

FRIENDS PROJECT

2025 SUMMER NEWSLETTER

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT LAB | UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO

Dear Families, Teachers, and Directors,

I hope everyone is having a wonderful summer! We had so much fun catching up with our fifth and final cohort of children who transitioned into kindergarten this year. We could tell that they learned so many new skills!

We are thrilled to share that we have officially wrapped up the FRIENDS Project! It has been a pleasure working with so many centers, families, and children over the past six years. We are so grateful for all of the parents who signed their children up for our study. Whether you helped to collect saliva samples at home, completed a report, or met with us at a school to collect hair and nail samples, we are grateful for each participant who helped us along the way! We also would like to thank all directors and teachers for welcoming us into your schools, helping us to recruit participants, and completing reports for us. This project could not have happened without all of your support!

In this final newsletter for the FRIENDS Project, you will find our project findings and some lab updates.

Thank you again for all of your support!

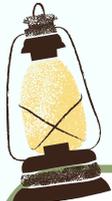
With gratitude,
Dr. Jamie Ostrov
Director, UB Social Development Lab

FRIENDS SUMMARY

Children that Participated: **319**
Preschools that Participated: **20**
Kindergartens that Participated: **58**
Saliva Samples Collected: **1,637**
Nail Samples Collected: **391**
Hair Samples Collected: **182**
Child Interviews Conducted: **663**

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FINDINGS



The FRIENDS project is interested in learning more about how challenges at home and at school affect children’s readiness for kindergarten.

One of our goals is to understand how difficulties at home and with peers influence children’s transition to kindergarten. We found that when children faced challenges both at home and with peers, it impacted their executive functioning—that is, their ability to focus, control impulses, and manage emotions. These skills tended to worsen from preschool to kindergarten when both kinds of difficulties were present. However, if peer problems were low, children’s executive functioning was less affected.

We’re also interested in testing how family and peer problems impact children’s stress response systems, specifically through cortisol, a hormone linked to stress. We measured cortisol in saliva, hair, and nail samples! Our findings showed that children who had both family and peer problems had lower cortisol levels in their saliva, and this “blunting” or reduction in stress levels is a process theorized to occur with high stress exposure to protect the body from the negative effects of stress. Additionally, high parent adversity was linked to a marker of chronic exposure to stress or higher cortisol levels in children’s hair, which was then linked to more behavioral problems in kindergarten; however, this link was only present when children also experienced peer difficulties.

Finally, we tested how early adversity from family and peers during preschool affects children’s school readiness, even when accounting for difficulties children face later on in kindergarten. We found that early behavior problems were linked to more parenting challenges and to worsened executive functioning skills in children in kindergarten. Even after accounting for challenges faced during kindergarten, early risks at home and with peers in preschool continued to affect children’s success in kindergarten.



KEY POINTS

- Children who face challenges both at home and with peers may have more trouble focusing, managing emotions, and controlling impulses when starting kindergarten.
- Stress at home and problems with peers can affect children’s stress hormone levels, which can influence how well they do in school.
- Early behavior and family challenges can impact a child’s readiness for school, so getting support early may make a difference.

LAB UPDATES



- **Gretchen Perhamus** has completed her Clinical Psychology doctoral internship at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) and received her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology. Dr. Perhamus will remain at MUSC for a post-doctoral fellowship.
- **Maggie Azu** completed and defended her 2nd year project, presented a poster at the 2025 SRCD Biennial Meeting, received the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship (GRFP), and received the 2025 Psychological Association of Western New York (PAWNY) Morton D. Brooks Scholarship Award.
- **Emily Hong** received the 2025 Psychological Association of Western New York (PAWNY) Scholarship for Racial/Ethnic Minority Doctoral Students in Clinical Psychology.
- **Katy Gardner** completed and defended her 2nd year project and presented a talk at the 2025 SRCD Biennial Meeting.
- **Hannah Dickinson** presented a poster at the 2025 SRCD Biennial Meeting.
- **Ella Rivet** will be pursuing her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at Western University.
- We also welcomed a new staff member, **Kate Kasoff (Colby College)**, to the lab.
- **Riley Godwin** received the 2025 College of Arts and Sciences Dean's Award for Outstanding Student Graduating from Psychology.
- **Katie Kremer** received a Psi Chi Regional Research Award for her research she presented at the Eastern Psychological Association (EPA) annual conference in New York, NY.
- **Dr. Ostrov** received the University of Minnesota's College of Education and Human Development Distinguished Alumni Award.

RECENT FRIENDS PUBLICATIONS

Perhamus, G. R., Ostrov, J. M., & Murray-Close, D. (in press). *Parenting and peer victimization in the development of callous-unemotional behaviors: Moderation by irritability and basal cortisol*. *Research on Child and Adolescent Psychopathology*.

RESEARCH ASSISTANT GRADUATES

Riley Godwin, Gabriella Markham, Lauren Montagne, Alexa Nanfro and Adriana Santoro all graduated from UB. Riley successfully completed the Department of Psychology Honors Program and will be pursuing her Ph.D in School Psychology at UB. Gabriella will be attending UB's School Psychology M.A./A.C. program this fall, and Lauren will be attending UB's School Counseling M.A. program. Alexa will be attending George Washington University to receive her master's in School Counseling. Adriana will be starting UB's Masters of Social Work program this fall. Riley, Gabriella, and Lauren will continue working with the lab as part-time staff in the fall.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

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Dr. Dianna Murray-Close
(MPI)
Professor, University of Vermont



GRADUATE STUDENTS

Maggie Azu
Katy Gardner
Emily Hong

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

ASSISTANTS

Sarah England
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Maya Maurer
Madi Tewksbury

RESEARCH STAFF

Kate Kasoff
Hannah Dickinson
Kristin Tymchak Carrol



PART-TIME STAFF

Riley Godwin
Gabriella Markham
Lauren Montagne