all smiles after speaking to students in Dr. Lyndal Khaw's Community Engagement class.

Families, and currently works at DCF in Southern NJ with family reunifications and child welfare.

Jackie Ortiz (class of 2024) who originally was on the teaching track in our program, graduated with a concentration in Family Services, and went on to pursue her passion in school counseling by enrolling in the MA in Counseling program here at Montclair. She is currently a graduate assistant for our department, mentoring students who are sitting where she once started her journey. (Check out Jackie's alumni profile on page 6.)

As you can see with just these five anecdotes, it is not surprising that FSHD students who start our program may leave Montclair having different aspirations and set out to explore new chapters ahead. I firmly believe that FSHD students can do anything when it comes to finding a space or a niche where you find the most fulfillment in working with children and adults, communities, and families. It gives me a deep sense of pride that we have been a small part of Jon's, Andre's, Annie's, Lauren's, and Jackie's educational journeys, and we continue to see the good they do to make a positive impact in their communities.

What will your journey look like beyond Montclair? Well, wherever life takes you next, remember that your alma mater and home department are rooting for you and your successes, always.

Have an amazing summer ahead! ■

Celebrating Our Newest PhDs

The Family Science and Human Development Department is exceptionally proud to congratulate our SEVEN new PhDs who successfully defended their doctoral dissertations this spring! They have worked diligently to reach this academic and professional milestone, and we are excited to watch them continue to have a profound impact on our communities!

Dr. Yanira Amadeo - *Catalysts of Change: Exploring the Influence of Alumni Philanthropists of Color on Diverse Families and Student Achievement at Hispanic Serving Institutions*
Committee Chair: Dr. Pauline Garcia-Reid

Dr. Julie Chowdhury - *Navigating Reentry: A Life Course Inquiry into the Structural and Personal Dimensions among Returning Citizens*
Committee Chair: Dr. Jason Williams

Dr. Elaine Les - *Exploring the Role of Technology in Character Development Using a Relational Developmental Systems Metatheory Perspective*
Committee Chair: Dr. Jennifer Urban

Dr. Sabrina Magliulo - *Through the Eyes of Alumni: The Transformative Power of EOF for Students from Racially/Ethnically and Economically Marginalized Backgrounds*
Committee Chair: Dr. Pauline Garcia-Reid

Dr. Yasmine Perry - *Examining Dimensions and Patterns of Arts Participation in Relation to Positive Youth Development Outcomes across Socioeconomic Contexts*
Committee Chair: Dr. Miriam Linver

Dr. Melissa Screven - *Translingualism in Multilingual Contexts with Latinx Sign Language Interpreters: An Intersectional-PVEST Intervention Case Study*
Committee Chair: Dr. David Schwarzer

Dr. Erin Veloso - *The New Family Literacy Intervention and Its Impacts on Multilingual Parents Literacy Practices*
Committee Chair: Dr. David Schwarzer



Our Achievements

Dr. Jennifer Urban and **Dr. Miriam Linver** received a subaward from Outward Bound to implement their proposal titled *Outward Bound Character Compass*. They are also featured in "[The Purpose Paradox](#)," a College for Community Health podcast highlighting their research about youth anxiety and depressive symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Ashley Ermer was an invited panelist for Aging in Montclair's symposium, "Living Our Best Lives: The Challenges and Joys of Aging." She is pictured below, second from left, with the other panelists.



Meet Our Alumni

Major: Family Science & Human Development / Minor: Child Advocacy



Jackie Ortiz

About Me

I'm currently pursuing my master's degree in School Counseling here at MSU. I also work as a graduate assistant for the Department of Family Science and Human Development, where I get to support professors as a TA, help out around the office, and assist with planning fun and meaningful events for the department.

Favorite Part

My favorite part about being a graduate assistant is the opportunity to work professionally with the professors who once taught me and to connect with and help students who may have the same questions I had when I was in their place.

Class of '24

Advice For Students

Remember it's okay to change paths and take time to reflect on your 'why' so your career truly aligns with who you are.

From Trauma to Healing: Healing-Centered Approaches to Trauma in Families and Communities

This 10-week fully online and interactive course offers a comprehensive exploration of healing-centered approaches to addressing trauma. Moving beyond traditional trauma-informed care, the curriculum emphasizes a practice-shift towards recognizing and nurturing the inherent strength and resilience of individuals, families, and communities affected by trauma

Course Term & Fee

June 8 – August 16, 2026 (10 Weeks)
\$550

Course Highlights:

- Gain a deep understanding of Positive and Adverse Childhood Experiences (PACES) science; examine how early experiences shape brain development, and explore long-term outcomes of trauma across generations
- Learn about pioneering research on neurobiological responses to trauma with practical applications tailored for family and community contexts
- Be guided by a trauma-certified, licensed mental health professional and faculty in the department of Family Science & Human Development
- Develop culturally responsive skills to support healing within family systems and community structures
- Earn CEUs and a micro-credential certificate from the Department of Children and Families' Office of Resilience and Montclair State University



**Registration link opens
May 18, 2026**

[Click here to be
notified when
registration starts](#)

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