



**Oregon State
University**

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Oregon State University winner of Sharon Darling Innovation Fund Family Learning System Challenge by National Center for Families Learning

Researchers team up to draft playbook to inspire playful parenting

LOUISVILLE, Ky., (July 18, 2023) – [National Center for Families Learning](#) (NCFL) announced [Oregon State University](#) as one of three winners of the Sharon Darling Innovation Fund Family Learning System Challenge. Researchers from the College of Forestry and College of Health will use the \$30,000 grant to develop a program – “The Playful Path to Parenting” – that encourages and empowers parents and caregivers to be more playful with their children.

“Parents and caregivers are the most accessible play facilitators and playmates to young children,” said Xiangyou Shen, Ph.D., assistant professor, OSU College of Forestry and Health, Environment, and Leisure Lab (HEAL) lead. “We believe more playful interactions are key to unlocking the benefits play brings to both children and adults. While parents and caregivers play a crucial role in supporting children’s play, very few interventions have explored ways to help parents be more playful. We’re excited to change that with this grant.”

Research shows through play, children learn foundational academic skills, grow social-emotional strategies, and physically strengthen their bodies. Parents and caregivers also benefit, including improved parent-child relationships, increasing parents’ own mental health and well-being, and higher parent satisfaction and confidence.

“Play is powerful,” said Shauna Tominey, Ph.D., associate professor, OSU College of Health. “These past few years have been especially hard on families with young children. We hope to reignite the joy of play in partnership with families, honoring the differences in play across cultures, while also highlighting the universal nature of family relationships.”

Established in honor of NCFL’s founder, the Sharon Darling Innovation Fund was created to develop and test new family learning breakthroughs across the country. Research shows that parent engagement in education is critical for a child’s long-term success in school and beyond. In addition to student gains, the whole family benefits, contributing to a thriving, equitable community. More than 360 organizations submitted proposals for this challenge.

The Sharon Darling Innovation Fund Family Learning System Challenge seeks to support ground-breaking programming that increases access and quality of educational opportunities for parenting adults and families; improves learning outcomes for children and caregivers; enhances and increases positive interactions between children and caregivers, develops parent

leadership skills, and promotes strong connections and engagement between families, schools, and communities.

“The ‘Playful Path to Parenting’ project is truly innovative in how it seeks to engage parents and children in a learning relationship,” Darling said. “That two-generation approach is exactly what NCFL has worked for more than three decades to share. I cannot wait to see how this project develops and am proud this grant will have an impact on generations of families to come.”

Professors Shen and Tominey will work bring this research to the community through a longstanding partnership with the Oregon Parenting education Collaborative (OPEC), which is supported by an OSU team at the Hallie E. Ford Center for Healthy Children & Families. Parents and caregivers with children ages 3 – 5 years will participate in shaping the curriculum through in-person workshops and homework. Once the curriculum is developed and evaluated, OSU will offer trainings to parenting educators through OPEC to provide workshops for families across the organization’s statewide network of parenting “hubs.”

“This grant speaks to the essence of NCFL – supporting two generations to develop skills that lead to increased academic, workplace, and quality of life outcomes,” said Dr. Felicia C. Smith, NCFL president and CEO. “We see the potential for this work to spread nationally through NCFL’s partners. We are proud to nurture this idea and excited to see how the research project unfolds and builds new knowledge and learning for the field.”

The two other grant winners are Bright Beginnings, Inc., of Washington, D.C., and Literacy Partners of New York. Each will receive a \$30,000 grant. Bright Beginnings will create an Alumni Support Network for families with children who have transitioned from its preschool programming into elementary school, providing wraparound services to ensure help them thrive. Literacy Partners will develop a workshop curriculum related to its science-themed telenovela-style mini-series, created in partnership with Univision. Learn more about these projects, [here](#).

About National Center for Families Learning

National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) is a national nonprofit that supports family success and well-being through education. NCFL believes education is a shared responsibility and collaboration among families, schools, and community members that leads to powerful learning experiences. Partnering with educators, literacy advocates, and communities, NCFL has worked for over 30 years to eradicate poverty through education solutions for families. NCFL's vision is to establish coordinated and aligned family learning systems in 60 communities by 2030, built with and for families, to increase education and economic outcomes and create more equitable communities. When parenting adults and children are engaged in learning together, the whole family benefits, contributing to a thriving, equitable community. For more information on NCFL, visit familieslearning.org.

About Oregon State University

[Oregon State University](http://oregonstate.edu) is one of only three land, sea, space and sun grant universities in the nation and receives more research funding than all the state’s comprehensive public universities combined. With campuses in Corvallis and Bend, a marine research center in Newport, OSU Portland Center and award-winning Ecampus, the university excels at shaping today’s students into tomorrow’s leaders.

The [OSU College of Forestry](http://oregonstate.edu/forestry) offers degree programs in sustaining ecosystems, managing forests and manufacturing wood products; conducts research on the nature and use of forests; and operates more than 15,000 acres of college forests.

The [OSU College of Health](#) creates connections in teaching, research and community engagement while advancing knowledge, policies and practices that improve individual and population health in communities across the state and around the world.

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