


The WHALE Study
Family Newsletter
May | 30th | 2023

WHALE / STTAR End of (Academic) Year Wrap-Up!

A circular inset image showing a woman with curly hair sitting and reading a book to a young child. The woman is wearing a white shirt and a dark bag, and the child is wearing a white shirt and a dark skirt.

Welcome to our 50th WHALE families newsletter! As we end our Spring semester and the 2022-2023 academic year, we wanted to celebrate all the research and personal accomplishments in our lab which you contributed to by participating in research!

In the WHALE study, we completed over 230 visits with more than 100 families! We also launched a new mini project called the Participant Feedback Project (PFP), involving one-on-one interviews with a random selection of BIPOC families who completed the first 3 WHALE visits to learn about their experiences participating in research with the hope of improving our approaches to be inclusive and center their voices. We also began our newest WHALE visit (Visit 4) as described in a [previous newsletter](#).

In the STTAR study, we completed over 375 visits with more than 150 families this past year. We also launched our 2nd visit, which involves scanning adolescents and young adults with MRIs. We're taking a break from imaging visits this summer but we're excited to get started again with MRI visits for WHALE & STTAR in August/September!

In addition to being a research lab, we're a training ground for future scientists & clinicians! We are so grateful for our team of brilliant and dedicated research assistants, folks who work full time with us between their undergraduate & their graduate work. This Fall, six (6!) of our Research Assistants (RAs) will be starting their journeys in graduate school for clinical psychology, developmental psychology, or social work! Congratulations to our STTAR RAs, TJ, Margaret R, & Sophia; our WHALE RAs, Summer & Celina, and our lab & data managers, Amy & Katie, on beginning your next endeavors, we can't wait to see all the amazing things you accomplish!

Two of our doctoral students will be advancing to their next stage of training (similar to a "residency" for medical doctors) by matching at internship sites! Anais will go to the Durham VA Medical Center and Maddy to the UNC School of Medicine; wave hi if you see them! Amidst all of this, we are also delighted to celebrate Anais who welcomed a new baby boy this month!

Check out page 3 for **community** resources!

Click [here](#) to tell us what topics you want covered in future newsletters!

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Please reach out if you have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding The WHALE Study or the COVID-19 situation. Staff can be reached by call, text, or email: whalestudy@unc.edu | 919-914-0588
Find us on Twitter: [@circlelab_unc](#), Instagram: [circlelab_unc](#), and [Facebook!](#)

Newsletter written by Dr. Ilana S. Berman, edited by Dr. Margaret Sheridan, and formatted by Maria Phelps.

Folks who have their PhD's and are finished with graduate school also work in the lab as post doctoral fellows (or Post Doc's!): Postdoc Meredith Gruhn will be heading to Vanderbilt University to become an Assistant Professor in their School of Medicine!

Our work is primarily funded by receiving grants. One of our STTAR RA's, Margaret R, and one of our graduate students, Michelle S., were awarded prestigious grants that will fund their work in parenting and emotion regulation. Some of our other graduate-school bound trainees: Amy, Katie, & Summer, were also recognized with Honorable Mentions for their applications! Further, one of our postdoctoral fellows, Megan Davis, received a grant which will fund her fellowship investigating how peer experiences shape risk and resilience across adolescence.

Our lab members were also recognized within UNC-Chapel Hill's Psychology and Neuroscience department for their outstanding achievements. Graduate Student Angelina Tsai won the Bernadette Little-Grey award for her excellent dissertation work; WHALE RA, Maresa, earned the "Innovation in Equity and Inclusivity Service Award"; undergraduate Kayla Brown earned the "J. Steven Reznick Diversity & Psychology Research Grant" (2023) for her Honors Thesis and the "Lindquist Undergraduate Research Award" (2022) for her independent project exploring parent-child interactions in Black families. Masita, an undergraduate trainee who will still be with us as a senior this upcoming year, also won the "Diversifying Psychology & Neuroscience Summer Research Award" a few weeks ago.

It's a big accomplishment to publish the research we work so hard to do. This year, in addition to articles written by our PIs, members from all levels of our lab: Meredith, Andrea, Anais, Summer, & Katie, published these peer-reviewed articles to share their work with the academic community! Collectively across the lab, our research was shared at 8 regional, national, and international conferences this year to audiences including clinicians, policymakers, neuroscientists, statisticians, and child and adolescent developmental scientists.

None of this work would be possible without the generous contributions of our participants. We are beyond grateful for your time and sharing of your life experiences. From what you've shared, we have so far been able to demonstrate that:

- Experiences of threat versus neglect impact the brain and body differently during development.
- We found that according to caregivers, child depression symptoms were related to their caregiver's depression symptoms and amount of family conflict in the home; they were highest immediately following COVID-19 related stay-at-home orders (April 2020) and decreased over time.
- In a study of adolescent girls, those with more mental health problems getting positive and avoiding negative feedback from peers, which was also shown in their brain connections.
- In this same study, we saw that general attention capacity was related to risk for mental health problems in a broad way, pointing to a new potential point for intervention
- From a study with young children who were randomly selected to be removed from institutionalized care in Bucharest, Romania, we demonstrated the *causal* relationship between deprivation and neural structure and IQ that persisted 16 years later - which emphasizes the importance of early placement into family-based care

See our full list of lab publications [here](#).

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COMMUNITY RESOURCES

HOUSING

- [Durham Continuum of Care \(CoC\)](#)
 - Eviction Information: 216-965-5095
- [Durham Rescue Mission](#)
 - 919-688-9641
- [Orange County Partnership to End Homelessness](#)
- [Urban Ministries of Durham](#)
- **Social Services:**
 - [Durham County](#)
 - [Orange County](#)
 - [Wake County](#)

FOOD & GROCERIES

- [Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina](#)
- [No Kid Hungry NC](#) - Text FOODNC or COMIDA to 877-877 to receive information about 3 drive-thru or pickup sites with meals for kids closest to you.
- **Free/Reduced Price School Meals:**
 - [Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools](#)
 - [Durham County](#)
 - [Wake County](#)
- **Food Resources by County:** [Orange County](#), [Durham County](#), [Wake County](#)

HEALTH & SAFETY

- [Compass Center for Women and Families](#)
 - 919-929-7122 (24/7 Domestic Violence Hotline)
- [Durham Crisis Response Center](#)
 - 919-403-6562 (24-hour Help Line)
- [InterAct Family Safety and Empowerment Center](#)
 - 919-828-7501 (Main office)
- [Orange County Rape Crisis Center](#)
 - 866-935-4783 (call), 919-967-7273 (text)
- [Freedom House](#)
 - 866-275-9552 (Orange/Person County Mobile Crisis)
 - 919-957-7386 (Durham Women's House)
 - 336-599-8366 (Roxboro)
- [Suicide & Crisis Hotline](#): call or text 988
- [Hope4NC Helpline](#): Call or text "hope" to 1-855-587-3463
- [24/7 Crisis Text Line](#): Text HOME to 741741

CHILDCARE

- [Childcare Payment Assistance](#)
- [CCSA Child Care Scholarship Program](#)
- [NC Pre-K](#): state-funded, part-day preschool program
- [Durham Pre-K](#): 1-833-773-5338
- **Child Care Subsidy Programs:**
 - [Alamance County](#): 336-570-6532
 - [Durham County](#): 919-560-8300
 - [Orange County](#): 919-968-2000
 - [Wake County](#): 919-212-7000
- [Child Care Referral Central \(CCRC\)](#)

LEARNING

- Scholastics: [Learn at Home](#) & [Book Lists By Age](#)
- [Khan Academy Kids](#)
- [PBS Kids](#)

More community resources can be found on our website: circlelab.unc.edu