

CAPACITY BUILDING | PARTNERSHIP

# A LOOK BACK

The one-year anniversary of our Center working remotely



## From the Associate Director

### Dear Friends,

We recently passed the one-year anniversary of our Center working remotely. One benefit of this unexpected transition was that it highlighted the areas where there was desire for increased skills and capacity for our partners, staff and students, and myself. It was an important reminder that building capacity is an ongoing process.

The same is true of *evaluation capacity*. Applying and sustaining evaluative thinking is an active, dynamic process with continuous quality improvement at its core. As such, over the last year our Center's commitment to teaching, training, and building capacity for evaluation and demonstrating impact has become even more evident. Some of the ways we've expanded others' capacity, as well as our own, include:

### Coaching and Training

We are excited to offer our third [Post Master's Certificate in Program Evaluation](#) this fall. The course this year will be a little different with a fully virtual offering. In early 2021, we launched a new Post Master's Certificate in [Data Visualization and Communication](#) and Meihsi Chiang and I are enjoying the learning journey with our first cohort to increase their capacity to communicate and tell stories with data.

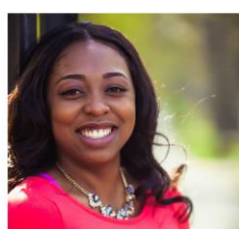


### Peer Learning

The [Evaluation Association of St. Louis](#), where I currently serve as vice-president, has had many wonderful virtual learning opportunities over the past year. And if you haven't heard of the [Open Classroom](#) through the Brown School, check it out today! It offers free webinars, low-cost trainings, and on-demand resources and learning opportunities. I also want to recognize a very important way that we build evaluation capacity — by **supporting the development of our staff and students**. This spring, four of our colleagues are graduating from the Brown School and/or continuing their educations. I want to give a HUGE shout out to



IFE ALBERT



DEJA MILES



JACOB NASON



ELSA SNIDER

**Ife Albert** (Evaluation Coordinator) — accepted an offer from Dornsife School of Public Health's Community Health and Prevention PhD program at Drexel University. She is interested in conducting community-based participatory research focused on the health of slum residents in the global south.

**Deja Miles** (Graduate Student Assistant) — MBA/MPH graduate, accepted a position at AbbVie in its 2021 Commercial Leadership Program as a marketing manager.

**Jacob Nason** (Graduate Student Assistant) — MBA/MSW graduate, accepted into Social Work PhD programs at Michigan State University and Virginia Commonwealth University. He is interested in sexual violence prevention and adjudication on college campuses.

**Elsa Snider** (Research Assistant) — will attend medical school at the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine at A.T. Still University in Kirksville, Missouri.


### Tools and Resources

Building capacity starts with ourselves. So what areas have I personally been pushing myself to learn more about lately? Below are just a few of the areas and resources I have been digging into:

1. Culturally responsive evaluation ([Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment](#) (CREA), [CDC's Practical Strategies for Culturally Competent Evaluation](#));

2. Even more about data visualization ([Better Data Visualization: A Guide for Scholars, Researchers, and Wonks](#) by Jonathan Schwabish); and
3. Virtual facilitation skills and meaningful engagement ([Interact and Engage!: Activities for Virtual Trainings, Meetings, and Webinars](#) by Kassy Laborie and Tom Stone).

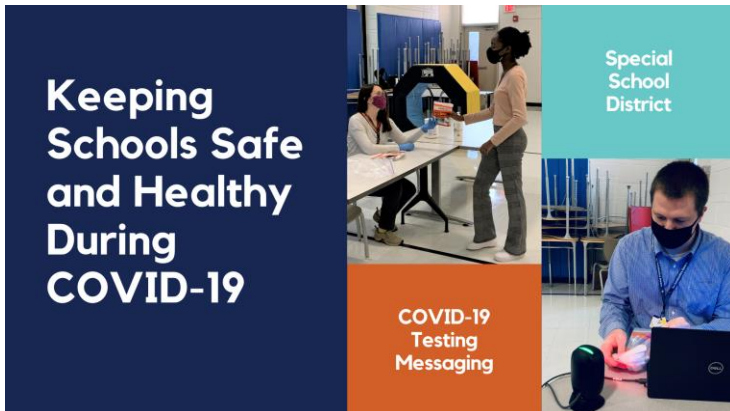
In partnership,



**Nikole Lobb Dougherty**

Associate Director of the Brown School Evaluation Center

## Featured Project



### Keeping Schools Safe and Healthy During COVID-19

The [Evaluation Center](#) is collaborating with university, local, and national partners to address the needs of those who are most disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Led by the [Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Center at Washington University School of Medicine](#), this project is utilizing a saliva-based SARS-CoV-2 test for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and school staff. Locally, the Special School District of Saint Louis County is participating, with nearly 400 staff and students tested weekly and an average weekly positivity rate of only 0.6%.

The Evaluation Center facilitated 31 discussion sessions with 86 school staff and parents/caregivers of students at six schools within the Special School District to better understand the barriers and facilitators to testing and develop strategies to optimize the delivery of weekly COVID-19 testing. In partnership with the [Health Communications Research Laboratory at the Brown School](#), the findings from the discussion sessions are being used to tailor messages to the school community. A randomized controlled trial is being used to determine which messages and forms of communication are most suited for encouraging uptake in weekly COVID-19 testing. The results from the discussion sessions have been used to inform a national survey to understand the impact of COVID-19, testing, and vaccination on students with IDD and their families.

With many schools around the country having been fully remote for the last year, findings from this project are being used to guide national return-to-school efforts for schools that support students with IDD.

Our project partners include the [University of Missouri - Kansas City Institute of Human Development](#) and the [Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities at the Kennedy Krieger Institute](#). This project is funded by the [Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development](#) as a part of the Rapid Acceleration of Diagnostics – Underserved Populations program.

## Evaluation in Action



Since its launch in 2019, the Cigna Foundation's [Healthier Kids For Our Future® \(HKFOF\)](#) initiative has

### Upcoming Events

**June 21-25, 2021**

Register now for [Effective Project Management Techniques for Social Service Settings](#) at the Brown School Summer Institute

**August 27- October 22, 2021**

Applications now being accepted for the [Post-Master's Certificate in Program Evaluation](#)

The [Evaluation Association of St. Louis](#) offers monthly evaluation workshops/events.

**April 22, 2021**

[Dissecting Data Visuals](#)

**May 12, 2021**

[Fundamentals of Data Storytelling](#)

### Staff Spotlight



Meet Deja Miles and Jacob Nason, Student Research Assistants

**How has the Evaluation Center helped prepare you for life after graduate school/your future career?**

**Deja:** The Evaluation Center has provided experience learning both simplistic and advanced approaches to project management. This is necessary for nearly every job function and working here has helped me perfect this skillset. Through direct practice, I have learned how to manipulate qualitative data with purposeful intent. From the business perspective, it is beautiful to work for an organization with a varied business mix – grant

awarded over \$8 million in grants to nonprofit organizations working to reduce childhood hunger and improve mental health in our country's youth. The Evaluation Center has [partnered with the Cigna Foundation](#) in evaluation planning and implementation to understand the reach, impact, and lessons learned of the initiative and its grantees. Most recently, the Evaluation Center initiated an onboarding process for the newest cohort of HKFOF grantees. In partnership with grantees, the Evaluation Center:

- **Conducted an “evaluation capacity” survey** to better understand grantees’ experience with and interest in receiving additional training on various evaluation topics.
- **Facilitated evaluation partnership kick-offs** to get to know grantees and begin planning evaluation activities and metrics for their individual programs.
- **Hosted training on the Foundation’s grant management system** to prepare grantees for their first quarterly report submissions.

■ [Re-Entry Community Linkages \(RELINK\)](#) is a St. Louis Integrated Health Network (IHN) initiative that connects the public health system and community support system to support young adults discharged from the jail who are returning to the community. The Evaluation Center has partnered with the RELINK initiative to assess the changes in coordination and linkages among the health and social service network (HSSN) since 2016. In spring 2020, the global pandemic caused a public health and social justice crisis for serving the justice-involved individuals. This year, IHN expanded the evaluation to include understanding the effects of COVID-19 on the HSSN partners and the services they provide to justice-involved individuals. The results will help to inform guidance and support for organizations operating in a pandemic.

■ [Better Family Life \(BFL\)](#) and [NeighborWorks America](#) collaborated with the Brown School Evaluation Center to complete a Community Impact Measurement (CIM) assessment, which examined multiple aspects of housing and neighborhood residents’ perceptions in Better Family Life’s geographic handprint at a point in time. We worked with BFL to tailor the data collection instruments, conduct data entry, management, and complete analysis. By repeating the CIM assessment every three years, a picture can be developed of how BFL’s programs impact the neighborhood over time. The data will be used to develop and refine BFL’s programs to maximize impact on the community.



## New Partnerships

The Evaluation Center is looking forward to working with our new partners:



■ The Center is also working with [AmeriCorps STL](#) to better understand the impact and effectiveness of their services. AmeriCorps STL works primarily in two focus areas -- Disaster Response and Environmental Stewardship, and serve as a national leader in emergency management and volunteer deployment.

■ We’re partnering with the [Washington University School of Medicine Office of Continuing Medical Education](#) to conduct a stakeholder needs assessment to inform their strategic vision and ensure alignment with the educational needs of key stakeholders across the WashU School of Medicine.



## In the News

[COVID-19 Messaging for SPeciAl School DiStrict Testing \(COMPASS-T\)](#)

[radx-up.org](#), March 2, 2020

funding and fee for services.

**Jacob:** Working at the Evaluation Center helped me decide to pursue a PhD after finishing my master’s degrees (MSW/MBA). Hands-on experience in evaluation showed me the power that translational research in social science can have on society, gave me the baseline skills needed to begin a career as a scholar, and exposed me to work that I find enjoyable and gratifying.

**What is one thing you’ve learned while working at the Evaluation Center?**

**Deja:** Leadership at the Evaluation Center maintains an open-door policy! For my MPH Capstone project, I chose to evaluate the City of St. Louis Department of Health. The center Director, Associate Director, and Student Experience Manager were open to meeting and providing invaluable feedback regarding this personal project. Throughout this experience, I learned how to perform an independent evaluation from start to finish. This simply would not have been possible without working at the Evaluation Center.

**Jacob:** Don’t collect (or analyze) data you’re not going to use.

**What is one thing about your work as an evaluator that you’re proud of?**

**Deja:** Working on the RADx project was a compelling experience. My role included analyzing qualitative and quantitative focus group data for project evaluation and overall program impact. I also worked throughout all aspects of the project, including – focus group facilitation, data collection, and qualitative data analysis, which were the proudest moments. Knowing that I performed the primary data analysis on the communication strategies being used to inform how the projects’ communication budget will be used for the remainder of the NIH grant was empowering. The data I analyzed was used to create messaging targeting parents and staff within Special School District.

**Jacob:** Knowing how much I’ve learned with the Evaluation Center and being able to see that progress in my work.

**Do you have any pets?**



## Publications

Purnell JQ, Lobb Dougherty N, Kryzer E, Bajracharya S, Chaitan VL, Combs T, Ballard E, Simpson A, Caburnay C, Poor TJ, Pearson CJ, Reiter C, Adams KR, Brown M (2020). [Research to Translation: The Healthy Schools Toolkit and New Approaches to the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model.](#) *Journal of School Health*. 90(12): 948-963. doi: 10.1111/josh.12958.

Cavazos-Rehs P, Xu C, Krauss MJ, Min C, Winograd R, Gruzca R, Bierut LJ (2021). [Understanding barriers to treatment among individuals not engaged in treatment who misuse opioids: A structural equation modeling approach.](#) *Substance Abuse*. Feb 22, online ahead of print. doi: 10.1080/08897077.2021.1876199.

**Deja:** We have a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel and his name is Jay.

**Jacob:** I have a dog named Zambu, who I adopted from the Humane Society a little over a year ago. He's a mutt but looks a lot like an Irish terrier.

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