Message from the Director

Welcome to our fall 2014 issue of Family Connections. In this issue you will read about our gerontology program, some of our endowments that fund student and faculty awards, and a few of our distinguished alumni who are making a difference in their communities. I think you’ll enjoy what our editor and assistants have prepared for you.

While few of us want to face our mortality, our bodies and our culture do not allow us to escape daily reminders that we are growing old. I remember the first time I fully faced the fact that I was growing old. I used to be a pretty good basketball player, with a quick first step that allowed me to get open for a jump shot or drive to the rim against almost any defender. When I was approaching forty I was playing a very fast 14 year old in a one-on-one game of basketball and finding that every time I made a move to the basket he was still right in front of me no matter how quickly I faked or darted to try and get some distance from him. After a resounding defeat I started to go through all of the excuses as to why I had lost—maybe I was coming down with the flu, maybe I needed to get in better shape, maybe it was just an off day. In the end I just had to admit that my days of darting past defenders, regardless of their age, was over. Basketball lost a little of its luster that day as a form of ego stroking for me. Since then I have noticed how desperately most of us hang on to a pretended youthfulness that masks, behind tightened skin and adjusted body parts, a body and mind that are nonetheless aging. I have wondered if there is some way that we could recapture how some cultures used to venerate aging rather than run from it like the plague. They listened to their elders and sought their wisdom rather than encouraging them to move to Arizona or Florida and allowing them to slip away unappreciated. Who among us has significant relationships with our grandparents these days? How many of our children know and seek counsel and companionship from their grandparents, aunts, and uncles?

It is in the gerontology program where our students and faculty are challenging the current approach to aging. This is a program where they learn and study the last decades of the lifespan through a lens that acknowledges the challenges of life in a youth-obsessed world while celebrating the hidden gems of time as a senior. We also have several well-known gerontology scholars on our faculty who make important contributions to understanding how relationships change and grow across the lifespan.

We hope you find this and all issues of Family Connections worthwhile. It is one way we believe we can help those who have been a part of our School stay connected and involved. Please feel free to contact us for more information about our academic programs and research or to support us in our endeavors in any way you feel able.

Sincerely,

DEAN M. BUSBY
Message from the Director

Jessica Torrie and Lauren McDonald: SFL Graduates “On the Move”

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Learning to Serve the Elderly: The Gerontology Program in the School of Family Life

Understanding and Strengthening Families: The Camilla Eyring Kimball Professorships

Lifelong Learning
In April of 2014, Jessica Torrie stood in a tunnel at Brigham Young University’s (BYU) Marriott Center, surrounded by her graduating class. Her years of college education behind her, Torrie was excited to put the Family Life BS degree she had earned to good use. Her area of study was largely motivated by a babysitting job she had when she was twelve, caring for an autistic child and interacting with the child’s family on a regular basis. At that early age, she recognized that providing assistance to a person with special needs could benefit not only that person, but their entire family as well. “I always loved helping like that,” said Torrie. “I loved feeling like I was making a difference.”

Shortly after graduation, an acquaintance referred her to Kids on the Move, a nonprofit organization that has assisted children with special needs for more than twenty years. “Things just kind of fell into place,” Torrie recalled of her hiring. “It was basically my dream job.”

Nathan George Healey is born in Layton, Utah. He is a beautiful baby with bright eyes and a round skull. (His family lovingly refers to him as “pumpkin-head.”) He also has low-set ears and the corners of his mouth droop slightly—classic physical traits of an autistic child. His parents, Mike and Kathy, don’t think anything of this. And why should they be? After all, only one out of every 500 children will be diagnosed with an autism disorder this year.

Jessica has worked at Kids on the Move since just after her graduation. In her current position as a family life educator, she provides guided learning for children and educates parents on methods of promoting optimal child development—paying visits to these families in their homes. She remains confident that her education at BYU has been integral in every step of her career.

She cites BYU’s service-oriented approach as one of the key influences in her studies. “What’s the slogan? ‘Enter to Learn, Go Forth to Serve.’ I’ve definitely felt that’s been the case for me,” said Torrie. “I learned so much during my time at BYU that’s shaped how I approach my work. Being taught all those things not only enabled me to ‘go forth to serve,’ but motivated me as well.”

Kids on the Move was officially founded in 1986 by Karen Hahne and Brenda Winegar, mothers of children with Down syndrome. Both Hahne and Winegar desired better professional care for their children and sought to create an environment in which parents could be more effectively educated on how to help their children progress. In 1992, Kids on the Move obtained the resources to build a facility in Orem, Utah, where their operations are still based. Today, Kids on the Move has added a satellite campus in Lehi, Utah, and provides service to nearly a thousand children and their families. They employ a staff of over one hundred, many of whom graduated from BYU’s School of Family Life (SFL), including Lauren McDonald.

McDonald has been working at Kids on the Move in their Early Intervention Program. She makes home visits once a week with a set of families. She does
developmentally appropriate guided activities with children who have a range of disabilities to help improve their functioning. But her real target is not so much the children as it is their parents. She helps parents, who are with their children 24/7, showing them helpful ways to engage with their children and giving the parents greater confidence.

McDonald first volunteered at Kids on the Move for a class assignment as an undergraduate student at BYU. Her volunteer work led to a job working in the Early Head Start Program and then her current position. “I love my work,” MacDonald says. “It’s rewarding but it can be emotionally draining, too.”

She credits a well-rounded undergraduate education in the SFL major with preparing her effectively for her work. “In my classes, I learned to understand children’s development, of course. But I also learned to understand adults and parents and the whole family system. That has been important in my work.”

Likewise, Torrie credits the SFL for providing a much-needed perspective to herself, McDonald, and other Kids on the Move employees. “There really is such a family emphasis there,” she said of her BYU experience. “Everything’s all about family, family, family, and that really instills a strong desire to help families who are struggling.”

Even though their mission is to support the development of young children in general, the majority of children they deal with suffer from some form of disability. Kids on the Move utilizes three programs to achieve their goals.

The first of these programs is known as Early Intervention. This is offered to children who have developmental delays or disabilities, and constitutes an attempt to minimize the effects of the condition.

The Autism Bridges Program is, as the name suggests, specialized towards autism spectrum disorders and is available to children ages 2 to 8 who require additional or individualized help. This program was instituted recently as a method of combating the sharp increase of autism diagnoses in recent years.

Kids on the Move is not restricted to children with disabilities. The third program, Early Head Start, meets a variety of needs, including low-income families, expectant mothers, and others requiring parental guidance. This program, which has been expanding rapidly over the last few years, is where Torrie has done most of her work so far, although she is currently training to work in other programs to broaden her skills. “I love Early Head Start,” she related. “It’s wonderful to help children push their limits and try new things.”

Kathy Healey calls Kids on the Move. The facility is a godsend for the Healey family. Not only do the workers administer much-needed therapy to Nathan on a weekly basis, they actually teach Kathy how to work effectively with him at home. This is enormously beneficial. Instead of occasionally receiving treatment, Nathan is being immersed in it.

Kathy learns it’s best to catch autism in the first three years of life. By age eight, a human’s brain pathways have passed a critical point of development, and further treatment would yield minimal results. Instructed by the educators at Kids on the Move, Kathy works tirelessly to ensure that Nathan’s brain develops as much as it can during these critical early years. She teaches him to point to things he wants. She uses playtime to improve his sensory skills. She fosters family closeness by
squishing Nathan and his brother together between cushions or rolling them up in a blanket like a giant burrito.

By age three, Nathan has improved drastically. He controls his tantrums and is less afraid of large groups of people. He exhibits a greater understanding of the world around him. He has learned how to roughhouse and interact with his family. He even has begun to explore his verbal capabilities. One morning on their drive to Kids on the Move, Nathan opens his mouth from the back seat and treats his mother to three shockingly clear syllables: “No-vem-ber.” As an ecstatic Kathy relates the experience to his therapist, Nathan, who enjoys a television program about a singing canine named Lorenzo, sees an identical toy dog across the room. Three more astonishing syllables prove beyond doubt that Nathan can not only speak, but can associate his speech with correct objects. “Lo-ren-zo,” Nathan exclaims as he points at the dog. His expression is curious, as if he never realized he could control the noises his mouth made.

His voice is the most incredible sound his mother has ever heard.

For Jessica Torrie and Lauren McDonald, the future is bright. “How many people get to love going to work every day?” Torrie asks with a smile on her face. “It’s absolutely the most rewarding thing I could imagine. It’s incredible to see a child learn something new, something they otherwise might never have learned. I think one of the things [I love most] is seeing a mom or a concerned parent who is stressed, who doesn’t know what to do or where to turn, and watching that person’s attitude transform.” She pauses for a moment, then nods her head in affirmation. “Yeah, that’s one of my favorite things, because that’s the whole point of what we do here. We take a heartbreaking situation . . . [and we] help people say, ‘I can handle this.’”

May 31, 2013

Nathan George Healey stands in a tunnel at the Marriott Center, surrounded by his high school graduating class. A black cap rests atop his “pumpkin-head,” and the usually droopy corners of his mouth are turned up in a smile. He is with friends. His parents, Mike and Kathy, sit eagerly in the crowd along with his younger sister Sarah. When his name is called, his classmates cheer and clap him on the back. It seems as though every member of American Fork High School’s class of 2013 knows Nathan and is familiar with his condition. And why shouldn’t they be? After all, one out of every 50 children will be diagnosed with an autism disorder this year.

There’s a crowd—a big one—as Nathan steps out of the tunnel into the arena. But he doesn’t mind. Some nice folks at Kids on the Move helped him get over that. As he walks out under the bright lights to receive his special diploma, his father and sister are loudest in a united round of rousing applause. But his mother, who has spent countless hours and days cheering him on, is unable to make a sound. All she can do is marvel at the bright future her son has after all.
As a child, I was fascinated by the concept of pregnancy and birth yet I had very little exposure to pregnant women in my family and community. After joining The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a teenager, I admired the large extended families who seemed to be constantly welcoming new babies into their families.

When it came time to choose a major in college, I was reminded of my fascination in a marriage and family class and tried to think of professions that would afford me the opportunity to work with pregnant and birthing families. Not coming up with any possibilities besides being a nurse or obstetrician, I continued taking classes in child development and family studies, transferring to Brigham Young University (BYU) to major in Marriage, Family and Human Development in the School of Family Life (SFL).

It wasn’t until I married and was pregnant with my first child, shortly after graduating from BYU, that I learned the name of the profession I had been seeking in college: doula.

A doula’s role in birth is often confused with that of the midwife. Both have historical significance in premodern births that mainly occurred in homes before the shift to hospital births, which were attended predominantly by male physicians. In many images of birth before 1800, there are three women present—the laboring mother, the midwife, and what was once termed the god-sib who has since been renamed doula, a Greek word meaning “woman servant.

The god-sib was present to attend to the emotional and physical needs of the laboring women. Often women nearby attended births together in small and even large groups, bringing a jovial and celebratory atmosphere to the birthing house. The midwife was called to catch the baby, and provide medicinal treatments or manual skills to safeguard the life of mother and child, while the god-sibs attended to the mother’s comfort and good cheer with a cool cloth to the forehead, encouraging words, a shoulder to lean on, or a hand to hold. The god-sibs were mostly family and local friends who knew and cared for the mother. They were sources for information and mentoring as she transitioned from maiden to mother. Sisters, cousins, ladies-in-waiting, aunts, and grandmothers all likely had attended dozens of births within this kith-and-kin network.

When birthing moved to hospitals, the obstetrician and nurse replaced the god-sib and midwife. Instead of physical and emotional support to cope with the challenges of labor, medicinal forms of pain relief were sought to remove pain, and sometimes even the memory of childbirth.

Advances in obstetric services provided necessary and lifesaving procedures that helped to improve maternal and infant outcomes by addressing the needs that previously could not be managed by midwives at home.

“When it came time to choose a major in college, I was reminded of my fascination in a marriage and family class and tried to think of professions that would afford me the opportunity to work with pregnant and birthing families.”
Through my SFL studies, I learned there were many more dimensions to the transition to parenthood than the strictly medical components of the birth process and the newborn period.

The best of both worlds now exist in maternity care. Women can benefit from the lifesaving medical services provided by hospitals, and the holistic, caring labor support provided by doulas—people today who have gained the experience of attending many births and who have learned best practices for assisting women emotionally through the birth process. Research indicates that having doula support during birth can improve outcomes for both the mother and the baby.

I knew I did not want to pursue the medical aspects of maternity services, though some doulas eventually do go onto nursing, midwifery school, or even medical school to learn those medical aspects. Through my SFL studies, I learned there were many more dimensions to the transition to parenthood than the strictly medical components of the birth process and the newborn period. In my marriage education classes, we talked a great deal about the significance of mentors for healthy marriage. When I was introduced to the concept of doulas, I recognized that they were the equivalent of mentors for pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum period. In my marriage education classes, we talked a great deal about the significance of mentors for healthy marriage. When I was introduced to the concept of doulas, I recognized that they were the equivalent of mentors for pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum period for fathers as well as for mothers. Many doulas also become trained childbirth educators and offer childbirth preparation classes to couples in their community, which is one service I have felt drawn to offer. The Bringing Baby Home and the Becoming Parents Program are two examples of family life education programs that combine couples’ relationship skills with practical knowledge about birth and early parenting. After attending a Smart Marriages conference with students and faculty from BYU, I became a trained instructor for the Family Wellness program, whose curricula include “The Couple: The Strongest Link” and “The Marriage Map,” which can be adapted for expecting couples.

And yet, through my work as a doula, I see how direct mentoring can be more beneficial than didactic instruction. Combining the two methods affords stronger connections between the doula and family and offers opportunities for parents to be mentored through real world, in-the-moment situations using the skills or knowledge taught in the classes. I am able to stay in touch with the families I serve after the birth of their babies by also providing postpartum support, another form of mentoring and emotional support around new parent issues: breastfeeding, sleeping, and integrating the newborn into the family.

I did not expect that being a doula would become our household’s primary source of income for my family but when my husband faced an extended period of unemployment, we quickly found that doula work allowed me to help out, working part time a few days a week while still being home with my children. The life of a birth worker calls me from my bed to attend laboring women but I am comforted knowing that my children are safely sleeping with my husband home to care for them while I am away.

As a doula, I am a self-employed small-business owner, which enables me to set my own work-life balance and make adjustments when needed. Birth is unpredictable so sometimes that means that I am leaving church early or coming home to Thanksgiving dinner on the table after being up all night. Yet, nothing can rival the excitement of having just witnessed a family meet their baby for the first time. I almost always feel the Spirit strongly as I look upon their exhausted and joyful faces. Sometimes when the birth is difficult or when there is a concern for the mother or baby, I may be the only one in the room who is able to attend to the feelings of the mother and father, a role that is heartrending to fill but one that I know provides comfort and understanding in a difficult experience.

Around one in ten babies have difficulty breathing at birth, which is one of the reasons why it is important for someone trained in neonatal resuscitation to be present at every birth. At one birth I attended, the midwife quickly started the resuscitation protocol while the parents watched confused and concerned. I was able to draw the mother’s attention to me and while I held eye contact with her I explained what was happening and why. I saw the relief in her eyes as she realized that I was there to help her understand
“There is a sisterhood that exists among birth workers and it is one that I hoped to share with other Latter-day Saint women.”

and to provide comfort. While it was only a minute or so that the midwife was helping the baby, those moments felt much longer. As soon as the baby was breathing on her own, she was put into her mother’s arms and together we cried in relief and gratitude. Later, her mother told me that she was very glad I was there to comfort her at that moment. While it is not common for situations as dramatic as this to happen, the shoulder I provide, the gentle comforting touch I share, or the words of encouragement I speak, all bring comfort and blessings to families in that moment and every time they remember their child’s birth.

Often as I drive home from a birth, I find myself humming the words, “As sisters in Zion, we’ll all work together, the blessings of God on our labors we seek . . . to do whatsoever is gentle and human, to cheer and to bless in humanity’s name” (Hymns, no. 309).

There is a sisterhood that exists among birth workers and it is one that I hoped to share with other Latter-day Saint women. As a mother myself, I also had the desire to be attended by women who share my faith. For this reason, I sought out the LDS professional birth community through the website Birthing in Zion (www.birthinginzion.com). The organization’s goal is to find midwives and doulas throughout the Church of Jesus Christ to evoke the time period in Nauvoo and early Utah when women were called to be midwives to their sisters in Zion. Women who showed an aptitude for ministering to women in labor were extended opportunities to be trained as midwives and doctors to serve their growing community. Today, a small percentage of women in the church feel the same prompting and follow in the footsteps of their foremothers who attended and assisted their sisters during childbirth. My experience majoring in SFL guided me to follow that path and helped me to recognize it when I found it.
Learning to Serve the Elderly: The Gerontology Program in the School of Family Life

WRITTEN BY BEN HALE

BYU School of Family Life Alumni Magazine

Melanie Serrao, a senior in the School of Family Life (SFO) with an emphasis in family studies, has become quite familiar with Alzheimer’s disease. For several years, she helped an elderly man write his family history. As she typed and edited, she watched with admiration as he cared for his wife, who was confined to a wheelchair and suffering from Alzheimer’s. Last year, Serrao coordinated activities at an Alzheimer's care center. And most recently—about one year ago—her grandfather was diagnosed with the very same disease.

“Watching them, and seeing my grandpa, made me very interested in the elderly population,” said Serrao. This interest in the elderly has led her to seek further education and add a gerontology minor to her SFL degree at Brigham Young University (BYU). According to family life professor and gerontology committee member Jeremy Yorgason, discovering an interest in gerontology through a grandparent, a neighbor, or work experience is quite common. Yorgason’s own interest in gerontology stemmed from living as a student with his grandfather.

BYU students with such an interest can educate themselves on the lives of the elderly by choosing one of two tracks: the minor or the certificate. The gerontology minor focuses on research; it requires students to complete twelve credit hours of classes and a directed research project involving subjects age fifty or older. To earn a certificate, which is more hands-on, students must complete classes and an internship where they work with the elderly.

In the late 1990s, the gerontology program at BYU was transferred to the School of Family Life, which has given it more focus on aging in the context of family relationships. Yet the program still fosters interdisciplinary learning about the aging process. The coursework calls on experts from biology, physiology and developmental biology, health science, neuroscience, nursing, sociology, psychology, and family studies to provide a comprehensive picture of the issues people face later in life. This interdisciplinary emphasis gives students an opportunity to learn about aging outside of their regular fields of study.

“We may have different disciplinary backgrounds, but we share the perspective that to understand the entire aging process, we’ve got to have everyone’s help,” said Vaughan Call, professor of sociology and director of the gerontology program.

As Call puts it, the gerontology program has two main objectives: “to foster student learning about the aging process and faculty research on aging.” To this end, a steering committee appropriates funds for scholarships and new studies on aging. Many research projects originally funded through the gerontology program have gone on to receive additional funding from outside BYU.

Each year, the gerontology program sponsors two major events. In the fall, gerontology students head to St. George, Utah, for the Huntsman World Senior Games. As thousands of seniors from around the world come to compete in athletic events, BYU students conduct health screenings and gather data. Spring brings with it the Russell B. Clark Gerontology Conference. At this conference, world renowned scholars share the latest research conducted on the aging process.

Census figures project that by 2050 about a third of the population of the United States will be age fifty-five or older. As Yorgason suggests, “We’re seeing signs of a flood.” Many students will work with the elderly in the future, whether they be their clients or recipients of a particular service. The gerontology program aims to give students skills that will help them to understand the needs of the elderly they work with and to succeed in their careers.

The skillset students will take with them into their careers depends on whether they take the minor or earn the certificate. Call reported that several former students have come back to him saying that the certificate gave them an edge in competing for a job. Others have received benefits from the academic knowledge they gained in the minor. Either way, the program has allowed students the opportunity to select a path that works best for their needs.
The gerontology program aims to give students skills that will help them to understand the needs of the elderly they work with and to succeed in their careers.

In addition to the academic and career advantages gained from the program, Call hopes that the program will help students prepare for their own old age. The issues presented in gerontology studies do not apply only to the students’ parents and grandparents—they apply to everyone. “You start young [in] preparing for your old age,” said Call. “Whether you like it or not, every day you’re aging.”

The gerontology program aids even students who are not in the minor or certificate programs. Serrao is a teaching assistant for an adult development and aging class where many of the students are not involved with gerontology at all. Talking with these students, Serrao has learned that many are afraid of interacting with older people; they simply don’t know how to do it. However, the service learning aspect of their class requires them to work with the elderly and, “the ones that have done it have come back to me and said that it really changes their perspective,” said Serrao.

Yorgason, who teaches the adult development and aging class, confirmed Serrao’s observation. “[The students] get in and see that these people just need a friend, someone to listen to them, someone to talk to, and they just fall in love with these people,” said Yorgason. Studies also suggest that this service learning aids in combating negative stereotypes about older people. So, what do students do once they’ve graduated? Serrao’s plan is to attend graduate school. After that, she dreams of opening her own adult daycare center for people with Alzheimer’s. Students like Serrao supply the dreams. Professors Call, Yorgason, and other dedicated faculty members and staff provide the knowledge and skills to get them there.
Understanding and Strengthening Families: The Camilla Eyring Kimball Professorships

WRITTEN BY ALLANAH OSBORN

Camilla Eyring Kimball was a woman who always focused on and cared deeply for her family. “Grandma valued her family and the gospel of Jesus Christ,” says Mary Kimball Dollahite, who shared memories of her grandmother. Camilla was always involved with the family and the various practices that kept it together, asserting in her autobiography that, “the sanctity of the home must be zealously guarded, for it is here that the morality and righteous habits are formed.”

Camilla’s devotion to ongoing learning was evident: “Those who avoid learning or abandon it find that life becomes dry, but when the mind is alert, life is luxuriant.”

In the late 70s generous donors began to donate funds to Brigham Young University (BYU) to honor Camilla’s devotion to family and learning. Funds for the Camilla Eyring Kimball Endowed Chair of Home and Family Life have grown over the years and have been used in various ways. They have supported bringing numerous leading scholars on family life and child development to BYU to enrich the learning of students and promote research collaborations. Recent Kimball Visiting Scholars have included Professors Susan Johnson (University of Ottawa), Kim Halford (University of Queensland), Dan Hart, (Rutgers University), and Tracy Vaillancourt (McMaster University).

But the most prominent feature of the endowment has been the Kimball Professorships. The Camilla Eyring Kimball Professorships were officially established in 2002. These professorships are given to BYU scholars with a distinguished record of significant research and teaching focused on understanding and strengthening families. Kimball professors are faculty whose “mind[s] [are] alert” and who understand that, as Camilla said, “the family is the biggest field for learning there is.” The professorships come with a modest salary stipend and additional funds to support family research.

The Camilla Eyring Kimball Professorships are not limited to the SFL but are awarded to professors across the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences who have, with their research, contributed to strengthening home and family and striven to uphold the ideal of the family.

TIM HEATON
Sociology professor Tim Heaton has been at BYU for over thirty years, devoting much of that time to his study of children and families in less-developed countries. “My research for quite a while has focused on how family structure and family resources affect children’s well-being,” says Heaton. His studies, funded by the professorship, look at a variety of familial characteristics, including the household structure, the presence of violence, and the family’s access to resources. “All of those things affect [the] children and [their] health,” Heaton says.

Heaton’s most recent research focuses on African countries such as Uganda and Malawi. “Conditions for children are even worse in Africa,” says Heaton, explaining that having good family support will help the children grow taller, live longer, and generally survive childhood better.

“I was interested to find out that the main factor[s] that improve kids’ health [are] changes in the status of women,” says Heaton, who has been a research pioneer role in this area. Heaton’s research documents how greater education for women, reduced violence in the home, and better status in society for women all affect the health of their children. Heaton explains, “As
Lars Lefgren, an economics professor, has been doing substantive research on intergenerational income mobility and why one sees more economic mobility (from the parent generation to the child generation) in some states and less in others. He uses the example of Utah vs. Alabama to explain this concept. In Utah, it’s not particularly unusual to see children in financially disadvantaged families grow up and work their way into the middle-class; an example of high mobility. However, in Alabama, this is much less common and children born into a poor family usually stay in the same economic situation as their parents; an example of low mobility.

Lefgren’s research primarily analyzes why intergenerational income mobility changes from state to state. “There are differences in views as to what might be causing this,” says Lefgren. Having researched mobility rates state by state (and county by county), Lefgren explains that he can look at differing public policies in states and counties and see if those differences help explain differences in income mobility. Lefgren explains that differences in public policies often have little to do with disparity in income mobility.” He argues that it is, “more likely cultural factors; what’s going on in the home and the neighborhood that [are] affecting children’s ability to succeed financially.” Noting that “cultural [and] familial structures don’t just stop at the state line,” Lefgren presents his results saying that “there’s strong evidence for cultural or family reasons for the differences that we observe across locations.” Cultural differences and differences in family structure are actually the highest predictors of intergenerational income mobility. “Traditional families with the father and the mother taking care of the kids [lead to] very high mobility rates,” says Lefgren; poorer children who experience a stable, married, two-parent family have greater income mobility than children in economically similar single-parent families.

Still, Lefgren hopes his research can identify government programs, policies, and services that provide the resources that make it possible to be financially successful and implement them properly across states.

The Kimball Professorship funds have allowed Lefgren and his colleagues to work on these studies, hire research assistants, and present their research and prestigious academic conferences.
Alan Hawkins, who has been a professor in the School of Family Life for twenty-five years, is the newest recipient of a Kimball Professorship (2014), considerable support from Day’s Kimball Professorship. The study consisted of interviewing 500 families in Seattle over several years. The main part of the project went from 2007 through 2012. “The basic purpose of that [study],” Day indicates, “was to assess the stability of families over time.”

Day explains that each family involved with the study had a child about 11-12 years old, and “we followed them all the way through until they graduated from high school.” With a large number of student research assistants and other BYU faculty, Day has produced numerous academic articles and, he tells us, there is still “lots of research potential in our data.”

Day and his colleagues took teams of students up to Seattle during summers. Over the past eight years they have worked with more than 650 BYU students. These students went into the families’ homes to interview them and collect data, including videotaped observations of families interacting together. “We have a fairly large coding lab [on campus] where students would code the videotapes of family interaction and work on the [expansive] questionnaire data,” says Day, “A smaller part of our group is continuing to follow those families using [an] Internet approach [rather than in-home visits].”

“My plans for the future are to continue writing on [a] book project . . . that involves several publications that have to do primarily with men in families,” says Day, explaining that, “the main theme of my research over the past 35 years has been fathers in families, and the role of the father, what he contributes, how he contributes to the mother’s role, and how that contribution impacts children.”

“I will be using these funds over the next few years on a project to help us understand how we can help couples on the brink,” or, Hawkins clarifies, “at the crossroads of divorce.”

“One of the things we are beginning to understand is that many divorces . . . come from low-conflict marriages,” he adds. “I say that knowing that many divorces are necessary; they are unsafe or unhealthy or simply dead, for whatever reason.” However, Hawkins argues that in many instances the problems that arise are often ones that can be resolved and all family members would benefit if the family can be preserved.

From previous research, Hawkins “know[s] that there are a proportion of couples . . . who don’t really want to get divorced but end up getting divorced.” Research indicates that perhaps 10 to 20 percent of couples who divorce really would like to find a way to preserve the marriage.

“But what we don’t know a lot about,” Hawkins explains, “is how individuals and couples make decisions about ending or sticking with the marriage.” He says, “It sounds strange to say, but with all the research we have done on marriage and divorce, there is very, very little about how people think and make decisions about whether to end their marriage or whether to keep trying to work on it.”

“We are launching a survey on a large sample of adults in the United States who have had some thoughts on divorce [with the purpose of] trying to understand what those thoughts are and . . . map out the terrain of what they are thinking,” says Hawkins. “Then, we will follow up with some in-depth qualitative interviews to get more fine-grained information about their circumstances and their thinking.” The goal of researching how couples are coming to make these decisions, Hawkins tells us, “will be to try [to] understand how best to help those couples for whom divorce is probably not the best solution, for them [or] for their children.”

Camilla Eyring Kimball once said, “The Lord fosters beauty, and there is beauty in all knowledge—not just in music and painting—but in biology and geology and mathematics, too.” These four faculty, supported by the generous donors to the Kimball endowment, strive through their diverse work in different academic fields to strengthen home and family. Their work honors this great woman’s love for, not only her own family, but the family as the fundamental unit of society.
Life-long Learning

A BYU education should be spiritually strengthening, intellectually enlarging, character building, leading to lifelong learning and service. In that spirit, the School of Family Life faculty have suggested some recent publications and resources of potential interest to SFL alumni to help them stay current in the field.

Packaging Boyhood: Saving Our Sons from Superheroes, Slackers, and Other Media Stereotypes
BY SHARON LAMB, LYN MIKEL BROWN, AND MARK TAPPAN

Boys these days are bombarded with stereotypes about what it means to be a boy, including messages about violence, risk-taking, and being “cool” and aloof. From interviews with more than 600 boys surveyed from across the U.S., the authors offer parents a long, hard look at what boys are watching, reading, hearing, and doing. They give parents advice on how to talk with their sons about what they are viewing and hearing and provide them with tools to help their sons resist these messages and be their unique selves.

Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing Our Daughters from Marketers’ Schemes
BY SHARON LAMB AND LYN MIKEL BROWN

This new book helps guide parents by exposing marketers’ (and the media’s) schemes to influence girls. They show parents the image of girls that’s being packaged and sold, pretty in pink. They write about how “girl power” has been co-opted by marketers of music, fashion, books, cartoons, TV shows, movies, toys, and more to mean the power to shop and attract boys, and how girls are encouraged to choose accessorizing over academics, sex appeal over sports, and boyfriends over friends. They expose these stereotypes of who girls are and what they can be. They also give advice to parents about how they can guide their daughters through these negative images without taking a “Just say no” perspective.

Before “I Do”: What Do Premarital Experiences Have to Do with Marital Quality Among Today’s Young Adults?
BY GALENA K. RHOADES AND SCOTT M. STANLEY

http://nationalmarriageproject.org/reports/
This recent report from the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia sheds a bright light on how premarital relationship behavior later affects marital quality. The authors—research professors at the University of Denver’s Center for Marital and Family Studies—report their findings of 400 couples they followed over several years who were in romantic relationships and eventually married. They found that past experiences in premarital relationships are linked to future marital quality, and that “what happens in Vegas doesn’t stay in Vegas.” They also discovered that many couples slide through major relationship transitions (e.g., dating to cohabiting, cohabiting to marriage), and these couples fare worse in marriage than those who make intentional transition decisions.

Seven Letters That Will Bring You Closer to Your College Student
DRS. STEVEN M. HARRIS AND ROY A. BEAN

This recent book by two SFL alumni is a simple and heartfelt guide to help parents connect to their college student. Unlike any other send-your-kid-to-college book, the authors outline a letter writing exercise that parents follow through their child’s first years of college, the time when parents and children begin to relate to one another more as adult peers than they do as parent and child. Each specifically themed letter is designed to strengthen and enrich family relationships.