

# OUR neighborhood

Spring 2024

NEWS



## Collaborative Research for Community Empowerment

**N**orthwestern's Alliance for Research in Chicagoland Communities (ARCC) works to catalyze and bolster research partnerships between academics and communities, with a philosophy centered on honoring the expertise of communities that are closely connected to prevailing issues—and empowering them to take the lead in research endeavors.

“Research is a powerful way of understanding our world,” says Jen Brown, cofounder and director of ARCC. “When driven by affected communities, research increases the value for those communities.”

At the heart of ARCC's mission is the belief that research is a potent vehicle for making sense of the stories of our world. Brown emphasizes the crucial role of research in

enabling communities to articulate their own narratives.

“The collaborative community research approach asks, at each step of the process, who is making decisions, who holds the power, and what has changed because of the collaboration,” she says. “Our goal is ensuring communities are driving the work, including how findings can be shared so the people who participated can benefit from what was learned.”

Though ARCC collaborates with research teams across Northwestern, its focus is on health and equity issues, embracing a comprehensive definition of health that encompasses such aspects as transportation and workforce equity—recognizing health as fundamental for robust and thriving communities.

“We believe health is a primary building block for communities of all kinds and a shared priority across many communities and populations,” Brown says. “Not only are most issues determinants of physical, mental, or emotional health, but health contributes to other parts of people's lives. For instance, how can you have great education outcomes without health? They support each other.”

Just as ARCC believes communities should drive research, the same is true for its own programs. Guided by a steering community that includes representatives from community and faith-based organizations, public agencies, and Northwestern faculty and staff, its initiatives are tailored to create partnerships, build collaborative research capacity, and advocate for effective research outcomes.

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## NUCASLL: Where Science Meets Service

**N**orthwestern's Center for Audiology, Speech, Language, and Learning offers evidence-based evaluations and treatments for children and adults, while providing research and training experiences for graduate students in audiology, speech-language pathology, and learning disabilities.

The nonprofit center, established in 1928 and open to the public, "bridges science and service under one roof, offering one of the area's top resources for clinical services," says center director Diane Novak, an associate clinical professor in the School of Communication.

The center includes a state-of-the-art audio-environment simulation room unique to an audiology and speech clinic, allowing audiologists to check hearing devices

against a range of background noises and real-world environments to fine-tune and personalize fittings. Patients practice communication skills in realistic situations and receive feedback from their clinicians.

"NUCASLL may be the best-kept secret on campus," Novak says. "Patients can visit us for services to address communication challenges related to learning and reading, autism, stroke, aphasia, voice, and changes in hearing—to name a few."

Its location at Northwestern, the birthplace of the audiology field, allows the center opportunities to partner with world-renowned researchers. Clinical faculty members direct services in partnership with medical teams, educators, and other professionals to ensure comprehensive care for clients.

As part of the University's School of Communication, the center offers opportunities for "increased collaboration across disciplines and integrates innovation and science to form the foundation of our clinical care," Novak says.

The center is housed on campus within the North Parking Garage, located at 2315 North Campus Drive. This spring and summer, it will host communication and hearing enhancement courses open to the community.

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**TO LEARN MORE** about services or make an appointment, call 847-491-3165 or visit [nucasll.northwestern.edu](http://nucasll.northwestern.edu).





## Empowering Community Mental Health

Chicago-area nonprofit Turning Point has offered a range of mental health services to children and adults for more than 50 years. The Skokie, Illinois-based center serves over 1,400 people annually, especially low-income and Medicaid clients who often lack access to mental health services elsewhere.

Its comprehensive offerings include individual and group therapy and crisis intervention. The center will soon expand its crisis center to operate 24/7 and is establishing a new site in Evanston, broadening its reach to support a wider demographic. The robust group program assists clients with severe and chronic mental health issues, focusing on imparting essential life skills and aiding in the transition to independent living. A transitional living program in Skokie and Des Plaines provides temporary housing.

For over 20 years, Turning Point has collaborated with Northwestern University, hosting interns from the school's master of arts in counseling program. Interns work with clients, receive clinical supervision, and actively participate in the center's operations.



"Northwestern consistently sends us top-notch clinicians," says director of clinical services Julianne Rooney. "It's nice to be able to partner

with a university right here in our area. Students are familiar with the community the clients are a part of and can relate to them in that way."

Turning Point's commitment to supporting interns includes an open-door policy so that students have access to guidance and debriefing sessions when needed. A crisis team is readily available to aid students in managing challenging situations, ensuring a comprehensive learning experience.

"Interns get a broad range of experiences," Rooney says, noting they can ask to work with children, couples, families, or people with particular diagnoses. "But we'll also push them to see others. Sometimes students are scared of working with a particular type of client or diagnosis. With the right

support, they might find they enjoy it and they'll get a chance to practice several different skills and therapy modalities.

"They've got a lot of support and options to grow as clinicians and get many different experiences."

TO LEARN MORE about Turning Point's services, visit [tpoint.org](http://tpoint.org).



## Collaborative Research

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Lisa Daniels, executive director of the Darren B. Easterling Center for Restorative Practices, led an ARCC seed grant partnership focused on supporting the mental health of Black women who have lost children to gun violence or incarceration. “ARCC’s belief in and funding for our program from its inception have been cornerstones of our success,” she says.

Brown says it’s pivotal for ARCC to ensure that research transcends the academic realm and translates into practical impact. Projects such as collaborating with Chicago community media outlets to disseminate research findings in accessible ways underscore the goal of engaging a wider audience beyond traditional academic circles.

The center also confronts historical issues of research misconduct and inequity, striving to dismantle ingrained dynamics that have marginalized communities.

“Many times, a lot of harm has been wrought through research that’s been done unethically and disrespectfully and hasn’t had a lot of impact,” Brown says, adding that researchers haven’t always had a shared understanding with their subjects.

And as researchers are often rewarded for publishing and for obtaining grants, there is less recognition for things like policy testimony or developing a technical manual or training. ARCC is working to change systems so they “are not in service of research but are serviced by research,” Brown says.

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**FOR GUIDELINES TO APPLY to the ARCC seed grant program, visit [bit.ly/ARCCgrants](https://bit.ly/ARCCgrants).**

## Staff profile: **Rebekah Sigman**



Northwestern welcomes Rebekah Sigman as assistant director of community relations for athletics. Sigman began in the role last year, serving as a point of con-

tact for community members, planning Northwestern Athletics events such as movie night at Ryan Field, and supporting community groups and strengthening their relationships with Northwestern Athletics.

She has worked at Northwestern since 2016 and since moving to Evanston has worked and volunteered at various theater, arts, and entertainment organizations.

Sigman graduated from the University of Virginia with a bachelor’s degree in theater. She later earned her master’s in leadership for creative enterprises from Northwestern, with a goal of working as a community relations professional for an organization she is passionate about—like Northwestern Athletics.

Sigman and her partner, David, enjoy being a part of the Evanston community; attending Northwestern sporting events, concerts, and plays; and playing through their massive board game collection.



## CONNECT WITH US

Our monthly email newsletter includes important community updates. Email Shayla Butler at [shayla.butler@northwestern.edu](mailto:shayla.butler@northwestern.edu) to sign up.

Do you have a business or non-profit in Evanston? We can help increase your visibility, facilitate connections to the Northwestern community, and find student volunteers.

For details, visit [northwestern.edu/communityrelations](https://northwestern.edu/communityrelations) or contact Dave Davis, senior executive director of the Office of Neighborhood and Community Relations, at [dave.davis@northwestern.edu](mailto:dave.davis@northwestern.edu) or 847-467-5762.