# Health and Human Science Matters Season 3, Episode 5: Debbie Fidler

Debbie Fidler: We've been really trying to work in the direction of creating play-based opportunities for parents and their kids in daily routines and the home environment to be able to practice these skills in short, brief, activities and games. And so, if we've done our work right, it should feel like ways that parents and kids can play together. But embedded in those activities are opportunities to strengthen working memory skills, which are the remembering skills we need whenever we're trying to complete a task. Inhibition skills, those are the skills that help us hold back from an automatic response in favor of a more measured and considered response. And a couple of other really important thinking skills that help us be goal-directed and problem-solving in our day-to-day lives.

Avery Martin: Welcome to Health and Human Science Matters, a podcast by Colorado State University's College of Health and Human Sciences. I'm your co-host and digital media strategist, Avery Martin.

Matt Hickey: And I'm Matt Hickey, associate dean for research and graduate studies. In our college, we make it our mission to optimize human health and wellbeing through discovery and innovation. Don't just take our word for it. Each episode, we sit down with people who fulfill that mission, our college faculty and staff. And today we're lucky enough to have a colleague who I've long admired whose work I've seen in a variety of different settings, we'll unpack in the next few minutes, Dr. Debbie Fidler from Human Development Family Studies. Debbie, welcome.

Debbie Fidler: Thank you very much. It's wonderful to be here.

Matt Hickey: We're delighted to have you. I want to start with the most recent recognition. This was just in the spring. Of course, the Scholarship Impact Award here at CSU goes to one faculty member. And then, it went to Debbie in the spring in recognition of a remarkable breadth and depth of scholarship. And so, congratulations.

Debbie Fidler: Thank you so much. It was really very meaningful for me to receive that award. I think that when we set out to ask research questions and to try to generate new science, to move our field forward, the ultimate goal is to have an impact and to reach the populations that we care about and that we're dedicated to. And so, to receive that particular recognition meant a lot to me.

Matt Hickey: I have to tell you, for many of us that have been on the sidelines, fans cheering you on, watching from a distance, there was no surprise whatsoever. I first met Debbie, I think, at a distance. We're in different departments in the college, and for many years I chaired a research ethics committee on campus for our academic folks. It's the IRB. For our guests who don't know what the heck IRB stands for, it's a research ethics committee that oversees proposed work involving human research participants. And Debbie, I think, could fairly be described as a frequent flyer. She's got a lot going on. So we would see-

Debbie Fidler: A lot of protocols, a lot of amendments.

Matt Hickey: ... of protocols coming from her. It was obvious to me early on, in fact, obviously enough that I made repeated requests for Debbie to come join us on the committee. She was smart enough to say, "I've got a research program to run here." But those invitations were born out of an appreciation for what she was doing, the impact. I think this, there's a gift for communication. IRBs, we always somewhat tongue in cheek to tell investigators, write your consents for the people that are going to be considering enrolling at the sixth to eighth grade reading level, make it simple, make it conversation. So, she had a gift for... Because, we would see all these. The typical IRB submission would have elements of the proposal that was funded. So, this is the standard jargon laden, uber sophisticated, work that goes to a funding agency like the National Institutes of Health.

Avery Martin: Correct.

Matt Hickey: We then have the proposal, which is speaking to us as IRB members, which is distilling again, this complex, sophisticated work into language that other academics and community members can understand. And then, we have these consents. As you'll see in a few minutes, Debbie's population of interest is one where communication is particularly important. I think it's always important, but there are particular populations where that gift and in the need to communicate is crucial. And I would continue to see these protocols come through, and I'd say, "Wow, she's doing all three of these things in a really powerful way." And so, my fandom is not just tongue in cheek. I've admired her, worked for a long time. This is a natural platform to tell us, when we think about big problems, big issues, big questions that you pursue as a scholar, what are they?

Debbie Fidler: The big question, I would say, that ties together most of our work is, how do we create greater inclusive experiences for all members of our community, including people who have neurodiverse perspectives, so are people who are differing ability levels. And in particular, a lot of our work focuses on supporting outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families, and identifying ways to promote positive developmental pathways, to provide families with supports that could help them in the home environment, and to provide their child with positive, enriching, experiences during early childhood all the way through to, most recently, trying to find ways to promote inclusive employment pathways for young adults in our community with intellectual and developmental disabilities so that they can be engaged as contributing members of our community throughout adulthood as well.

Matt Hickey: I need not oversell the import of the work here.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: Can you give our listeners just one or two examples of who exactly are we talking about?

Debbie Fidler: Sure. In particular, the work that our team has been focused on has been connected to individuals who have underlying conditions that are genetic in nature. And so, the origin of someone's learning delays or the challenges and strengths that they are presenting with happen all the way back in the earliest moments of genetics. And so, when there are some kind of change or difference that happens in early stages, early, early prenatal development, that can have some really important ramifications for how prenatal development takes place, and how early childhood development unfolds, and development really throughout the lifespan. So, we study what are called neurogenetic conditions that are associated with intellectual disability. And in particular, we've studied several different neurogenetic conditions that are of varying degrees of prevalence. But the most common neurogenetic condition that we study is Down syndrome, which is caused by the presence, in most cases, the presence of a third chromosome 21.

Matt Hickey: Thank you, Debbie. I want to use this as a bridge to talk about your pathway. We were always interested in how is it, and this is going to be a multiyear, maybe multi-decade, story in some ways of how did you end up sitting at this table today. How is it that we're celebrating this talented scholar and member of our community here at CSU? And so, we're interested in, again, educational influences. This could be family mentors and maybe folks, when I was an undergrad in graduate school, that you still bear their fingerprints. This is a metaphor that we like to share here. So, tell us about your journey.

Debbie Fidler: I think that there are two parallel sets of influences that I had along the way in my own lifespan development. The first is, is that I was really lucky enough, and I thank my family for giving me this opportunity, I was lucky enough to attend, each summer, an inclusive overnight camp experience in New England for many, many years throughout the eighties. And in this camp experience, we were able to do sports, and art, and dance, and swimming, and boating side by side with peers of lots of different abilities. To me, I knew right from the very start that, that felt like the kind of community that I always would want to be a part of. As I got older and older, I wondered why we can't have more of this outside of a idyllic setting in central Massachusetts. And so, I stayed on actually as a staff member in the program throughout college and even throughout graduate school. And that really influenced my decision to pursue this particular line of study for this particular population.

The second set of formative experiences, I think I always knew that this was the population and the community that I wanted to be engaged with professionally, but I'm not sure that I always knew exactly how. And I had a couple of different strategies along the way in my early adulthood. But what I didn't realize was that I was given an opportunity to have an exposure to being a part of a research lab as an undergraduate. I thought I was just getting some credits here and there that could help me towards my psych major. And so, I had the opportunity to work in Dr. Tom Gilovich's social psychology lab at Cornell University. And it was a profound experience for me. I got to work in the lab from sophomore through to senior year. I met one of my dearest friends who was brought into the lab at the same time, and we still talk on the phone to this day all the time.

Matt Hickey: That's so great, isn't it?

Avery Martin: That's [inaudible 00:09:50].

Debbie Fidler: And what I got to see that was, at the time I didn't know even was something that you could choose as a career pathway, was the front lines of being able to be generating new knowledge in an area of interest and to be a part of asking the research questions. And then to hear all of these incredibly brilliant people sitting at the table, coming up with ideas for study designs, and collaborating around those ideas, and going back and forth iteratively to make the ideas even stronger. And then, to have the chance to be a part of recruiting participants and implementing research studies as an undergraduate.

When it came time for me to think about what came after college, I realized, hey, I really think I would love to pursue this idea of being a researcher. And if I could put it together with this population that I really deeply care about, that that would be a very meaningful way to spend my adult life as a professional. And so, I worked really hard to try to find a good match in terms of graduate school.

That takes me to another mentor that I am deeply indebted to, and that is my mentor Dr. Bob Hodapp, who at the time was at UCLA. He's at Vanderbilt now. And he gave me the opportunity to be fully immersed in the research that I love to this day. But he also, from A to Z, provided socialization experiences for me around, how do you ask the questions? What are the theories that we need to use to guide us? What are the study designs? How do you think about analyzing the data once you've collected it? And then, how do you communicate what you've found? And Bob is an incredible communicator. How do you communicate what you found to the different audiences that this information is going to be useful for?

I'm very happy to say that, even though I finished school over two decades ago, I still collaborate with my mentor Bob. We co-edit the serial review in our field called the International Review of Research and Developmental Disabilities. He brought me on seven years ago to do that with him. And it is one of the biggest honors of my career to be able to still work with him.

Matt Hickey: One of the hallmarks I'm hearing already is these enduring relationships. It's not just three or four years in graduate school, and that's a special thing. I know you don't take it for granted. I have to ask you a couple follow on questions if I can. I'm assuming from some of the descriptions that you may have been born and raised in the northeast?

Debbie Fidler: Yeah. I was born in the Washington DC area and just in the suburbia.

Matt Hickey: Yeah, great.

Debbie Fidler: Just on the Maryland side of things, and lived there all of my growing up years, and then had college in upstate New York. And then graduate school, I really went in a different direction that I think was not on my family's radar by going to the West Coast and by having graduate school in California. And then, even more I think a surprise to my family, I ended up staying in the middle of the country, in the Mountain West.

Matt Hickey: Here, here. Here, here. So familial influences, presumably education was important as in your household growing up. Can you again share a little bit more about that?

Debbie Fidler: Sure. Yeah. My father was a physician. He was an endocrinologist. And he was the archetypal family doctor that you just don't see that much anymore. He cared deeply about his patients. There was story after story that we heard, over the years, about how he would reach out to them, and several stories about him in the moment taking his patients from the office to a place to make sure that they got what they needed. He was just a really incredibly caring, very thorough, very intellectual, but very gentle spirited, amazing man.

Matt Hickey: Apples don't fall far.

Avery Martin: Yeah, exactly.

Matt Hickey: I mean, you bear your father's influence. I think you would perhaps be willing to say so.

Debbie Fidler: I would aspire to be able to have something like that.

Matt Hickey: Well said.

Debbie Fidler: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: Well said.

Debbie Fidler: To this day, there is a memorial lecture in my dad's memory at George Washington University Medical School. It actually just happened last week.

Matt Hickey: Oh, wow.

Debbie Fidler: There was a fund that was made for this annual lecture about the art of providing care for patients. And so, giving medical students the opportunity to go beyond the science side of developing their diagnostician skills and their med school foundations to think about the human side of medicine.

I'll also share that there was a very strong influence for me from my mother who spent many years working in our local social services agency. She was actually very instrumental in providing a lot of trainings to the different service providers within the Department of Social Services in our area. And so, the combination of, I think, my father's dedication to science and caregiving and my mother's dedication to working with agencies and community partners, I think all of that, there's some threads that you can pull through from both of them to what I'm doing today.

Matt Hickey: So I want to circle back to where we started. This first impression was this experience you had at these summer camps, enough that you stayed on as a counselor yourself on into college. There's something there, right? I'm interested in hearing more about, again, the influence, maybe a mentor, or experiences in that setting.

Debbie Fidler: The camp that I went to was really unique. And the inclusive element of the camp was really the vision of another set of mentors of mine. Herb and Barbara Greenberg, who were special educators, who lived in Long Island at the time. They're still here with us innovating and contributing to our community to this day.

Matt Hickey: Wow, nice.

Debbie Fidler: And they had a vision for creating camping experiences for their students that could enrich the experiences year round, that there were wonderful ways that students were being supported throughout the academic year. But at the time, things would really fall off during the summertime. And so, they had an idea about, what if we tried to create this inclusive summer camp program? By the time that I came through, they were already really legendary in the camping world for having created this really successful, what at the time was really a test case. Could we make this happen?

And so, by the time that I got to be a staff member working with them and then move my way up through program director and things like that, I always felt humbled by being able to sit at the table with them and to be mentored by them. They really, that idea of being able to try to see something, just a hint of something that could be really innovative, and new, and impactful, and then take it from that early vision all the way through to, I mean, it's now, I think, something in the 50 years of execution of that camp program, that inspires me to this day to think about what they made happen, and to try to take a little piece of that and make that happen too.

Matt Hickey: Does that inform how you approach research design or interactions with vulnerable participants? I'm really intrigued.

Debbie Fidler: Yeah. I think that one of the ways that our lab operates that is really influenced by that particular sentiment is that we are oftentimes trying to think about what isn't out there yet that we really need as a field. And where do we have a bunch of puzzle pieces in place that haven't been put together into the full puzzle? And so, there are a couple of examples of that right now that have been in the works for quite some time, but are coming to fruition right now.

One of the exciting projects that our team is working on is the development of a new parent-mediated or parent-implemented intervention for preschoolers with Down syndrome. And the idea is, is that we're trying to work to support a set of thinking skills in young children with Down syndrome that are known to be areas of vulnerability for many young children with Down syndrome.

But rather than using a traditional approach to a therapy to have parents and kids come into a medical center or to a therapy center for their 40-minute appointment and then go home, we've been really trying to work in the direction of creating play-based opportunities for parents and their kids in daily routines, in the home environment, to be able to practice these skills in short brief activities and games. And so, we spent the last year in collaboration with our colleagues at the University of Padua, in Padua, Italy, a sister lab that we have there where we've been working on similar kinds of research questions, and we've been joining forces to create this new intervention.

We have developed what we are calling EXPO, which is it stands for Executive Function Play Opportunities. And we've just finished year one of a two-year intervention development project that was funded by the Jerome Lejeune Foundation. We now have version 1.0 of a clinician manual, of a parent guide, of activity cards, of an app that parents can use when they're playing these games with their child, demonstration videos. And we actually just received the round one of feedback on what we'll call a formative evaluation. We went to trusted colleagues at different places around the US and around Italy and asked them to review all of our materials and give us as rigorous of feedback as they possibly can.

We're receiving that feedback right now. And we're going to refine it for a version 2.0 by mid-October. And then, we're going to pilot it this January. And we're really excited to see if we can get this home-based intervention that, if we've done our work right, it should feel like ways that parents and kids can play together. But embedded in those activities are opportunities to strengthen working memory skills, which are the remembering skills we need whenever we're trying to complete a task, inhibition skills, those are the skills that help us hold back from an automatic response in favor of a more measured and considered response, and a couple of other really important thinking skills that help us be goal directed and problem solving in our day-to-day lives.

Matt Hickey: That's phenomenal.

Avery Martin: That's incredible. Talk about impact.

Matt Hickey: I'll say, wow. Have you been able to go visit your colleagues in Italy?

Debbie Fidler: I have.

Avery Martin: Oh, awesome.

Matt Hickey: Padua was one of the oldest universities on planet Earth. We're talking eight centuries of history.

Debbie Fidler: I think it was founded in the year 1200, something like that.

Matt Hickey: Isn't that awesome?

Avery Martin: Wow.

Matt Hickey: Stuff like that gets me geeked up.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Debbie Fidler: Yeah. And to be in a place like that, to visit such a incredible historic location, and to see colleagues who are doing the most cutting edge research at the same time, it was really incredible. And I'm hoping in my sabbatical year that I'll be able to get back there one more time.

Matt Hickey: Good for you. I'm jealous, I have to admit. Good for you.

Avery Martin: Yeah, maybe we can tag along and do an episode out there.

Matt Hickey: Yes. Still a ways, right?

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: So I want to talk about the transition here to CSU. When did we manage to recruit you? How did that happen?

Debbie Fidler: Well, I went on the job market my last year of graduate school, and there were a few positions that seemed to be a potential match. And this is the one that I got.

Matt Hickey: I have to ask you, was Colorado State even on your radar screen at that time? I think these things are important to hear. Because, you look back now and say, "A place that really I wasn't even considering, I've now had a long and productive history."

Debbie Fidler: I'll confess that CSU really wasn't on my radar at the time, and I had to do quite a bit of homework both before I got here and once I got here.

Matt Hickey: Who are these people?

Debbie Fidler: To learn more about the Land-Grant Mission.

Matt Hickey: Sure.

Debbie Fidler: And to learn more about our region and the Rocky Mountains, and the Mountain West, and the different segments of the population that we wanted to be able to serve through our research. And so, it's really been a wonderful pathway of discovery that we continue to learn as we go about how do we create strong community partnerships, learn more about how we can serve the families and the organizations that we work with. And I think, in fact, if there's one big important trajectory that our team has been on, it's learning how to be good partners and to continue to improve that outreach and engagement component of the work that we do in our lab. That's

Matt Hickey: That's great. So, we always ask this question a day in the life, as if there ever is such a thing. But talk to us about when you're thinking about, I'm together with my team here at CSU, and as we've already heard, and you haven't touched on other partnerships, multiple partnerships all over the country, I think of Cincinnati is one example among many, but the group you have here could you just give us a typical day.

Debbie Fidler: I'm going to brag on our wonderful Developmental Disabilities Research Lab team, and start by saying that it's a group that is just phenomenal and inspiring to work with each day. And that's not an understatement. We have three doctoral students in our lab. And our lab coordinator is a doc student in applied developmental science. Her name is Kaylyn Van Deusen. And then, we also have Miranda Pinks and Madison Walsh, two other doc students who are incredible MVPs in our lab as well. We also have two professional research associates who work in our lab, Bianka Enriquez Estrada and Sarah Looney, as well as a lab tech who helps us with all kinds of different lab activities, Breelynn Frank. And so, that's our core team.

And then, on top of all of that and that incredibly talented team, we have a group of undergraduate research assistants who work with us from semester to semester and who we really couldn't do a lot of what we do. A lot of our productivity is really the result of a lot of their hard work as well. And I want to also just share that I co-lead the Developmental Disabilities Research Lab with my colleague, Dr. Lisa Daunhauer.

Matt Hickey: That's great. And so, who makes all this possible, do you have a money tree in your backyard?

Debbie Fidler: We have, over the years, been really very fortunate to be able to have found different sources of funding consistently for the projects that we are hoping to implement. And so, we have been funded by both federal agencies and by private foundations. Our work has been funded by the NIH, and National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the US Department of Education, in particular, Institute for Educational Sciences, and also the Administration for Community Living, the National Institute of Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, or NIDILRR. And then, on the foundation side, we've been funded by the March of Dimes Foundation, the Global Down Syndrome Foundation, and the National Down Syndrome Society, and then most recently the Jerome Lejeune Foundation as well.

Matt Hickey: That's fantastic. That's a lot.

Avery Martin: Yes, it is. That's an impressive CV right there.

Matt Hickey: It is. It really is.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: I want you to talk because you did so beautifully, this wonderful job describing the influence of mentors on you. I want to cast that shadow forward now and think about your aspirations as a mentor, these PhD trainings you have in the lab now, those that have moved on from the lab, what do you hope they take away from their experience with you, as a mentor?

Debbie Fidler: That's a terrific question, and I think I'm actually going to go and pull a little bit from another question that you asked just a minute or two ago that I don't think I completely answered. So, the question about what a day in the life of members of our lab team looks like I think is also connected to what I'm hoping for them to be able to take with them once they launch in their own career pathways. So, we talk a lot in our team about the lifecycle of a data point and all of the different ways that we are working at different, we're developmentalists, so at different stages, in order to arrive at that final finding, that we are able to turn to our different communities that we work with and our scientific colleagues and share that new knowledge.

What does it take to get there? Our lab activities start, in the most important ways, with that outreach and engagement component and being strong community partners to the families that we work with, to the advocacy groups that we work with. And really building those relationships so that, when we come to our different partners and say we have a new research study or a new intervention opportunity, that we're coming with a real long history of having been invested in this community and being trustworthy community partners who are not going to come here today and leave tomorrow. And so, a good amount of what we are doing these days is spending time at community events. We were just at the Rocky Mountain Down Syndrome Association Step Up walk, and had a wonderful opportunity to speak with so many families. We consider those kinds of community connections just as essential as the advanced analytic approaches that we take to modeling our data.

And so, we start there, and then we work on recruitment activities. Then, we have a very active calendar of research, laboratory assessment visits with families. We have visits up here, in the BSB. And then, we also have two sites in Denver that our team members will visit with families. And then, we'll also, for some of our funded projects, we will travel to see families who meet the different kinds of criteria for participating in that study. So, we've got the assessment visits, and our team works really well. We have a primary examiner and then we have a second examiner at every visit. There's just beautiful teamwork that happens to make those visits go smoothly not just for the assessments themselves but for the relationship building with the families, and to make sure that each participant has a really as fun of a time as possible so that when they drive by CSU, they say, "Hey, I want to go back there for the next opportunity."

And then, I would say even more fun begins once we have our data sets. I want to highlight, actually, that we have an incredibly fortunate collaboration with Dr. Mark Prince in the Department of Psychology, who is both a very talented clinical psychologist and a research methodologist and statistician. Our collaboration with him, over the past five years or so, that continues on in a lot of our funded projects has really been a game changer in terms of us being able to answer our research questions in increasingly more sophisticated way ways. And actually, let me say that a little differently. He's been able to help us ask better questions and know how to get at the patterns, the underlying patterns, that we didn't know that we could look for with some of the analytic approaches that he has trained us on and that he guides us through. The analytic phase of working with our data is ongoing every day as well, all the way through to mentoring students with dissemination, presenting at conferences, all of the fun, taking the findings to the finish line.

What do I want, or what do we want in our lab, our students to be able to leave with? It's that 360 view of what it means to be someone who goes from being a consumer of knowledge to a generator of knowledge, someone who is going to move our field forward, identify the next set of important, impactful, vital questions that need to be asked. And then, to have all the tools in the toolkit to be able to go from community engagement to dissemination back to the community.

Matt Hickey: There's some phrases that are emerging as thematic of our conversation over the last 35 or 40 minutes. And we think scholarship, we think things like rigor, integrity of data, as you've pointed out. I think of innovation, imagination, of being able to see a question in a different way. But the one that I think emerges the most consistently for me is this word relationships. For you, you talk about the enduring relationships of friends from the Cornell days. And mentors that are... These are now 20 plus year relationships with mentors. The beautiful way you describe the relationship with your family. It's a wonderful package in many ways. It's easy for folks outside the academy, I think, to get this impression of us as talking heads. And I think this more balanced view of what it means to be a scholar is an important one. So, thanks for sharing that. I really appreciate it.

Debbie Fidler: Absolutely. I actually, I want to speak to that centrality of relationships. It's even important for us to be able to do the big science. In our subfield, we work with relatively rarer conditions. And so, in order for us to be able to have design studies that answer really big, important, impactful questions, oftentimes we can't just rely on our own team and our own geographic area. We have to build partnerships. We have to collaborate with colleagues in Ohio, and in California, and Arizona, and Pennsylvania, and now Massachusetts, and Italy.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: Yeah, I was about to say.

Debbie Fidler: And there's this really beautiful sentiment in our subfield that I actually talk about quite a lot. And I think our students, from time to time, get a little bit like, "Oh there goes Debbie again waxing on about our subfield." But there has been this really beautiful sense of collaboration that, together, we can ask the bigger questions. And if we write projects together, if we support each other through data collection in our region for your study and data collection in your region for our study, what we can do, what we really want to do, as scientists and practitioners, and that is move the field forward in substantial ways, and not just small incremental ways from our small vantage point in our one location. And so, I really have a lot of gratitude for the opportunities to work with colleagues that have been like-minded in that way.

Matt Hickey: This is a perfect platform to talk about impact. So, we cast our vision a few years into the future, five, 10, we take our pick. But aspirationally, I hope, Debbie, speaking for you, what kind of impact does Debbie want to have on the field of developmental disabilities?

Debbie Fidler: I think the big impact that would be the aspirational thing that motivates us, in our team, is the idea of working to find the right in interventions or the right activities for the right individuals at the right time in development. If we are able to produce evidence-based approaches that started out from the developmental science side of things with discoveries about key cognitive constructs, like executive function, some of those thinking processes that I described before, the necessary thinking skills that drive all of our purposeful goal directed behavior. Our team spent a lot of time studying executive function in children with Down syndrome and in other different intellectual disability category groups. From all of that work, we were able to then take a really informed stance towards crafting interventions that would target and meet exactly the needs of what we were seeing from our science.

And so, if we can continue to create that kind of loop from the developmental science discovery, describing what we call the natural history of development and different important populations that we work with. And then, take those discoveries and translate them into rigorously tested, evidence-based, practices that are feasible for families to be able to do, that are not arduous or burdensome, but that feel positive and promotive, and that really can both bring families together through the activities, and have an impact on the particular skills that we're trying to target, that would be... If we can create that and replicate that in other areas and other parts of the lifespan even, we would call that, I would call that, really a very aspirational and exciting outcome.

Avery Martin: Yeah. In addition to that, what are some of the impacts that you've already seen?

Debbie Fidler: Well, one of the things I think I would say that is really exciting for me and for our team is when families that we interact with come in with all kinds of knowledge that they've gained from working with professionals, and working with educators, and allied health providers. And that the conversations that they're coming into our visits with and the questions that they're asking are so insightful, and they're so sophisticated and rigorous. And we're having conversations with families in ways that I think we weren't able to have 20 years ago in our field, because we didn't have the foundation yet to have the vocabulary to describe these different constructs, or to think about interventions in really creative ways. And so, I would say it's more about the collective impact of our subfield, of lots of researchers and lots of places doing incredibly hard work, that collectively have made it so that families have access to this knowledge and are coming in with just a wealth of resources that weren't there before. That's what I think could be called a bit of an impact today.

Avery Martin: I would definitely say so.

Matt Hickey: I'll say. I have two remaining questions. It's about the environment we find ourselves working in. CSU, as an institution, as you've already alluded to, is a land-grant. And we take that ever so seriously. For 25 years, that's been front and center. It's not just somewhere tucked away on a website. It's not buried in the Moral Act from 150 years ago. It means something.

Debbie Fidler: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: What does it mean to Debbie?

Debbie Fidler: I don't know that I would have known this when I first got here, but what I've come to understand is that the land-grant University setting was just the right context to be able to do the kind of work that we do. Because, we do have that outreach and engagement aspect of our mission as part of our core. And so, we have no interest in generating some new finding and having it sit in a journal on a shelf somewhere, collecting dust. The imperative that we have, from being at a place like CSU, that that knowledge needs to reach people and it needs to be used in ways that are engaged and not just in your immediate environment but throughout our whole state. To be able to understand different constituencies throughout our state, and how we reach different members of our community at the state level, that has been just the right kind of match for the work that we do.

And so, I think that the Land-Grant Mission has made our work much more translational, much more impactful. And like I said, it was a lucky thing. I don't know at the time if I would've understood that when I first arrived here. But I really have internalized it over the 22 years that I've been here.

Matt Hickey: That's great, thanks. So, we also find ourselves at the next level down in this College of Health and Human science is a really eclectic group of academic disciplines. And in fact, I was just sharing with prospective deans fellows earlier this week that, when we think about the range of disciplinary expertise, even within particular units, it's quite diverse, let alone we move across and start counting all eight of them. It's really a remarkable collection. What's it like to be a faculty member in the College of Health and Human Sciences, and what do you like best about it?

Debbie Fidler: What I really appreciate about being in the College of Health and Human Sciences is that we keep two things in mind all of the time. The first thing is, is that we are working to try to understand all of the things that we have in common, all of the things that are part of the human condition that bring us all together, and that we can really relate to one another, because those things are to be human. At the same time, we spend just as much effort and energy in trying to understand all of the ways that we are unique and all of the things that contribute to who we are as individuals. That appreciation of individual differences, and appreciation of neurodiversity, of diversity from lots of different backgrounds and identities, and that we care about both of those things in equal measure.

And so, I oftentimes find myself, when I'm learning about somebody's work that's new to me that I had not yet encountered before, I'll understand that this is somebody's work who's advancing this universal human insight. And this is somebody who's helping me understand how we are, who we are as individuals. Both of those kinds of discoveries are really exciting to me.

Matt Hickey: That's so powerful.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: It's really well said. Thank you for that.

Avery Martin: Yes.

Matt Hickey: Super way to end. Thanks for coming, spending some time with us. We know it's obvious, for our listeners in the last 45 minutes, you're incredibly busy. You didn't have to say yes. So, thank you for coming and sharing with us a little bit. We appreciate it.

Debbie Fidler: Thank you. This has been really fun.

Matt Hickey: Good, good.

Avery Martin: Great.

Matt Hickey: Another great interview is in the books. Thank you for listening to this episode of Health and Human Science Matters.

Avery Martin: Stay tuned for the next episode. It's on the way. In the meantime, go listen to our episodes from seasons one and two. And if you want to learn more about our College of Health and Human Sciences at CSU, go to www.chhs.colostate.edu.