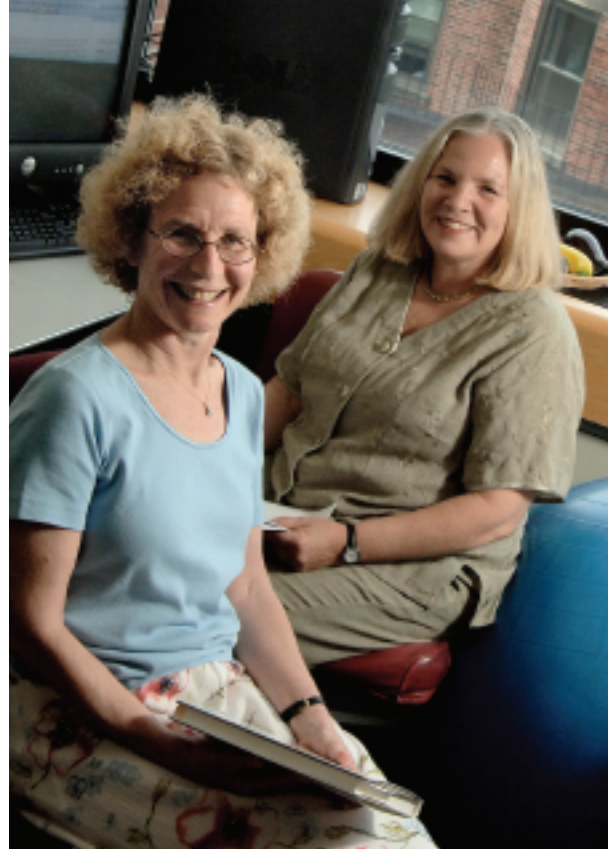


SHARON CERMAK &  
LINDA BANDINI

NIH Funds Study to Examine Physical Activity in Children with Coordination Disorders



Linda Bandini (left), and Sharon Cermak will work on an NIH-funded study to examine physical activity in children with Development Coordination Disorder.

It's no secret that decreased physical activity is a serious, growing problem in the United States. While many initiatives and programs have been developed over the past few years to encourage greater physical activity so that children have a lower risk of becoming overweight, much of the effort has been concentrated within the general population. There has been little effort to understand and treat children with disabilities whose disorders can put them at greater risk for low levels of physical activity.

For the next two years, two Boston University Sargent College researchers—in conjunction with their collaborators at UMass Medical School and Tufts University—will work on an NIH-funded study to examine physical activity and fitness in seven- through eleven-year-old children with Development Coordination Disorder (DCD), or dyspraxia. Sharon Cermak, Ed.D., OTR/L, FAOTA, professor of occupational therapy, and Linda Bandini, Ph.D., R.D., clinical associate professor of nutrition, will compare the activity levels and fitness of children with and without coordination disorders.

Cermak, the principal investigator of this study, argues that research like this is long overdue. “Children with DCD have delays in acquiring and executing complex motor skills, and therefore have difficulty participating in physical and sports-related activities. While poor coordination may seem like a minor problem, it can have a major impact on a child’s self-esteem and daily activities. Children with DCD or dyspraxia are often teased by peers and excluded from participation in sports. Research has shown that children with DCD spend significantly less time engaging in physical activities and play-

ing with peers during school recess. As these children get older, they may withdraw even further from physical activity. Research suggests that a physically active lifestyle established in childhood and adolescence tends to persist in adulthood. Children with DCD include 6–13 percent of the population and therefore represent a substantial number of children in the population who may be at risk,” she says.

“This project is important because lack of physical activity in childhood has both short-term and long-term health implications. The study brings together researchers from several disciplines (occupational therapy, nutrition, physical therapy, exercise science, and social work) to provide the expertise to assess physical activity and physical fitness,” explains Bandini.

Cermak and Bandini believe that their research, funded by a grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, will translate to children with other disabilities as well. The long-term goal of the study is to identify factors associated with decreased activity and fitness and to develop specific interventions to encourage physical activity.

For more information, please contact Sharon Cermak at [cermak@bu.edu](mailto:cermak@bu.edu).

NORM HURSH

Striving to End Homelessness

*In the 2003 issue of Inside Sargent, we announced a joint study between Sargent and Community Work Services; although the study is still ongoing, this is a follow-up on select results so far.*

One of the biggest challenges facing individuals who are homeless and trying to get back on their feet isn't just getting a job; it's securing and retaining a meaningful job that pays enough so that they can support themselves.

Initial results from the newest collaborative study between researchers at Boston University Sargent College and Community Work Services (CWS), a Boston-based vocational rehabilitation agency, show that it is possible for homeless persons to remain successfully employed. The goal of this study was to determine services and support needed to improve job acquisition and retention rates for chronically homeless individuals with significant disabilities. The study identifies specific, essential services that will increase the long-term employment prospects of these individuals.

“Although there are current social service programs designed to help homeless persons secure and retain jobs, they often only focus on one or two life issues that keep them from productive employment,” explains William McCarriston, former executive director of CWS and co-principal investigator of this study.

Building on prior research at CWS, results from this study show that “nontraditional” case management practices were essential to impacting the long-term job retention rates of homeless persons with physical, mental, and social disabilities. Based on results from focus groups and individual interviews, researchers found that coordination of training and skills development along with support to resolve housing, legal, health care, and other benefit challenges are critical to the long-term employment prospects of homeless persons with disabilities.

Norman Hursh, Sc.D., associate professor of rehabilitation counseling at BU Sargent College and co-

principal investigator on this study, notes that he and his team always knew that individuals who were homeless could get jobs; this research helps them to better identify what impacts their job retention.

“Our findings indicate that ending homelessness must focus not only on finding permanent housing, but also on implementing services and programs that provide lasting work and life supports,” says Hursh, who has been collaborating with CWS for years to help improve the overall quality of life and job retention of individuals who are homeless.

These results are part of an ongoing study funded by a grant from the United States Department of Education National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. Hursh and McCarriston expect to release further results as the study continues.

*Established in 1877, CWS is committed to helping some of the hardest-to-serve homeless and disabled people live self-sufficiently.*

*Below: Norm Hursh and William McCarriston have been working to understand services and support needed to help chronically homeless individuals with significant disabilities secure and retain jobs to support themselves.*

