



**NJ-AIMH**  
c/o Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health  
College of Education and Human Services  
**MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY**  
1 Normal Avenue  
Montclair NJ 07043

Dear Friends,

It is with great excitement that I announce the “re-inauguration” of the New Jersey Association for Infant Mental Health (“NJ-AIMH” or the “Association”). We are also pleased to announce our affiliation with Montclair State University, Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health.

Founded in 1990, NJ-AIMH was created to (1) increase awareness of the importance of psychosocial development in infancy and early childhood, (2) increase competency in the areas of cultural and ethnic diversity within family child-rearing practices, and (3) facilitate statewide cooperation among multi-disciplinary professionals and organizations concerned with promoting the optimal development of infants and caregiver-infant relationships.

Historically, NJ-AIMH led the field in providing educational opportunities through forums and conferences, the creation and dissemination of publications on infant mental health, and advocacy for public policies that foster awareness of the importance of infant mental health.

Since 1991, in cooperation with such organizations as Rutgers University, UMDNJ, the YCS Institute for Infant and Preschool Mental Health, Gateway Northwest Maternal-Child Health Consortium, and the Central New Jersey Maternal Child Health Consortium, the Association sponsored conferences on topics which promoted the understanding that infancy is a critical period in psychosocial development of individuals and that every child needs an environment which supports optimal physical, mental, and emotional growth and development. Through these professional development forums, NJ-AIMH sponsored presentations by world renowned faculty in the field, including Michael Trout, Dr. Michael Lewis, Dr. Charles Zeanah, Dr. Vivian Shapiro, Dr. Janet Shapiro, and Judge Cindy Lederman.

NJ-AIMH has also supported significant measures on behalf of infants and toddlers and their families which laid the foundation for legislative decisions within the States of NJ and Pennsylvania. For more details regarding our advocacy efforts, please refer to our website at [www.nj-aimh.org](http://www.nj-aimh.org).

In recent years, however, NJ-AIMH activities and membership have waned. This has paralleled a significant increase in infancy and early childhood initiatives in our state, such as the NJ BUILD Initiative (birth to 5 early learning), the NJDHSS Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) initiative, NJ-FEELS, an initiative aimed at promoting the Pyramid/CSEFEL model in early childhood programs, the NJDCF funding of infant and early childhood evidence-based home visitation initiatives, and the creation of the New Jersey Council for Young Children, with a committee dedicated to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health. For more than two decades, these organizations have accepted the mantle of advocating and advancing infant and early childhood mental health, increasing cultural competence of professionals working with families, and providing essential training and networking opportunities to those professionals.

NJ-AIMH has inspired growth and awareness within the field of infant toddler mental health; however, it is time to broaden our scope. In these times of fiscal constraint, it is essential that professionals have a place to go to network, share ideas, collaborate on potential grant opportunities, promote programs and events, and avoid service overload for families. In the coming months and years, we will strive to increase our visibility and availability to become that professional resource. Although in its infancy, please visit [www.nj-aimh.org](http://www.nj-aimh.org). Over the upcoming months, its content will become more relevant to our efforts.

Moreover, despite past successes, the concept of Infant Mental Health and the importance of early childhood relationships as it relates to development have not been fully embraced at all levels. There remains an urgent need to inform public health policy, the court system, and education policy in order to effectively safeguard our young children. Hence, advocacy and expertise in this area remain essential. All programs within the State of NJ, working with children prenatal to five, need a strong foundation in understanding the critical importance of the earliest relationships in promoting emotional development and for a healthy trajectory for young children. Especially for our most vulnerable children is this need greatest. Particularly in protective services, judicial, and special education systems, where normative practices fail to address the foundational importance of early childhood mental health, is the need for seeing the world through the “eyes of the child” most vital.

To help address these needs, the Association, in conjunction with the NJ Council for Young Children, is pleased to announce that it is engaged in efforts to adopt the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health Consultant Competency Guidelines and Endorsement (“Endorsement”) for the State of New Jersey. This Endorsement provides for professional development in infant and early childhood mental health, ongoing mentorship, and the essential component of reflective practice at all staff levels. The existence of a formal professional certification such as the Endorsement, that incorporates competency at all levels, would create a cadre of professionals dedicated to the promotion of infant mental health and prevention services for families at risk.

This endorsement/certification credential will benefit all practitioners, agencies, and publicly-funded entities involved in efforts to promote infant mental health and development by certifying the competency of professionals at all levels – thereby increasing staff and program credibility – and acknowledging and enhancing professional practice with the goal of drawing more qualified individuals to the field. NJ-AIMH is best poised to lead initiatives for professional development in this rich, multidisciplinary field and it is the goal of NJ-AIMH to begin informational meetings with stakeholders about the Endorsement system beginning in the Fall of 2012.

In sum, within the next six months, we intend to refresh our Mission Statement and Bylaws consistent with the announcements set forth above, elect a new Board of Trustees, enhance our website and engage in a statewide membership drive. Enclosed please find our brochure and membership information. For those who join prior to our November 2012 Annual Meeting, annual renewal will not be due again until January 2014. Benefits of membership include:

- Annual Membership Meeting with CEUs
- Reduced Fees for Annual Conference in May and related events
- Networking Opportunities
- Leadership Opportunities
- Access to Professional Accreditation (pending)

This is a very exciting time for professionals working with young children and for young children and their families in the State of NJ! I, along with the Provisional Board, look forward to your participation, support and advocacy! Please submit the attached form and appropriate fee, or contact us at:

NJ-AIMH c/o Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health  
College of Education and Human Services  
MONCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY  
1 Normal Avenue  
Montclair, NJ 07043  
Ph: 973-655-6685, Fax: 973-655-5376  
Email: [info@nj-aimh.org](mailto:info@nj-aimh.org), Web: [www.nj-aimh.org](http://www.nj-aimh.org)

Sincerely,



Diane E. Ristaino, Provisional President