

MSU and Michigan Children's Trust Fund come together to fight child abuse

BY TOM OSWALD

Michigan State University and the Michigan Children's Trust Fund have formed a partnership to determine just how much power the media have over children.

The Michigan Children's Trust Fund is working with MSU Children's Central, a research collaborative in the Department of Advertising, Public Relations, and Retailing. They are studying marketing messages and free Internet games aimed at children.

The ultimate goal of the three-year project, said department chairperson Richard Cole, is to better understand the power of the media on children and to turn this information into new methods of protecting children.

"This affiliation provides hundreds of MSU students and faculty members with an opportunity to become actively involved in research, outreach and educational efforts aimed at reducing child abuse and neglect in Michigan and supporting the ethical treatment of its children," Cole said. "It gives the department faculty and students a clear mission and new energy for developing and using powerful promotional skills to make a real difference in our state."

As part of the collaboration, the Michigan Children's Trust Fund is providing a three-year grant worth \$370,000 which will allow faculty to continue to conduct research and pursue additional funding on a variety of issues related to the prevention of child abuse.

MSU research interests include the short- and long-term effects of media and marketing on children. Other areas include the identification of effective advertising and other communication efforts to prevent child abuse; the promotion of fundraising and volunteering activity to support local and statewide efforts to prevent child abuse; and Internet safety and security for children.

Children's Trust Fund interim director



A student presents promotional campaign ideas to the Michigan Children's Trust Fund. Jordan Sweet/CAS

Paul Shaheen said preventing child abuse, in all forms, "requires a greater and broader attention to advocating for positive treatment of all children in the state. While we can't let our guard down on the need to prevent what we normally think of as child abuse, it is time we expand our thinking to include the more subtle form of abuses that may be occurring.

"TV programs, advertising, and free online and rental video games that may be harming our children are important areas to investigate, and we are fortunate to have a relationship with scholars at MSU who are so willing and able to help us in this effort."

The Children's Trust Fund is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to the prevention of child abuse and neglect. The fund's board is housed within the Michigan Department of Human Services. Since 1982, the fund has raised more than \$60 million and has provided support to more than 6 million Michigan children and their families.

The MSU Children's Central research collaborative is composed of faculty members from the College of Communication Arts and Sciences, under the direction of advertising professor Nora Rifon.

"Children are the most vulnerable

targets for marketing messages," Rifon said. "It's time we aggressively pursue research and programming that respects our families and that demands the ethical treatment of children by our society."

The collaborative also will provide funding for as many as 25 faculty "innovation awards" over a three-year period. These grants will stimulate child-abuse prevention-related pilot studies of MSU faculty members in more than 20 departments across the campus.

Professor Emeritus Bradley Greenberg, longtime media effects researcher, and two faculty members of the Department of Advertising, Public Relations, and Retailing – Nora Rifon and Elizabeth Taylor Quilliam – also will serve as co-chairs of an international conference on child abuse prevention and the ethical treatment of children in East Lansing in November 2009. The Journal of the American Academy of Advertising has appointed Rifon to serve as co-editor of a special issue of the journal dedicated to exploring issues relating to potential harm of media and marketing on children.

For more info, go online to childrenscentral.msu.edu.

"It's time we aggressively pursue research and programming that respects our families and that demands the ethical treatment of children by our society."

—Nora Rifon

Students volunteer as summer interns at Michigan non-profits

BY NICOLE MARBLE

Forty undergraduate students in Michigan State University's Department of Advertising, Public Relations, and Retailing have accepted volunteer internships working in non-profit agencies as a result of efforts stimulated by the department's relationship with Michigan's Children's Trust Fund (MCTF).

The students, mostly undergraduates, are getting a unique opportunity to build their resumes with on-the-job communications projects designed to prevent child abuse and support other important community efforts, said Richard Cole, professor and department chair.

The project to place student interns in non-profit agencies is an outgrowth of the unique relationship between MSU and MCTF, the foundation that serves as the state's child abuse-prevention agency.

Three MSU communication-related classes developed student-directed projects aimed at the prevention of child abuse during the most recent MSU semester.

Classes in social marketing, promotions and sponsorships, and integrated campaigning rely on clients, normally small to mid-sized businesses, to provide real-world marketing communication experiences.

At the conclusion of the spring semester classes, Nicole Marble, an APRR project manager and graduate student, inventoried students in these and other classes about their interest in spending part of their summer vacation helping the Children's Trust Fund and its local affiliates around the state get the word out on child abuse. "More than 100 students stepped up," said Marble.

Due to the overwhelming response, the MSU department and MCTF jointly approached Michigan Non-Profit Association (MNA), a statewide coalition of more than 1,100 Michigan-based non-profit organizations. Cole, a former volunteer board chair of MNA, describes non-profit agencies as a perfect place for students to gain real-world marketing communication experience, and in some cases, "these volunteer assignments turn into full time jobs for young graduates," he said.

Among the summer internships:

- MCTF's offices (Lansing)
- CTF affiliates around the state
- Detroit Historical Society (Detroit)
- Michigan Federation for Children and Families (Lansing)
- Grand Rapids Symphony (Grand Rapids)
- Brighton National Addiction Foundation (Brighton)
- American Diabetes Association (Detroit)
- JARC (Farmington Hills)
- Gateway Counseling Center (Madison Heights)
- The Baldwin Center (Pontiac)
- Lewton Elementary School (Lansing)
- American Red Cross (Lansing)

