Global Research to Advance Equity
Dear Friends,

Just as our faculty, students and staff are eager to drive positive change in our city, region and nation, we have many in our community who are passionate about making an impact across the world.

Included in this publication is a selection of the research, studies and initiatives of Brown School social work and public health scholars aimed at advancing social, economic and health equity on a global scale.

In addition to leading their own research portfolios, our faculty are committed to sharing their knowledge with the next generation of global leaders. They lead field-based courses internationally, train our masters and doctoral students to assist in worldwide research initiatives, and help those students with interest in international work to find unique and challenging practicum placements.

The sustained effort by Brown School faculty and leadership to expand and align our global programs is meant to advance the School as a leader in social development and public health, especially in resource-constrained global contexts.

We hope you will engage and join us in our efforts.

Sincerely,

Mary M. McKay
Neidorff Family and Centene Corporation Dean of the Brown School
For more than 25 years, the Brown School’s Center for Social Development (CSD) has been pioneering programs around the world to create asset-building accounts for children to improve their chance for life success.

Led by Michael Sherraden, founding director of CSD and George Warren Brown Distinguished University Professor, CSD has defined this policy direction, conducted innovative research and used the findings to advance the creation of child development accounts in the U.S., the United Kingdom, South Korea, Israel and other nations, most recently in Taiwan.

“Universal accounts for children lead to increased asset holding, and also to better parenting, higher educational expectations, and improved social-emotional development of children,” Sherraden said.

Sherraden noted the aim of these accounts is to be fully inclusive.

“The large purpose of asset building research at the Brown School is assets for all. We aim to inform a fully inclusive policy, with accounts for everyone, starting at birth, with automatic deposits, and greater subsidies for the poor.”

In 2015, Israel’s parliament passed a law funding long-term savings accounts for all newborns, based on a proposal developed by Michal Grinstein-Weiss, Shanti K. Khinduka Distinguished Professor at the Brown School. Grinstein-Weiss worked closely with government leaders and other social policy experts for over a decade to help propose and pass the law, including organizing multiple conferences and expert delegations to raise the idea. She collaborated with executive leadership at Israel’s National Insurance Institute, Ministry of Social Affairs, and Ministry of Finance.

“Passing the law is a great step toward advancing social and economic mobility of children in Israel and giving them a financial head start once they reach adulthood,” Grinstein-Weiss said. “The infrastructure of the child allowance is a powerful platform to deliver these accounts and can serve as a model for other countries.”
IMPROVING LIVES IN KENYA THROUGH COMMUNITY ACTION

Professor Carolyn Lesorogol began her work in Kenya 30 years ago, when she studied there as an undergraduate. At the time, the nation was recovering from a drought.

“I was very impressed by people’s ability to survive with relatively little assistance,” she recalled. Lesorogol realized that the strength of the community was key, and she’s been working ever since to build on that knowledge and improve the lives of Kenyans.

Her primary projects have undertaken ethnographic research about processes of land privatization and the effects of land-use choices on livelihoods and social relations, including using computer models to show over time how those choices affect food, income, households and the environment.

A second focus has been working with a community association to introduce highly productive dairy goats to improve food security, income and nutrition. The project started with 30 households and Lesorogol hopes to expand the program, which translates into better futures, particularly for children.

“If you have more food and income, you can meet other needs such as education and health,” noted Lesorogol, who is also the Brown School’s associate dean for global strategy and programs. In that role, she coordinates international practica and field-based courses for graduate students, most recently in focusing on refugee assistance and assimilation in Germany and community engagement practices in Tanzania.

“At the Brown School, we have a mission of supporting vulnerable populations around the world,” she said. “We aim to use research results to inform policies and practices that improve the lives of people around the world.”
EVIDENCE-INFORMED SYSTEMS CHANGE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

SMART Africa Center
This center is a transdisciplinary enterprise aimed at reducing child mental health gaps in service and research in Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda. SMART (Strengthening Mental Health and Research Training) Africa is co-led by William E. Gordon Distinguished Professor Fred Ssewamala and Mary McKay, Neidorff Family and Centene Corporation Dean of the Brown School, with support from Ozge Sensoy Bahar, research assistant professor at the Brown School.

Context-specific influences in sub-Saharan Africa — such as high levels of stigma associated with mental health, high rates of poverty, and health epidemics — increase the prevalence of serious mental health needs. These challenges, coupled with mental health policies being at their early stages of implementation, hinder the ability to provide adequate services in these countries.

ICHAD
The International Center for Child Health and Asset Development (ICHAD) serves as a hub for applied research focused on family-level economic strengthening and empowerment interventions that tackle the interactive effects of poverty, disease, and health-related risk factors for youth in sub-Saharan Africa.

ICHAD has worked with teams across the United States and Africa comprised of faculty affiliates, community collaborators, and doctoral and masters students.

Research
One recent ICHAD project aims to prevent HIV risk behaviors among 15- to 17-year-old girls living in communities heavily affected by poverty and HIV/AIDS in Uganda. The study intervention combines a youth monetary saving program that supports secondary education with a family-based dialogue and training to address mental health challenges that frequently accompany adolescent girls’ transitions to adulthood.

SMART Africa is implementing an evidence-based multiple family group intervention with children experiencing behavioral problems and their families in Uganda, with concurrent pilot studies in Ghana and Kenya.

Education and Outreach
SMART Africa launched the Junior Scholar Conference Travel Award in 2018 to engage high school, undergraduate and masters students in child and adolescent behavioral health and research. “We are deeply invested in developing a pipeline of young researchers,” said Ssewamala.

In addition to implementing research initiatives, SMART Africa and ICHAD co-sponsor the Annual Conference on Child Behavioral Health in Sub-Saharan Africa. The conference convenes academics, researchers, policymakers, programmers, NGO leaders, students, early career professionals and community members to create service models to better serve the youth population.
HEALTHY URBAN LIVING AND AGING IN PLACE

A three-year research project, led by Brown School Professor Rodrigo Reis, aims to enhance the understanding of how the built environment influences the physical activity of older adults in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and Curitiba, Brazil.

The project engages an international, multi-disciplinary team of researchers drawn from the fields of public health, geography, planning and management, as well as a range of key stakeholders promoting this policy agenda in Brazil, the United Kingdom, and around the world. The team is developing evidence for the improvement of physical activity and well-being of older adults in both cities. The project will also advance policy tools, with the overall aim of assisting active aging in place.

The research focuses on:

- Finding solutions that have been implemented in developing countries or low-income communities in developed countries
- Informing policies to implement changes in cities
- Advancing science toward livability in cities
- “Solutions can be found many places and applied across cities,” Reis commented. “The issues we are facing in low-income St. Louis communities are the same issues that low-income populations are facing in other developed countries, such as those in Europe.”
- “The Brown School has a very interesting role,” he said. “By combining public health and social work, we are better able to address the social determinants of health.”
BOXGIRLS: STRONG GIRLS, SAFE COMMUNITIES

Boxgirls South Africa seeks to build safe communities by strengthening girls and young women in disadvantaged communities through education, leadership development and violence prevention.

Founded by Heather Cameron, the Michael B. Kaufman Professor of Practice in Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Boxgirls serves 20 primary schools with evidence-based, after-school programs for fifth-grade girls, as well as community events and parent outreach to build capacity for violence prevention in the wider community. The program is part of a global best practice initiative funded by the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation and Comic Relief.

In March 2017, Cameron took five Olin Business School students to Cape Town to work on Boxgirls’ marketing and impact strategy as part of Olin’s Center for Experiential Learning practicum. Additional collaborations are planned with impact accelerators and agencies in Cape Town for student and research exchanges.

“The success of sustainable development goals depends on effective grassroots organizations, innovative foundations and government, and impact-oriented university research,” Cameron said. “At the Brown School, with our practice, policy and research strength we contribute to all three at a global level.”
ADVANCING PARENTING RESOURCES AND CHILD NUTRITION IN HAITI

A collaboration between Patricia Kohl and Lora Iannotti, associate professors at the Brown School, hopes to improve parenting and child development in Haiti.

The project created and tested an innovative nutrition and parenting intervention to promote healthy growth and development among young children in an urban slum of Haiti. Mothers participated in peer discussion groups on the themes of positive parenting, water, sanitation and hygiene, and the importance of animal source foods in the diets of young children. Each of the 15 families participating in the pilot study were provided with eggs for 12 weeks.

Kohl’s expertise in parenting and Iannotti’s in nutrition were key to the success of the research. Kohl is the Brown School’s associate dean for social work, and Iannotti is the associate dean for public health.

“It’s the best example of transdisciplinary research I’ve worked on,” Iannotti said. “It’s got all the elements — biology, economics, policy and social development.”

Research assistants and staff at the Brown School, along with the study coordinator, are currently analyzing data on child social development, diet and other health outcomes, as well as the receptivity of parents. They hope to build on favorable results and secure funding to expand the project to more families.

Iannotti and Kohl said the potential for success in Haiti can be translated elsewhere.

“What we’re learning in Haiti is applicable to impoverished communities in the U.S.,” Kohl said.
Key Faculty

Heather Cameron
Michael B. Kaufman Professor of Practice in Social Entrepreneurship
PhD, York University, Toronto

Cameron is an international expert in social innovation. In addition to teaching courses, she has created the Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation Lab, a joint venture of Olin Business School and the Brown School. The lab fosters an entrepreneurial and impact-focused culture of innovation with campus and community members, driving a new focus on social innovation throughout the university.

Cameron founded an award-winning social enterprise in Berlin, Boxgirls, which uses sports to drive transformation for girls in vulnerable communities. Cameron also spearheads a student/community social innovation competition and accelerator, as well as enriching global urban development experiences.

Michal Grinstein-Weiss
Shanti K. Khinduka Distinguished Professor;
Associate Dean for Policy Initiatives;
Director, Envolve Center for Health Behavior Change;
PhD, Washington University in St. Louis

Grinstein-Weiss is a leading expert and researcher in social and economic development. She is an influential voice in the design of innovative social policies to promote household financial security and asset building, both in the United States and internationally, most notably in Israel. She has led successful research collaborations with top industry, government and philanthropic partners, including Fortune 500 companies, major foundations and government agencies.

She is currently working with a group of government stakeholders to design an evaluation research agenda around Israel’s new Savings for Every Child law, which provides savings accounts for every newborn. Grinstein-Weiss is a nonresident senior fellow in global economy and development at the Brookings Institution. She has held leadership roles with the Brookings Institution and the Clinton Global Initiative and was recently identified as one of the highest-impact social work scholars by Research on Social Work Practice.
Peter Hovmand
Professor of Practice; Director of the Social System Design Lab
PhD, Michigan State University

Hovmand is the founding director of the Brown School’s Social System Design Lab. The lab’s research, teaching and practice has a global reach with a specific focus on developing and supporting the development of “communities of practice” in system dynamics to address important social and public health issues. This work emphasizes building a global, collaborative network of system dynamics practitioners to impact local, regional and national policies.

The lab is engaged and leading the advance of science and application of community-based system dynamics in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, China, India, the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, Mexico, Panama and Honduras. Topics explored range from reducing maternal and neonatal mortality, to obesity prevention, to redesigning mental health services for adults and children.

Lora Iannotti
Associate Professor; Associate Dean for Public Health
PhD, Johns Hopkins University

Iannotti has expertise in maternal and young child nutrition and nutrient deficiencies related to poverty and infectious diseases. She applies epidemiological methods to investigate interventions aimed at reducing stunted growth and development. Iannotti leads projects in Haiti, Ecuador, and East Africa where she collaborates with local partners to test innovative, transdisciplinary approaches using animal source foods and small livestock and fisheries development.

She is founder and director of the E3 Nutrition Lab working to identify economically affordable, environmentally sustainable, and evolutionarily appropriate nutrition solutions globally. In collaboration with Patricia Kohl, associate professor and associate dean social work, the project approaches nutrition solutions from many different angles: developing supplemental food supplements for pregnant mothers; evaluating the impact of animal source foods on maternal and child nutrition; and launching a combined parenting and nutrition intervention.

Iannotti also leads a partnership with Université Publique du Nord au Cap-Haitien to offer the first undergraduate public health degree in Haiti.

Patricia Kohl
Associate Professor; Associate Dean for Social Work
PhD, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Kohl’s scholarship is focused on strengthening, implementing and sustaining evidence-based interventions that improve the quality of care for vulnerable families. Through her research, which is informed by years of clinical practice with children and families, she seeks to close the gap between research and community-based practice.

Her research involves analyses of large datasets to examine how characteristics of parents within the child welfare service system influence parenting, child emotional and behavioral health, and the safety of children. She is currently working to adapt an evidence-based parent training program to increase father participation and improve father-child interactions. She is also collaborating with Lora Iannotti, associate professor and associate dean for public health, to develop a parenting intervention in Haiti that addresses nutrition, child development, and water, sanitation and hygiene.

RESEARCH INTERESTS:

Peter Hovmand
- System dynamics
- Group model building
- Implementation and scale-up of innovations
- Domestic violence

Lora Iannotti
- Young child nutrition
- Micronutrient deficiencies
- Infectious diseases and poverty pathways
- Evaluation research

Patricia Kohl
- Child welfare
- Evidence-based practice
- Engaging hard-to-reach populations in treatment
- Parent training
Carolyn Lesorogol
Professor; Associate Dean for Global Strategy and Programs
PhD, Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis

Lesorogol researches international social development to understand how dynamic social change affects the well-being of families and communities. Using ethnography and mixed methods, she investigates the transition from communal to private land among Samburu pastoralists in Kenya, and its long-term effects on land use, cooperation, social norms and livelihoods. She designs and implements capacity-building community programs, including work with a community association in Kenya introducing a highly productive breed of dairy goats to improve household nutrition and income, in collaboration with Lora Iannotti, associate professor and associate dean for public health.

As an associate dean, Lesorogol leads the Brown School’s efforts to engage students, faculty and staff in issues of global significance. The Global Programs Office supports international practica, international field-based courses, research and global programming at the School. She teaches masters classes in international social development theory and practice and the doctoral course in qualitative research; she also coordinates the International Social and Economic Development concentration in the Master of Social Work program.

Mary M. McKay
Neidorff Family and Centene Corporation Dean; Professor
PhD, University of Illinois at Chicago

Working with colleagues in the field, Dean McKay has developed a substantial body of research findings around practices to improve involvement in family-based HIV prevention programs and mental health services for children, youth and families in high-poverty urban areas. Her career in HIV science began with CHAMP (Collaborative HIV Prevention and Adolescent Mental Health Project), a collaborative effort between university and community members to test HIV prevention and mental health promotion approaches in urban, low-income communities. The study began in Chicago and has been replicated in New York City, South Africa, Argentina, Trinidad, Thailand and Indonesia.

Dean McKay’s research also aligns with the SMART Africa Center (Strengthening Mental Health and Research Training in Africa), funded by the National Institute of Mental Health and the International Center for Child Health & Asset Development.

Sojung Park
Assistant Professor
PhD, University of Michigan

An environmental gerontologist, Park aims to redress disparities in health and well-being in old age by matching aging individuals’ needs and environmental resources. She examines aspects of vulnerability in old age — such as poverty, living alone and chronic medical issues — as risk factors for compromised health and well-being. Her research has examined health, hospitalization and nursing home admission.

Park’s research in senior housing has been recognized in her home country of South Korea, where she is contributing to policy development on senior housing for low-income older adults. As a policy advisor on housing for the Korean government, she has been involved in research commissioned by the nation’s Ministry of Health and Welfare to develop senior housing models for low-income elders. With her collaborators, she has developed a conceptual framework for a residential care model and is developing a pilot study of low-income senior housing.
Rodrigo Reis
Professor
PhD, Federal University of Santa Catarina, Florianopolis, Brazil

Reis’s research focuses on physical activity and public health, with a particular interest in community interventions for promoting physical activity, the effect of the built environment and community on health, active transportation and health, and physical activity analysis.

His global work includes projects in Curitiba, Brazil; Belfast, Northern Ireland; and Bogota, Colombia. Other large, multisite studies examine the connections between the built and social environment on physical activity and health outcomes, and the role of urban planning and design on health. Reis also has worked on projects evaluating local and national community-based physical activity projects and policies in Brazil and, more recently, on the factors related to scalability of physical activity interventions worldwide.

Deborah Salvo
Assistant Professor
PhD, Emory University

Salvo’s interests lie in generating, translating and scaling up evidence for reducing health and social disparities, with a particular emphasis on chronic disease prevention in low and countries, and among minority groups in the U.S.

She works to understand the context-specific relationships between the built environment and health; documenting and improving geospatial health disparities; and using and improving objective measures to quantify obesity-related behaviors (physical activity, diet) and relevant geospatial exposures (i.e., social and built environment, using GIS, accelerometry, GPS, geostatistical approaches, and other new technologies).

She is an active member of a global network of researchers working jointly to advance the understanding of the relation between the features of urban environments and obesity-related behaviors, with particular emphasis in Latin America and low- and middle-income countries.

Ozge Sensoy Bahar
Research Assistant Professor
PhD, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Sensoy Bahar’s research focuses on child and family well-being in global contexts characterized by poverty and associated stressors. She seeks to develop culturally and contextually-relevant interventions to reduce risk factors associated with child labor.

Her current research program focuses on the individual, family, and contextual factors leading to child labor in two country contexts, Turkey and Ghana. A recent study in the Northern Ghana explores family processes and multi-level risk factors that contribute to the decision for female adolescents to independently migrate to cities for child labor.

Sensoy Bahar also serves as a co-investigator for the SMART Africa Center, co-led by Professor Fred Ssewamala and Dean Mary McKay. The NIMH-funded project aims to advance child behavioral health services and implementation science capacity across Uganda, Ghana and Kenya. Sensoy Bahar is also a co-investigator providing qualitative expertise on several NIH-funded global research studies housed within the International Center for Child Health and Development (ICHAD).
Michael Sherraden
George Warren Brown Distinguished University Professor; Director, Center for Social Development
PhD, University of Michigan

The founding director of the Center for Social Development, Sherraden has defined and informed a growing body of applied research and policy to promote inclusion in asset building. This work has contributed to the development of Individual Development Accounts and Child Development Accounts in cities and states in the U.S. and in many other countries, including South Korea, Israel and the United Kingdom. The CSD focuses on testing social innovations and taking research evidence to practice and policy.

Sherraden has trained dozens of doctoral graduates of the Brown School, and he uses the CSD to support the development of younger faculty members in areas such as smart decarceration, inclusive housing, racial inequality and social mobility, child and youth development, and environment and social development. In recent years, he has co-chaired the national steering committee for the Grand Challenges for Social Work.

Fred M. Ssewamala
William E. Gordon Distinguished Professor; Director, International Center for Child Health and Asset Development
PhD, Columbia University

Ssewamala is engaged in innovative research that informs, develops and tests family-based, savings-led economic and social protection interventions. These interventions aim to improve life chances and long-term developmental impacts — including health, mental health and educational outcomes — for poor and vulnerable children and youth, particularly those impacted by HIV in sub-Saharan Africa.

His research engages collaboratively with local institutions including schools, clinics, financial institutions and local governments to ensure scale-up and sustainability.

In 2013, Ssewamala established the International Center for Child Health and Asset Development at Columbia University, to contribute to the reduction of poverty and improvement of public health outcomes for youth and families in low-resource communities, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa and other developing countries. The center supports research, develops training programs and mentorship opportunities, and increases public awareness of asset-based programs. The center moved to the Brown School when Ssewamala joined the faculty in 2017.

Lindsay Stark
Associate Professor
DrPH, Columbia University

Stark’s research focuses on the health and welfare of children and families in global contexts. Her work addresses the prevention of violence against women and children, and the psychosocial health and well-being of women, particularly in developing nations.

She has innovated new methods to measure violence and protection in humanitarian and development settings. Along with colleagues, she pioneered a method of measuring the prevalence of human rights violations, including gender-based violence. She also developed locally validated measures of well-being, and novel approaches to measuring the number of children separated from their caregivers in a humanitarian emergency.

Currently, Stark is leading a mixed methods study (The Study of Adolescent Lives after Migration to America, or SALaMA) to assess the mental health and psychosocial well-being of adolescents resettled to the U.S. from Arab-majority countries. SALaMA also aims to identify sources of daily stress and identify sources of resilience in order to strengthen supports for this population.
Joe Steensma  
Professor of Practice  
EdD, Indiana Wesleyan University

Steensma’s research focuses on the intersections between social entrepreneurship, environmental health and sustainability that can yield marketable solutions for public health problems across the globe. His work supports start-ups around the world that seek to leverage the power of capitalism to solve pressing environmental issues.

Steensma’s work in Haiti with Lora Iannotti, associate professor and associate dean for public health, studies fish production and consumption, market function and sustainability to ensure economic and food security for the nation. In Australia, he helps early-phase companies think differently about entrepreneurship and redefine their bottom lines to include people, profit and the planet.

In addition to his work in helping translate science into marketable solutions for real public health problems, Steensma has been active on many nonprofit boards and continues to support research that seeks to discover the relationship between human health and the natural environment.

Jean-Francois Trani  
Associate Professor  
PhD, Institut d’Etudes Politiques de Paris, France

Trani investigates the intersection of mental health, disability, vulnerability and poverty with a focus on field research that informs policy and service design for individuals living in fragile, conflict-affected nations and other low-income countries. Using the Capability Approach of Amartya Sen, he hypothesizes that lack of opportunity or poor conversion factors are linked to the stigmatization of the disabled and other groups, which results in social exclusion and creates mental distress.

He has completed a four-year quasi-experiment comparing a community-based rehabilitation program of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan to usual care for persons with disabilities. His research has contributed to policy papers of the ministries of Education and Public Health in Afghanistan. He is an editor of ALER, the European Journal of Disability Research and the Revue Tiers Monde. His teaching is linked to his professional experience in global health and international development.
OUR VISION

To create positive social change through our path-breaking research and educational excellence.

OUR MISSION

To educate and prepare future social work and public health leaders in areas of policy, practice and research.

To pioneer research and apply results to impact policy and practice locally, nationally and internationally.

To collaborate with organizations to use evidence to improve access to and quality of social services and to address social and economic justice.

Founded in 1925, the George Warren Brown School was named with a generous gift from Betty Bofinger Brown in memory of her late husband.

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