

# Institute for Early Childhood Well-Being 2024 - 2025 Newsletter

## Message from the Director

Young children in our local communities, the United States, and around the world are currently facing extremely challenging circumstances. This reality makes our work as researchers concerned about young children's well-being more relevant than ever. The Boston University Institute for Early Childhood Well-Being (EC Institute) is actively promoting, conducting, and sharing research that offers new approaches to sustaining children's development, health, and well-being. We achieve this by fostering collaboration among early childhood researchers from various disciplines at BU.

The EC Institute focuses on bringing together researchers and community partners providing opportunities to discuss important topics affecting young children, their families, and the professionals who serve them. With over 100 faculty affiliates from across BU, we design and conduct research that moves beyond individual disciplinary approaches. Our work, known as convergent research, blends knowledge and methods from different fields to address complex problems in practice and policy. Research supported by the EC Institute has made an impact in communities from Massachusetts to Louisiana, as well as internationally in Lesotho, South Africa, Peru and other countries in the Global South.

Over the past four years, we have worked hard to establish the EC Institute as a hub at BU for research on young children's well-being, building capacity and creating innovative, forward-thinking research. We look forward to continuing this work next academic year and growing by adding new research programs and collaborations. I want to end by expressing my sincere gratitude to Dean Penny Bishop at Wheelock College and to our generous donors, whose financial support has made all this work possible. In light of the many challenges currently affecting the well-being of young children, we find hope in the unwavering commitment of BU researchers and our community partners to building a more just and supportive world for the next generation.

Sincerely,

Dr. Dina C. Castro  
Director, BU Institute for Early Childhood Well-Being

### Leadership:

Dr. Dina Castro, Director  
Wheelock College

Dr. Ruth Paris, Associate  
Director for Research  
School of Social Work

### Faculty Governing Board:

Dr. Gaby Cordova-Ramos,  
School of Medicine

Dr. Stephanie Curenton-  
Jolly,  
Wheelock College

Dr. Yoonsook Ha,  
School of Social Work

Dr. Lindsey Locks,  
Sargent College & School  
of Public Health

Dr. Peter Rockers,  
School of Public Health

Dr. Amanda Tarullo,  
College of Arts and  
Sciences

**Program Coordinator:**  
Jelonid Fuentes

**Research Assistant:**  
Yarianis Rivera

# Annual Keynote Lecture



Dr. Alicia Lieberman honored the Institute for Early Childhood Well-Being and the Center on Forced Displacement by speaking at the 2024 Annual Keynote Lecture.

Dr. Lieberman's lecture on *Reality and the American Dream: Embracing Young Immigrant Children and their Families to Create Belonging* gave us insight into the mental health of immigrant children and the importance of repair. This wonderful lecture was followed by our panelists of professionals with expertise in early childhood mental health and immigrant children including Dr. Carmen Rosa Noroña, Anat Weisenfreund, and Danielle de la Fuente.

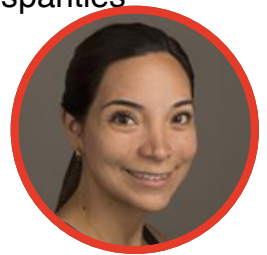
## Lesotho Conference



On November 2024, the Institute for Early Childhood Well-Being represented by Dr. Dina Castro, Dr. Ruth Paris, and Dr. Mihoko Maru, in collaboration with the Lesotho Boston Health Alliance (LeBoHA) and the Network of Early Childhood Development of Lesotho (NECDOL) helped sponsor and participated in the Southern Africa 2024 Regional Early Childhood Development and Education Conference in Maseru, Lesotho. This conference helped the Institute learn more about the early childhood needs in Lesotho and move towards the Lesotho Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Well-Being.

## Faculty Highlight

Dr. Erika Cordova Ramos investigates multi-level drivers of racial, ethnic, and linguistic disparities in evidence-based care practices, including safe sleep, breastfeeding, skin-to-skin, and family-centered care in the preterm infant population. Current projects include national, state, and local studies. National projects include a hybrid effectiveness-implementation study examining social determinants of health screening and referral in the NICU setting, and a randomized controlled trial to examine the effect of cash transfers during the NICU hospitalization on maternal and infant health outcomes. State and local projects focus on investigating equity-focused implementation strategies to integrate social care innovations into a safety-net NICU context, including a breastfeeding peer counseling/social needs navigation program and a transportation assistance program in the NICU.



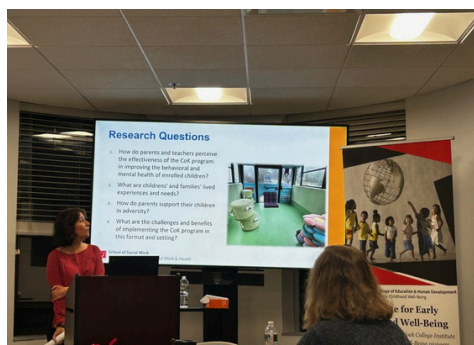
Three of Dr. Cordova Ramos' current projects include:

1. Multi-level determinants of receipt of community resources following social needs screening and referral in the NICU (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation)
2. Understanding the impact of racism on neonatal care quality (March of Dimes)
3. Impact of a transportation program on maternal caregiving among low-income mothers of premature infants in the neonatal intensive care unit (Alpert Grant Endowment)

# Research in Progress



Our monthly Research in Progress meetings are an opportunity to engage early childhood researchers in cross-disciplinary conversations about their ongoing research and its impact in the community. This year we had meetings in September, November, February, and April.



In the Fall Semester, we focused on learning more about the progress of University-Community Partnership awards. There were presentations on intervention for mothers with opioid disorders, providing low-income parents tools to support child development, understanding health consequences of non-participation in WIC, reducing health inequities, and Vietnamese families' transition from early intervention to public schools. The presenters included Dr. Katherine Standish, Dr. Detris Adelabu, Dr. Linda Banks-Santilli, Dr. Simone Gill, Dr. Zach Rossetti, Chau Nguyen, Dr. Ana Población, and Dr. Cristina Gago.



In the Spring semester, we presented local and global research, with a focus on Africa. The local topics that were covered were the role of explanations in early STEM learning by observing parents in the Museum of Science, and the evaluation of the socio-emotional learning of asylum-seeking children in Massachusetts. The global research with a focus on Africa touched on a partnership with the University of Ghana to create a digital intervention for pregnant and post-partum women; the impact of early institutional enrolment on early childhood development of children of factory workers in Lesotho; and the creation of the Lesotho Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Well-Being. The presenters were Dr. Kathleen Corriveau, Dr. Emilia Bianco, Dr. Lindsey Locks, Dr. Dina Castro, Dr. Ruth Paris, and Shoeshoe Mofokeng.

# Research Connections Event



This Spring, we celebrated our second annual Early Childhood Well-Being Research Connections Event! This event gifted a space for Boston University researchers from all disciplines focused on young children to network, share ideas, and jump-start collaborations. The flash talks included Massachusetts-focused topics of harnessing mobility in infants with motor delays, mental health workforce, music activities, and geography. The flash talk speakers were Dr. Dolores Acevedo-Garcia, Dept. of Human Behavior, Research & Policy; Dr. Jana Iverson, Dept. of Physical Therapy & Athletic Training; Dr. Dina Castro, Dept. of Teaching & Learning; Dr. Diana Dansereau, Dept. Music Education; Dr. Tara Mandalaywala, Dept. of Psychological & Brain Sciences; and Dr. Alicia Mendez, Dept. of Macro Practice.

Dept. of Human Behavior, Research & Policy; Dr. Jana Iverson, Dept. of Physical Therapy & Athletic Training; Dr. Dina Castro, Dept. of Teaching & Learning; Dr. Diana Dansereau, Dept. Music Education; Dr. Tara Mandalaywala, Dept. of Psychological & Brain Sciences; and Dr. Alicia Mendez, Dept. of Macro Practice.

