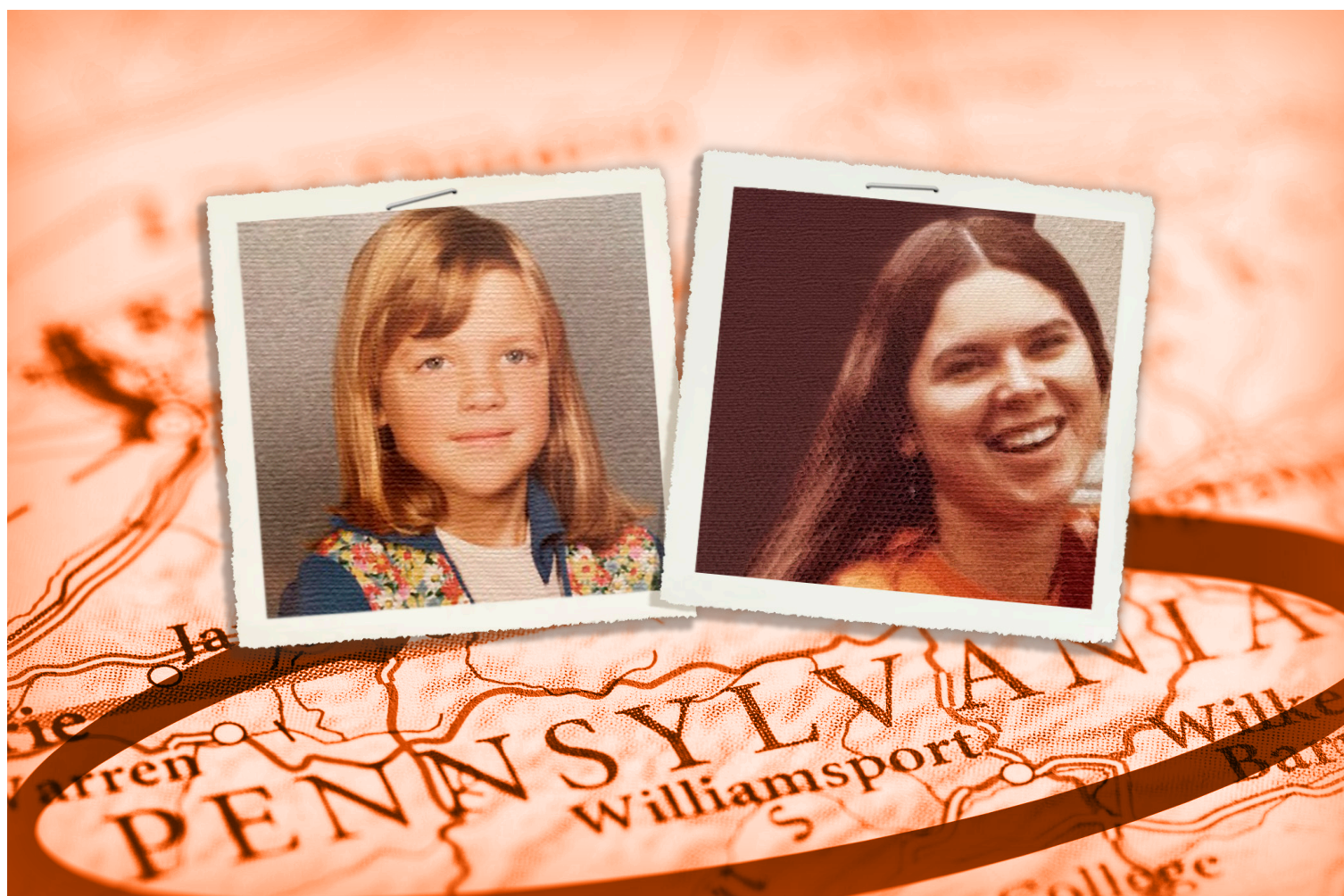


Research/Action

Coming Full Circle at WCW: Linda Williams and Kate Price



Featuring:

Youth and AI: Applying Lessons Learned from Social Media • Collaboration, Not Competition, is Key for the Future of Early Childhood Policy Research • New Digs for WCW's Next Chapter

Shaping a
Better World
through
Research
& Action

**Wellesley
Centers for
Women**

Research \ Action Report

annual report 2025

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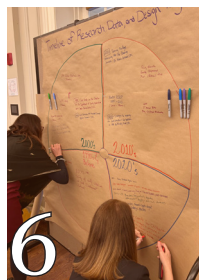
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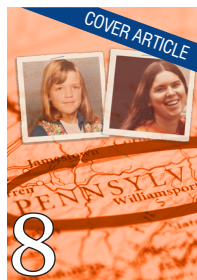
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The Wellesley Centers
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From the Executive Director

A world that
is good for
women is good
for everyone.™

The Wellesley Centers for Women is an academic research and action institute at Wellesley College that is focused on women and gender and driven by social change. Our mission is to advance gender equality, social justice, and human wellbeing through high-quality research, theory, and action programs.

This has been a season of change for the Wellesley Centers for Women (WCW). In February, after more than 12 years of dedicated service as executive director, **Layli Maparyan** accepted the opportunity to serve as President of the University of Liberia. Since then, I have been honored to serve as interim executive director, and will continue to do so until the search for a new director has been completed.

In July, WCW moved from its longtime headquarters at Cheever House to a newly refurbished Simpson Cottage on the Wellesley College main campus. Please check out the photos of this beautiful space on the following pages of this *Research & Action Report*, and stop in and visit us!

It continues to be a very challenging time for federal and foundation grant funding. But our work goes on, as it always has, and we are proud to update you on some of our most exciting and impactful projects.

We're working on several important projects here in Massachusetts: Wendy Wagner Robeson and her colleagues are developing a statewide early childhood policy research collaborative, which will facilitate researchers working together to maximize their effectiveness. And the National Institute on Out-of-School Time and its partners, in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, are developing a professional apprenticeship program for OST educators in Massachusetts.

We're also having an impact across the country and beyond: **Jennifer M. Grossman**

completed a very successful pilot of Connected Dads, Healthy Teens, an online program she developed to help fathers talk to their teens about sex and relationships.

Katherine R. Buchholz is implementing an evidence-based PTSD treatment in college counseling centers across the U.S. **Sari Pekkala Kerr** is embarking on two projects that will help us better understand the effects of state minimum wage increases. And **Linda Charmaraman** helps alleviate our concerns about youth and AI—and reminds us to apply the lessons we've already learned from social media.

We've hosted a number of exciting events this past year, including two featuring our international scholars-in-residence, **Hauwa Ibrahim** and **Pashtana Durrani**. We also wanted to introduce you to the newest members of our research staff, **Ben Berners-Lee**, **J. Maya Hernandez**, and **Nyasha Karimakwenda**.

Finally, as our 50th anniversary year comes to a close, **Linda M. Williams** and **Kate Price** look back on their respective life journeys—which ultimately led them both to WCW, where they are working together to protect children.

We are endlessly grateful to you for going with us on this journey of shaping a better world through research and action. ▀



Georgia Hall, Ph.D.
Interim Executive Director

New Digs for WCW's Next Chapter



Photo: Jared Stanley

After a half century based at Cheever House, WCW moved to Simpson Cottage on the main Wellesley College campus this past summer.

One of the oldest buildings on campus, Simpson Cottage is an 1881 Queen Anne-style structure originally built as housing for “girls in delicate health, who were not fitted to endure the wear and tear of life in a large building,” according to an 1891 publication.

Long after these students had graduated, the building became the home of the Stone Center. In 1981, the Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies was founded with a generous grant from Grace W. and Robert S. Stone. The center, first led by Jean Baker Miller, M.D., author of the groundbreaking book, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, became the origin of Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT), recognized by the American Psychological Association’s *Theories of Psychotherapy Series* as ‘one of the 10 most important psychological theories today.’ The Stone Center joined with the Center for Research on

Women in 1995 to become a single organization: the Wellesley Centers for Women.

In recent years, Simpson Cottage housed Wellesley College’s counseling services and was adjacent to health services. Both have now moved into a new building next door, while Simpson Cottage received new paint, carpet, furniture, and other upgrades. (The National Institute on Out-of-School Time continues to be located at Waban House.)

WCW researchers and staff are enjoying their bright new workspace and happy to be geographically closer to students and colleagues at the College. Students are excited to have a shorter walk to their jobs and internships at WCW. The result is a buzzing, genial atmosphere where groundbreaking research and action are happening every day.



A selection of the new workspaces and common areas at Simpson Cottage. Spot some of the artwork brought over from Cheever House, as well as historic displays from our 50th anniversary celebration.



Pilot Program Helps Fathers Talk to Their Teens About Sex and Relationships

“**T**he best way I could describe it was a modern sex ed. It’s like what sex ed should probably be, but very likely isn’t. It’s like an ideal if you had to say what’s all the things you want to cover that a teenager should know so that they are prepared for whatever is going to come up.”

That’s feedback from one of the fathers who participated in Connected Dads, Healthy Teens, a pilot program developed by Senior Research Scientist **Jennifer M. Grossman**, Ph.D., to help fathers talk to their teens about sex and relationships. This equivalent of a five-star review is thanks to years of hard work by Grossman and her team to figure out what kind of support fathers need in order to have these conversations with their teens, and then design a program to provide that support.

“Research shows that when fathers talk to their teens about sex, it can positively influence teens’ sexual health,” said Grossman, who leads WCW’s Family, Sexuality, and Communication research. “Most programs supporting these kinds of conversations are directed at mothers, but research shows that fathers want guidance tailored to them.”

She and her team—Research Associate **Michelle Sullivan**, Ph.D., former Research Associate **Amanda Richer**, M.A., and high school and Wellesley College students—created the Connected Dads, Healthy Teens program, whose goal is to provide fathers and teens with information, tools, and practice to support healthy communication and decision-making about sex and relationships. It is a four-week online program that involves animated online lessons for fathers and teens, interactive activities for fathers and teens, and an online peer support group for fathers.

Developed with the help of an advisory board made up of fathers and teens, the program covers topics including healthy and unhealthy relationships, consent and readiness for sex, and sexual risk and protection. During the pilot this past year, 50 pairs of fathers and teens tried out the program and shared their feedback.

Many fathers described having more frequent conversations about sex and relationships and better conversations with their teens than they had in the past. And they saw their teens as more receptive and willing to talk—and more trusting of their fathers to listen without judgment on these topics. Unexpectedly, some fathers described a growing closeness and connection that extended beyond conversations about sex and relationships.

As one participant said, “I really saw changes in the way I communicate with my kid and kind of how intimate we could talk about things, like deep things we would not have talked about before.”

“We were pleasantly surprised to find that the skills the fathers learned could be applied to all kinds of conversations,” said Grossman. “It turns out that this framework may be valuable for other programs that support father-teen communication about difficult topics, like substance abuse and mental health.”

The next steps for Grossman and her team are to apply for funding to expand families’ access to the program, evaluate its effectiveness, and adapt the program to fit different types of families, like LGBTQ+ teens and their fathers. ■

This study received funding from grant 1R21HD109744-01A1 from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.



One of the program’s online lessons for fathers and teens.

Youth and AI: Applying Lessons Learned from Social Media

Senior Research Scientist **Linda Charmaraman**, Ph.D., has spent years studying social media's effects on youth, and she is often asked for her thoughts on this controversial subject. There are certain things she says over and over again: "Social media is not inherently good or bad. Its effects likely depend on what teens do and see online, their preexisting strengths or vulnerabilities, and the contexts in which they grow up."

One of the ways she puts this approach into action is through her Youth, Media & Wellbeing Research Lab's annual digital wellbeing workshops. Since 2019, Charmaraman and her team of Wellesley College students and local teens have offered summer workshops that teach middle schoolers how social media algorithms work and give them the opportunity to imagine and design more positive online communities of their own.

This year, the workshops focused on AI, and participants created their own chatbot companions to boost teen self-esteem. In a hands-on workshop activity, they learned how to create parameters on their chatbots and then tested vulnerabilities of the systems they created. In the process, they got a peek behind the curtain of how AI works. Program evaluations highlighted youth feeling more like "scientists" and STEM innovators by the end of the program—empowering young girls to feel included in STEM fields that often do not include their voices and perspectives.

"Giving youth agency is our goal," said Charmaraman. "They're curious and smart and can understand these technologies as well as the adults around them. So why not empower them with information rather than simply tell them to stay away?"

The APA advisory includes "Four ways parents can help teens use AI safely," which all involve the method Charmaraman advises most often: conversation between parents and their teens. The metaphor she uses when talking about social media also applies here.

"When your teen sits in the driver's seat of a car for the first time, you don't toss them the keys and say 'good luck out there,'" said Charmaraman. "You sit next to them and help them learn the rules of the road. You talk through tricky situations. You give them the tools to one day drive on their own. We should be doing the same with AI." ■



The Wellesley College students who helped run the Youth, Media & Wellbeing Research Lab's 2025 digital wellbeing workshops.

As the conversation has shifted to artificial intelligence (AI) and its effects on youth, Charmaraman has found that if you replace "social media" with "AI," the statement still holds true. The American Psychological Association (APA) put it this way in its recent advisory (which Charmaraman contributed to):

"The effects of AI on adolescent development are nuanced and complex; AI is not all 'good' or 'bad.' Consideration of the impacts of AI should include factors such as the specific application of AI, design features of applications, data uses to train AI systems, and the context of the use of these technologies."

So given the complexities involved, how should we approach the issue of youth using AI? Charmaraman believes it should be similar to the way she approaches social media: empower youth rather than just try to protect them.

[Read more from the APA's advisory on AI and adolescent wellbeing:](#)

[wcwonline.org/HealthAdvisory](https://www.apa.org/HealthAdvisory)

Commentary

by Wendy Wagner Robeson, Ed.D., Kimberly D. Lucas, Ph.D., Kyle DeMeo Cook, Ph.D.

Collaboration, Not Competition, is Key for the Future of Early Childhood Policy Research

As Massachusetts reels from losing millions of federal research dollars, it's easy for us as research scientists to lose hope. It's also easy to believe that with dwindling resources, we live in an even more dog-eat-dog world in which we must fight for the remaining grants and awards. But despite the challenges we are facing, we can choose to see this as a season of possibility—full of potential new ways to carry out our work that involve more collaboration, more partnership, and less competition.

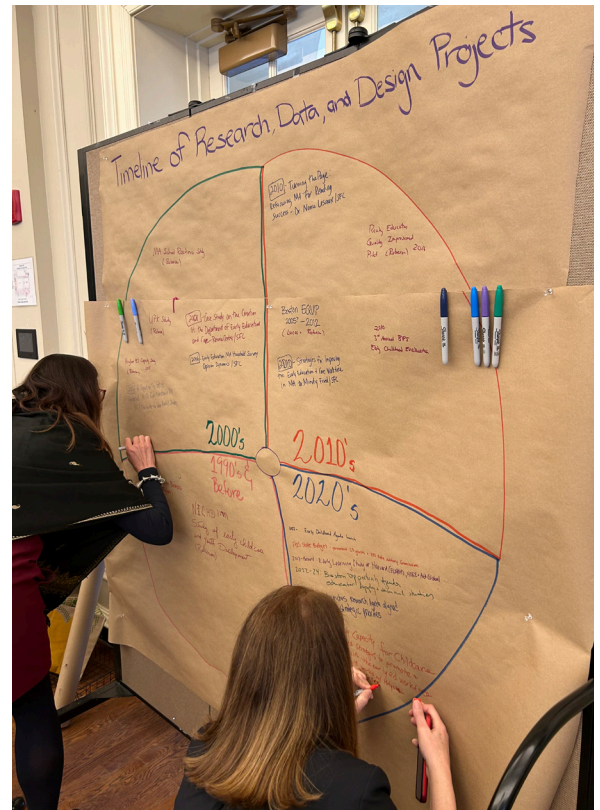
Of course, researchers have long worked with colleagues and shared their findings with those in their field. But this particular moment—in which scientific research is under attack from the federal administration—calls for much deeper collaboration: researchers must come together within, across, and even beyond our fields to determine what the real research questions are, identify whose skills are best suited to answer these questions, and design projects that produce data and information that our communities and policymakers can act upon.

We are ready to meet the moment: We are a group of early childhood policy researchers who are currently developing a statewide early childhood policy research collaborative in Massachusetts. We believe in a broad definition of “researcher”: included in our ranks are traditional academics; research scientists from think

tanks; community-based measurement, evaluation, and learning professionals; government analysts; and participatory action practitioners from the field.

We recently held the first
Massachusetts Early
Childhood Policy Research

Summit, at which we, alongside policymakers, advocates, funders, students, and practitioners, committed to working in coordination with each other. Together, we had over 100 participants and filled an entire day



A crowd-sourced chart of research, data, and design projects created at the Massachusetts Early Childhood Policy Research Summit in April 2025.

with discussion about the role of research, data, design, and collaboration in pushing our field forward. In her opening remarks, Rep. Alice Peisch noted her surprise at just how many researchers of all kinds want to work toward building a more collaborative network across the Commonwealth; those in the room agreed—we even surprised ourselves.

What does a research collaborative mean in practice? It means an annual summit and regular meetings of our leadership team, as well as several working groups focused on specific topics and methods of engaging the field. We decide as a group on our goals, mission, and values, taking into consideration the perspectives of researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and others

“When funding opportunities are limited—and when the problems we aim to address persist—we can’t waste time and money unnecessarily replicating each other’s work.”



Attendees and posters at the Massachusetts Early Childhood Policy Research Summit in April 2025.

across the field. We create a website and database of resources to keep our members connected. And, we think collectively about which projects to pursue, consider which of us is best positioned to pursue them, and strategize on how to get it all done and into the hands of those who can take action to support young children, families, and early educators across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

We are not the first to pursue this model. Similar early childhood policy research collaboratives exist in New York City, Chicago, New Hampshire and several other cities and states. In addition, the National Network of Education Research-Practice Partnerships (NNERPP) is a professional learning community that supports partnerships between researchers and education

agencies in order to improve the relationships between research, policy, and practice. These partnerships are considered “a promising strategy for producing more relevant research, improving the use of research evidence in decision making, and engaging both researchers and practitioners to tackle problems of practice.” We agree that this is a promising strategy. It is far more effective for us to approach policymakers as a collaborative of more than 100 members than it is for us to approach them as individual researchers or even as individual institutions.

Does this kind of collaboration sound too good to be true? Certainly, there are challenges to working collaboratively in this way, especially when you’re forming partnerships across research institutions. People have to be willing to move out of

their silos and out of the mindset of competition, which most of us have been in our entire careers as we competed against each other for grants, projects, and awards. Another challenge is simply finding the time to collaborate—to meet with each other, to build trusting relationships, and to work through difficult conversations.

But despite these challenges, we all understand that when funding opportunities are limited—and when the problems we aim to address persist—we can’t waste time and money unnecessarily replicating each other’s work or competing for the benefit of our individual institutions. This summer, we expanded our leadership team and supported a working group to keep up the momentum and ensure that collaboration is built into the design of our work together; we were 25 individuals representing 19 colleges and universities, research firms, government agencies, and direct service organizations. We’re excited to continue our work into next year—and to welcome many more researchers, data analysts, and designers of all walks to our 2026 summit.

In order to continue work that can positively impact children, families, and communities in Massachusetts, we must work together. We are ready. ■



- Wendy Wagner Robeson, Ed.D.**, Senior Research Scientist
Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley College
- Kimberly Lucas, Ph.D.**, Professor of the Practice in Public Policy and Economic Justice
School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs, Northeastern University
- Kyle DeMeo Cook, Ph.D.**, Clinical Assistant Professor
Wheelock College of Education and Human Development, Boston University

Coming Full Circle at WCW: Linda Williams and Kate Price

Senior Research Scientist **Linda M. Williams**, Ph.D., and Associate Research Scientist **Kate Price**, Ph.D., discuss how their paths have crossed—or almost crossed—over the course of their lives, ultimately leading to their research collaboration at WCW.

Content warning: This article discusses sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Kate, you were a child living in rural Pennsylvania in the early 1970s. Give us a snapshot of what your life was like and what you were enduring.

Every day was just survival, particularly the first 12 years of my life when my father was living in our home. I can still see his truck rounding the corner when he came home from work. He was physically and sexually abusing me. And also, I remember at the time being drugged and lifted out of bed in the middle of the night, and I didn't quite understand what was happening. Through research—I was going to be a sociologist no matter what happened to me—I was able to put together over the course of decades that my father was trafficking me. He was taking me to a rest area on a highway near our home in northern Appalachia, and sometimes he was also taking me to parties and to an adult movie theater.

Linda, you were two-and-a-half hours away at the University of Pennsylvania during this time. Tell us what you were working on and what you were learning about child sexual abuse.

I was in my mid-20s, finishing up my Ph.D. in sociology. I was directing research on the social and psychological consequences of rape and sexual assault, and we were interviewing victims brought in by the police to a huge city hospital. We went into it assuming that the women had been raped by men who were mostly strangers, people

they didn't know jumping out at them as they walked down the street. But what we found, of course, was that sexual assault usually happened at the hands of people the women knew.

We were also finding that many reports of sexual assault—many more than we ever expected—involved young children and adolescents. We were learning a lot about what had happened and how kids were affected and who was doing it—very often family members, as was the case with Kate. This was an eye-opener, even to people who worked in the field. I did a TV interview at the time, and the reporter asked me to estimate the number of child sexual abuse cases in the country as a whole. I came up with a number that was so low, something like 2,500 cases. We now know that it's many tens of thousands of cases reported every year, and most cases are still unreported.

Years later in my research, I found that more than a third of the child sexual abuse survivors I interviewed did not appear to recall the abuse that happened to them in childhood. This was some of the first scientific evidence of buried memories, as Kate had experienced.

Kate, how did you decide you could be both a survivor and a researcher? Why is WCW the right place for you?

I did my first public speaking engagement as a survivor a few months after I finished



Kate Price as a child in Pennsylvania in the 1970s.

my master's degree in 2005. And the practitioners in the room—social workers, law enforcement officers—found what I had to say interesting and helpful, and they told me that I was talking about research and theoretical concepts in plain language, in a way that could be applied to the systems they worked in.

And so, I sat down with my husband and my therapist and said: Would it be damaging for me to continue to do this work, or is it a way I can really contribute? Because it does feel like a calling. And after a lot of thought and conversations, I decided I could do it and I wanted to do it.



Linda Williams as a Ph.D. student at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1970s.

When I talk about WCW, my face lights up. I truly believe this is one of the very few places in the world that I could be doing the work that I'm doing, because we are so focused on research and action. We are doing the research so that we can influence policy, practice, and theory. I really want to be able to make change.

Linda, what is special to you about WCW and about working with a survivor like Kate?

For me, WCW is a home for scientific research that's going to reach others and hopefully make a difference. I never wanted my work on sexual violence simply to be published and then sit on a shelf. Since my research in Pennsylvania so many years ago, I have focused on understanding more about the causes and consequences of sexual violence and received funding to learn more about topics with little prior scientific study. WCW has provided an environment where this work can be done alongside researchers who collaborate closely with communities, practitioners, and policymakers. We have had to adapt and even re-invent some methodologies—always with the goal of conducting sound research and learning from survivors while protecting their privacy.

So when WCW attracts Kate, a survivor who is a resolute and highly qualified social science researcher, then our work can have a remarkable impact. Survivors' voices have been and are critical to this work. Much in this field that has changed for the better came from the voices of survivors

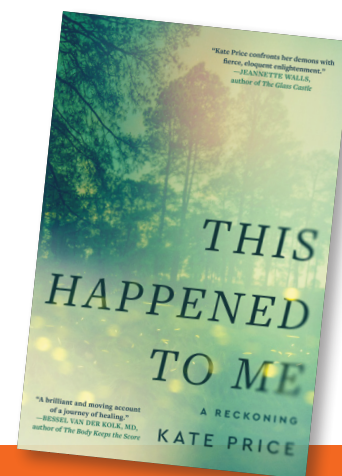
helping us understand how to improve policing and hospital response, psychology and therapy.

Kate, you and Linda are pursuing the first national study on familial commercial sexual exploitation of children. What is it like to come full circle and work together?

I always think of it as alignment. I'm not surprised that we're working together. Even when I was a little kid, and I didn't quite understand what was happening to me, and it was awful, I always had this sense that there were people out there who cared. Being able to put a face to that sense and knowing Linda and so many other people who've been doing this work for a very long time—I'm just incredibly honored to stand by her. Her research laid the foundation and made it possible for me to do the work I'm doing now. ■



Price's memoir *This Happened to Me: A Reckoning* was published in August.



Senior Research Scientist **Linda M. Williams, Ph.D.**, and Associate Research Scientist **Kate Price, Ph.D.**, are members of WCW's Justice and Gender-Based Violence Research Initiative.

Leading Scholars and Practitioners Unite to Harness Mothers' Soft Power for Peace

On October 3-5, 2025, 120 leading scholars and practitioners came together for the colloquium Mothers Without Borders: The Phenomenology of Mothers' Soft Power in Peace Building.

The event, convened by Senior International Scholar-in-Residence **Hauwa Ibrahim, J.D., S.J.D., M.L.**, took place at Wellesley College, Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

"Today is only the start of something larger," said Senior Research Scientist **Wendy Wagner Robeson, Ed.D.**, who helped plan the colloquium, during her welcome remarks. "For some it will be the spark, and for others it will be a renewed spark to bring change and peace to our world."

Through dialogue, art, and music, the colloquium explored how women can mobilize their homes and communities, diffuse tensions, build trust, and strengthen participation in decision-making processes, while tackling gender-based violence, stereotypes, and threats. Aiming to spotlight mothers and women as actors in peace-building and positive social change, Mothers Without Borders seeks to spark a continued global movement for peace.

"Mothers understand that shaping a better world starts with each of us," said **Susan McGee Bailey, Ph.D.**, executive director of WCW from 1985-2010, during her keynote address. "We can't change everything quickly, but we can change everything...By believing in ourselves and our vision, we can initiate major changes, not only in our own homes, but throughout the world."

The colloquium was attended by world-class leaders, visionaries, and change-makers, including Her Royal Highness, Dr. Nahla Al-Qassimi; Emir of Zazzau, Ambassador Ahmed Nuhu Bamalli; Hon. MEP Cecilia Strada and Hon.



Hauwa Ibrahim (right) speaks with Her Royal Highness, Nahla Al-Qassimi at the colloquium Mothers Without Borders: The Phenomenology of Mothers' Soft Power in Peace Building.

MEP Alexandra Moretti, members of the European Parliament; Lt. Gen. Fernando Gancotti; peace advocates Prof. Safiya Umoja Noble and Prof. Sonja Lokar; Dr. Ranjiv Chopra; and the Nigerian Minister of Women's Affairs, Hon. Imaan Ibrahim-Suliman.

"A mother's love is the most borderless thing on Earth," said Her Royal Highness, Nahla Al-Qassimi, Ph.D., associate professor, dean of students, and chair of the Women Empowerment Council at Ajman University in the United Arab Emirates, during her keynote address. "Mothers Without Borders reminds us that when mothers connect, the world becomes kinder, brighter, and stronger."

The first day of the colloquium concluded with Ibrahim delivering the 2025 Kenner Lecture, sponsored by the Madeleine Korbelt Albright Institute for Global Affairs at Wellesley College. Speaking on the topic of "leadership in a fragmented world," Ibrahim talked about strength, and how it is not at odds with softness.

"Our strength is right inside of us, and as mothers we carry even greater strength," she said. "Inside of each of us, there is a deep dignity—that we are human. If there is anything you remember in our long conversation today, let it be our humanity." ■

Hauwa Ibrahim gives the 2025 Kenner Lecture, sponsored by the Madeleine Korbelt Albright Institute for Global Affairs at Wellesley College.



Pashtana Durrani Travels the Globe on Behalf of Afghan Girls

In 2025, International Scholar-in-Residence **Pashtana Durrani**, M.Ed., traveled to Japan, Thailand, Qatar, and Rwanda. But no matter where in the world she is, her mind is with the girls of Afghanistan.

Durrani is an Afghan human rights activist, education advocate, and the founder of LEARN Afghan, a grass-roots organization providing education and healthcare to girls through innovative offline platforms. She is on a mission to educate as many girls as possible in Afghanistan, a country where they are not allowed to attend school beyond 6th grade.

“Because of WCW, LEARN is one of the largest organizations impacting girls and women in Afghanistan. We are impacting millions of people that UN agencies cannot.”

“This is what running a school in Afghanistan is right now: You have to do it underground—in someone’s basement, in backyards,” said Durrani at an event hosted by WCW in November called “Her Right to Learn: Educating Girls

in Afghanistan.” “I do this work from the safety of WCW and Wellesley, but the teachers and students in Afghanistan show up physically to these spaces every day. These women are making it possible.”

In conversation with international development economist and LEARN board member Courtenay Cabot Venton, MSc, Durrani spoke about her father’s dedication to educating his daughters, how she was inspired to found LEARN, and her dreams for the future of the organization. With the closure of USAID programs and reduction in international funding in the education sector, she has been traveling the world, meeting with governments, philanthropic organizations, and academic institutions to build alliances that champion long-term investment in girls’ education in Afghanistan. WCW has provided her a home base.

“I found my sacred spiritual home at WCW,” she said. “Because of WCW, LEARN is one of the largest organizations impacting girls and women in Afghanistan. We are impacting millions of people that UN agencies cannot.”

LEARN’s impact is undeniable. Since its founding in 2018, it has reached 6 million learners via radio programs, 2 million through SIM card-based learning initiatives, and 5,300 girls in person across 24 provinces of Afghanistan. Behind the numbers are individual lives forever changed by access to education, which offers something invaluable: hope.

“When I am a mother, and when I have a daughter, I want to tell her I did my best so girls her age could go to school in my country,” said Durrani. “I want to do that for my mother, my father, and for the girls in Afghanistan right now.” ■

Watch a recording of the event on our website at wcwonline.org/HerRighttoLearn



Pashtana Durrani (left) speaks with Courtenay Cabot Venton at the event “Her Right to Learn: Educating Girls in Afghanistan.”

Durrani was recently honored with the Ginetta Sagan Award, given by Amnesty International USA. The award recognizes and assists women who are working to protect the liberty and lives of women and children in areas where human rights violations are widespread. It is named after Ginetta Sagan, former honorary chair of the board of directors of Amnesty International USA, who devoted her life to defending the rights of those who were unfairly persecuted by repressive governments.

Meet the Newest Members of WCW



Ben Berners-Lee

Ben Berners-Lee, Ph.D., is a post-doctoral research scientist at the National Institute on Out-of-School Time. He joined WCW as a research associate in June 2023 and was promoted to postdoc in 2024 after he received his Ph.D.

Tell us about your professional background and how you learned about WCW.

My background is in studying how people communicate about their thought processes and psychological wellbeing, and the forms of human communication that follow uptake of new technologies in these areas. My Ph.D. is from an interdisciplinary program in communication and cognitive science. There, I studied how psychiatrists and data scientists communicate with each other and with participants as they develop a mental health treatment that uses machine learning. I first learned of WCW when I learned about Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT), which was developed at the Stone Center.

What are you currently working on?

My current work includes qualitative research to better understand how cognitive, social, and emotional skills manifest in observable activities. I use these findings to develop and improve questionnaires we administer to youth that participate in academic, social, and emotional learning programs. I also work with community organizations and school districts in Massachusetts to develop data-driven systems to continuously improve after-school and summer programming and bring about social and emotional learning and other youth development outcomes.

Why is WCW the place for you and your work?

At WCW I am surrounded by scholars with expertise on the questions that are central to my work. Broadly, the centers are known for research into how people can be understood not just as individuals, but also in terms of the other people, communities, and organizations that they relate to. It is an ideal place to take a feminist perspective on how human communication changes with the advent of new technologies—one that challenges the dichotomy between cold, calculating technical systems on one hand, and intuitive, human interactions on the other. It is also a historic home for groundbreaking research on youth development, out-of-school time, and the important role these systems play in the lives of women.



J. Maya Hernandez

J. Maya Hernandez, Ph.D., is a postdoctoral research scientist in the Youth, Media & Wellbeing Research Lab. She joined WCW in January 2025.

Tell us about your professional background and how you learned about WCW.

My work has always centered around youth mental health, and I actually started my research journey at Boston Children's Hospital in 2014 as a clinical research intern. Since then, I've studied pediatric mood disorders and chronic pain, and then shifted to an in-depth understanding of adolescence in the context of the digital age. I completed my Ph.D. in 2023 from University of California, Irvine and took a little break from academia to chase another passion in nonprofit; however, I found my way back to WCW as a postdoc with a longtime mentor, Dr. Linda Charmaraman.

I say I found my way back because I actually learned about WCW through a little stroke of luck. During my first year of grad school, I was curious to see what other researchers across the country were focusing on in the field of adolescence in the digital age. I stumbled upon Dr. Charmaraman's work, and decided to take a shot in the dark to email her to see if she would be willing to chat with me. One call later, our collaboration began, the rest is history, and I have since been continuously inspired by her work and WCW.

What are you currently working on?

At the Youth, Media & Wellbeing Research Lab... What are we not working on?! But in all seriousness, I'm currently focused on a few projects in depth, including preparing to lead the Youth Advisory Board for our Digital Wellbeing Workshops, which are going into their 8th year; managing and analyzing several datasets, including a four-year analysis of social media behaviors and social anxiety among adolescents; exploring various parent behaviors within our Media and Identity Election Study with our amazing students in the lab; and lots of grant writing.

Why is WCW the place for you and your work?

WCW is a unicorn for research in so many ways. The way it embraces the interdisciplinary nature of creating social change through top-tier research is something that aligns so deeply with my research orientation and beliefs. Not only does WCW value actionable research, it isn't afraid to transcend borders to create meaningful connections with communities around the world to achieve the goal of social change, with an emphasis on women, girls, and families. My and the lab's work focuses on uplifting the voices of youth who are historically underrepresented in traditional academic research, and WCW does not shy away from celebrating this. This is why I feel grateful and privileged to be a part of the WCW community.

Meet the Newest Members of WCW (*continued*)



Nyasha Karimakwenda

Nyasha Karimakwenda, Ph.D., is an associate research scientist in the Justice and Gender-Based Violence Research Initiative. She joined WCW in January 2025.

Tell us about your professional background and how you learned about WCW.

I'm a feminist researcher of gender-based violence in African contexts, and entered the world of research as a second career, beginning over 15 years ago. Over this time, I have worked independently and with academic research institutions, nonprofit organizations, and government bodies to examine different facets of gender-based violence, including socio-cultural drivers of violence, access to justice, and women's help-seeking experiences.

I came to WCW after returning to the United States from South Africa, where I had lived and studied for over six years. For a particular project, I was researching rape case attrition in African countries and came across America-focused research conducted by the Justice and Gender-Based Violence Research Initiative at WCW. This is how I learned about the Centers' work on gender-based violence, and reached out to them. In addition, I am a proud Wellesley College alumna and knew of WCW during my time here.

What are you currently working on?

I am supporting the development of a project to address gender-based violence in higher education institutions in Africa. This project has encouraged me to stretch my brain in new ways as it involves extensive program development planning and multi-partner collaborations. I am also continuing my work on marital rape, which is a type of intimate partner violence that I have studied closely. I aspire to do more empirical work in South Africa on forms of cultural practice called "ukuthwala" that involve abduction for purpose of marriage, and are sometimes characterized by rape and other abuses.

Why is WCW the place for you and your work?

WCW is a rare gem of a community that I am honored to be part of. It is women centered and therefore coincides well with my feminist work. It also applies research to action. I truly believe that research should not sit in a bubble or ivory tower, but should be used to change lives for the better, which is what WCW is doing. I am also glad that WCW has done work focused on Africa and is continuing to expand in this direction. This allows me to stay connected to the research areas that I am passionate about, and to help foster more linkages with the African continent. ■

Apprenticeships in Out-of-School Time Programs: NIOST is Helping to Create More Pathways into the Field

When you think of an apprenticeship, you might think of someone who is training to become a plumber or a carpenter. But apprenticeships can be a valuable option in another field: out-of-school time (OST).

Apprenticeships are industry-driven career pathways that combine classroom instruction, paid on-the-job training, and mentorship, and typically lead to a nationally recognized credential or degree. For individuals, apprenticeships can be an affordable alternative pathway into the OST field that allows them to “earn while they learn.” For employers, apprenticeships strengthen their workforce, support staff retention, and build workforce equity, as well as create leadership opportunities for experienced staff who serve as mentors.

“The National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) has done some work around apprenticeships before,” said NIOST Director **Georgia Hall**, Ph.D. “For example, through our work with the former National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment (NCASE), we have supported states that were looking to create and pilot OST apprenticeships. But this past year, we’ve had the opportunity to really dive in, in our home state.”

In 2025, NIOST became involved in a statewide initiative led by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care—along with partners including For Kids Only Afterschool, the United

Way of Massachusetts Bay, and the Institute for Education and Professional Development, Inc.—to develop a professional apprenticeship program for OST educators in Massachusetts. As a first step, NIOST and its partners are conducting statewide data gathering. Surveys, focus groups,



and interviews with OST program staff and directors, as well as field leaders, will inform the development of the apprenticeship program and an accompanying credential.

Senior Research Scientist **Wendy Wagner Robeson**, Ed.D., who leads WCW’s Work, Families & Children research, is also involved in the project. Robeson studies the field of early childhood education, where apprenticeships have become increasingly common in the last decade. So bringing in her expertise made sense and leveraged NIOST and WCW’s in-house strengths.

The ultimate goals are to develop a professional apprenticeship pathway informed by the field and to build a sustainable model that supports career entry and advancement in OST. The beneficiaries will be not only OST programs and staff, but the children and families they serve.

“OST programs need staff members, and they particularly need staff members from their own communities,” said Hall. “Having a sustainable, equitable workforce makes all the difference for the children and families in those programs.” ▀



Research Scientist Brings PTSD Treatment to College Campuses

Estimates indicate that 67-84% of college students have experienced at least one traumatic event, and 6-17% of college students meet the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). University counseling centers are one of the primary sources of mental health services for college students, so it's important that these centers offer effective PTSD treatment options.

That's where Research Scientist **Katherine R. Buchholz**, Ph.D., comes in. She and her colleague, Associate Professor of Psychology at Pacific Lutheran University, **Tiffany Artime**, Ph.D., are in the second year of a three-year project funded by the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) to implement a cognitive behavioral therapy-based PTSD treatment called Skills Training in Affective and Interpersonal Regulation (STAIR) in university counseling centers across the country. The project puts findings into practice from a completed PCORI-funded systematic review update that identified evidence in support of effective treatments for PTSD.

"STAIR can be delivered flexibly and tailored to each student, empowering them with skills to regulate emotions and improve interpersonal relationships," said Buchholz. "It's an effective tool to help them function better and have a better college experience."

So far, Buchholz and her team have trained over 300 clinicians at 40 university counseling centers, and over 300 students have started STAIR. Those who are participating have seen medium to large improvements in their symptoms.

"As we head into our second year of the project, our goal is to bring STAIR to more students," said Buchholz. "We want to offer this treatment, which has years of clinical research behind it, to as many people as possible who can benefit from it." ▀

Read more about this project at wcwonline.org/PTSDtreatment

New Projects Will Examine Impacts of State Minimum Wages

The minimum wage is one of the key instruments used by policymakers to bolster the earnings and wellbeing of low-wage workers. From proposals to raise the minimum wage to \$15 at the federal level to local efforts to increase city and state minimum wages, this policy features prominently in many "future of work" discussions. But what remains unclear is the extent to which the minimum wage is effective in aiding those most vulnerable economically versus those more well-off, as well as the impact of such increases on business owners.

Senior Research Scientist **Sari Pekkala Kerr**, Ph.D., is working on two new studies that will help to answer

these questions. A grant from the William T. Grant Foundation will fund a two-year investigation of the long-term impacts on job-level inequality measures for young workers from low-income families. And a grant from the Russell Sage Foundation will fund a two-year examination of the immediate and long-term impacts of state minimum wage increases on the job quality of low-wage workers.

"Both projects will help us better understand how minimum wage policies potentially impact low-wage workers, particularly young workers, in the long run," said Kerr. "Having this kind of evidence is rare but so critical to debates around the minimum wage." ▀



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