Center for Human Environments

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A. ACTIVITIES

The Center for Human Environments (CHE) enjoyed a banner year in 2009-2010 in terms of grants awarded, with new funding totaling $1.5 million committed to its research projects during the 12-month period. New awards came from a wide range of sources, including local, national and international foundations (New York Community Trust, Ford, Surdna, Bernard van Leer), international organizations (UNICEF), and a federal agency (NIH/National Institute of Child Health and Development).

Beyond this fundraising success, CHE researchers can be proud of the broad significance and impact of their projects. For example, CHE projects in the past year have focused on two of the most widely discussed public health issues of the day: the diabetes and childhood obesity epidemics (CUNY Campaign Against Diabetes); and efforts to reduce tobacco use, especially within minority groups (Robert Wood Johnson). Likewise, our Center’s researchers are addressing some of the most critical current issues in education, including how “racial justice” factors into US secondary schooling policy (Ford Foundation). We also continue our commitment to supporting community development of environments by coordinating the “Child Friendly Cities” international project with research teams in ten countries, funded by the UNICEF International Research Centre in Florence, Italy, Childwatch International in Oslo and the Bernard van Leer Foundation of the Netherlands.

The past year also saw an exceptionally rich series of conferences, meetings and workshops sponsored by CHE. These included international meetings on topics such as children’s rights in a global context; how exclusionary and discriminatory practices become entrenched, and how they are resisted; the privatization of public space in contemporary cities, together with movements to contest this erosion of “the commons”; and public health campaigns to combat childhood obesity in New York and London. (Further details about these meetings may be found below.)

As in the past, CHE continues to operate as a consortium of specialized research sub-groups that share administrative resources and often pool their expertise and contacts in developing research proposals or sponsoring events. These sub-groups are: the Children’s Environments Research Group, the Health & Society Research Group, the Housing Environments Research Group, the Public Science Project (also known as the Participatory Action Research Collective), the Public Space Research Group, and the Youth Studies Research Group. The Center also houses ActKnowledge, a consulting organization that works with community groups, not-for-profits, foundations, and government agencies to evaluate their programs and to help them formulate their own evaluation strategies.
Here are some highlights from the various CHE research teams’ activities during the past year:

- Carrying out work under its second-year contract with UNICEF’s International Research Centre, the **Children’s Environments Research Group (CERG)** led a November workshop in Rome, Italy to present to international partners the “Child Friendly Cities” toolkit, which has been piloted in Brazil and the Philippines and is now being widely disseminated. The toolkit provides a way for communities to assess the degree of fulfillment of children’s rights from the perspective of children and parents and community service providers as the basis for developing local plans of action and advocacy for children. Alongside this, the project is developing participatory tools for government officials in municipalities to critically assess the degree to which the structures and processes of governance in any municipality serve children. In April, CERG hosted the annual board meeting of Childwatch International network, headquartered in Norway, of 48 research centers of which CERG is one. During their stay in New York, Childwatch board members had dialogs with GC faculty and graduate students as well as child rights researchers and activists throughout New York. In Spring 2010, CERG was pleased to welcome GC Environmental Psychology alumna Pamela Wridt as its new Co-Director. Dr. Wridt is developing additional international projects, including a large-scale extension of the child friendly community assessment methodology in schools internationally with UNICEF. Kim Sabo and Blair Darnell continue to work on “Article 15” on the rights of children and youth to self organize. This project is being designed in collaboration with Worldvision, Save the Children International and UNICEF. Locally, CERG continues to promote the development of innovative approaches to public space provision for children in New York City with successful initiatives with New York City Parks Department and the Rockwell Group. CERG has led for many years in attempts to add ‘loose parts” to public playgrounds in order to greatly diversify play opportunities and to provide trained “Playworkers” to support this. These initiatives have resulted in a big impact on both public policy and public awareness with front-page coverage in the *New York Times* and lengthy interviews on public radio.

- Prof. Mary Clare Lennon, Co-Director of the **Health & Society Research Group (HSRG)**, has continued to serve as the Principal Investigator for a two-year study of community-based tobacco policy change campaigns across the US (funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and conducted in partnership with ActKnowledge, Prof. Cheryl Merzel of Yeshiva University/Albert Einstein Medical School, and consultant Andrea Anderson). In April, she was awarded a three-year NIH/NICHD grant to investigate the effects of neighborhood and family environments on very young children. This NIH grant is expected to employ 2-3 graduate research assistants per year, and will give them experience with advanced statistical methods applicable to public health issues. Co-Director of HSRG Prof. Tracey Revenson was on leave in 2009-2010, but as of June had submitted three new federal grant applications, all in partnership with Mt. Sinai Medical Center. These proposals continue a previous line of her research, funded over the last decade by the NIH, which centers on interventions to improve the quality of life of
In another health-related project at CHE, the CUNY Campaign Against Diabetes, directed by Prof. Nick Freudenberg and coordinated by Public Health doctoral candidate Lorraine Mongiello, completed its fourth year with two more sets of workshops at the Graduate Center. These five-day, comprehensive training sessions on the social, economic and medical aspects of the diabetes epidemic each attracted 50 registrants from across more than a dozen CUNY campuses.

- In 2009-2010, Housing Environments Research Group Director Prof. Susan Saegert remained on leave while teaching as a Visiting Professor at Vanderbilt University and directing its Center for Community Studies. In the past year, using findings from a recent three-year period of funded research at the GC, Prof. Saegert has continued to publish and present on the topic of home mortgage foreclosure, its effect on the social fabric of communities, and its implications for housing and public health policy. One mark of distinction for this work: a study she co-authored with her two GC doctoral student research assistants was named best journal article in the Journal of Urban Affairs for 2009. Prof. Saegert also has under consideration at the NIH a proposal to investigate the recovery of public health in NYC communities severely affected by abandonment, out migration and social fabric disruption during the 1970s.

- Professor Setha Low, Director of the Public Space Research Group, organized the two-day conference “The Privatization of Public Space? Resisting Enclosure,” which brought together scholars from the US, UK and Australia to examine the transformation of urban public spaces via various forms of privatization, including business improvement districts, homeowners’ associations, public/private partnerships, conservancies and zoning. The second day of this conference was devoted especially to GC doctoral students’ examination of activist maneuvers to resist privatization of public spaces. In other PSRG news, Prof. Low has continued to work with graduate students in several GC departments, focusing on a multi-year project to understand tensions between private and public domains in the organization of co-operative housing.

- The Public Science Project (PSP), a research team comprising Prof. Michelle Fine, GC doctoral students Maria Torre (who serves as Director) and Madeline Fox, as well as a network of partners within and outside CUNY, expanded its scope significantly in 2009-2010. (Note that the Public Science Project was previously known as the Participatory Action Research Collective.) Two major PSP projects supported by foundations were completed during the past year: “Polling for Justice,” a NYC-wide survey of youth experiences with schools, health care and the criminal justice system; and “Rebuilding Urban Communities and Families,” documenting and evaluating the College Initiative program, which helps formerly incarcerated New Yorkers enroll in college and succeed in their studies. Newly funded PSP projects include “Student Success Centers,” which is developing a model for student-led college counseling and preparation programs in NYC public schools in Brooklyn and the Bronx; and a “Food Justice” project involving youth learning about the social, political and environmental dimensions of food production through the lens of their participation in a Brooklyn community garden. Thanks to continuing support from the Surdna Foundation, PSP was also able to sponsor an extensive program of workshops and conferences in 2009-2010, including a “Forum on
Police Interactions with Youth,” the “National Latino Education Research Agenda Project,” “The Geography of Social Justice: Thinking Critically about Psychology, Social Justice & NYC,” and “Forgotten Alternatives to Social Injustice” (co-sponsored with the European Association of Social Psychologists). Finally, we note that in Fall 2009 Prof. Fine was awarded a two-year Ford Foundation grant to study “racial justice” as a factor in present-day US secondary school policy. The project involves a series of seminars with leading experts and policy makers in the field of secondary education, and is expected to produce guidance for Ford and others on how best to allocate education funding in order to promote an equitable secondary schooling system in the US.

• In **Youth Studies Research**, Prof. Colette Daiute published her study *Human Development & Political Violence* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), which is described as “an innovative approach to research and practice with young people growing up in the context of political violence.” This book grew out of Prof. Daiute’s multi-year funded research with youth in the states of the former Yugoslavia, as well as their age-mates in Balkan refugee communities in the US. Currently Prof. Daiute is applying for foundation support to extend her research on youth development in conflict situations to the case of Colombia. Besides her presentations at the GC, she has recently lectured and organized workshops at the University of Warwick (UK), Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), the University of Zagreb (Croatia), the University of Belgrade (Serbia), and the University of Manizales (Colombia).

• During the past year CHE partner organization **ActKnowledge** collaborated with Prof. Mary Clare Lennon and others in providing expertise for a Robert Wood Johnson-funded evaluation of the effectiveness of tobacco control advocacy campaigns across the US. **ActKnowledge** has also further refined and disseminated its online “Theory of Change” instrument, which is designed to help nonprofits and community-based organizations craft effective programs with clearly defined goals and integrated systems of evaluation. As its expertise in program evaluation has become more widely known and recognized, **ActKnowledge** now finds itself with a client portfolio that ranges from the local (after school programs in NYC), to the national (Girl Scouts of America), to the international (The Hunger Project, which works for sustainable solutions to hunger around the world).

**B. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE**

Future directions of the individual research sub-groups have been included in the descriptions above. We expect funding in the coming year to at least maintain, but more likely to exceed, the level of the current year. Here, in addition, are some of the general plans for the future at CHE:

• Continue a high rate of submission of federal grant proposals. In 2009-2010, CHE researchers submitted eight federal grant proposals, one of which was funded (Mary Clare Lennon), while the others are still pending. In 2010 CERG completed the NSF-funded project “The Changing Geography of Childhood” and is now submitting a proposal for funding from the Environmental Protection Agency with Hunter College and NYU. Also this summer, The Public Science Project has joined the Univ. of Minnesota and other consortium partners in a US Dept. of Education proposal promoting
collaboration between universities and community-based organizations. Additional federal proposals in the fields of the environmental education, community-based projects and public health are expected in the coming year.

- Continue to develop collaborative projects with other GC Centers, as well as with Centers or research partners at other CUNY campuses. These collaborations include joint funding proposals, for example with the Stanton Heiskell Center, or multi-campus CUNY projects, such as the CUNY Campaign Against Diabetes.

- CHE researchers also plan to pool resources from their fundraising efforts in order to develop a collective fund for enhancements to the Center’s website, and for presentations of general interest to CHE affiliates.

C. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Below is a selection of publications deriving from research conducted by CHE investigators:

1. **Books**


2. **Book Chapters**


   **Daiute, C.** (2010). Adolescents’ purposeful used of culture, Commentary of “Every eye ain’t sleep:  

   **Center for Human Environments   Annual Report 2009-2010   p. 6**


3. **Articles**


**Hart, R.** (2008 and 2009) Co-Editor (with Caitlin Cahill) of four special issues of the journal Children, Youth and Environments entitled “Pushing the Boundaries: International Perspectives on Child and Youth Participation. Volume 16, No.4 and Volume 16, Nos 1, 2 and 3.


4. Presentations at conferences


5. Conferences and meetings sponsored by CHE
Among the conferences, meetings and workshops sponsored by CHE in 2009-2010:


Forum on Police Interactions with Youth. September 24, 2009 at the Graduate Center. Organizers: Michelle Fine, Maria Torre.

Participatory Action Research and Faith-Based Organizations. October 1, 2009 at Vanderbilt University. Organizers: Michelle Fine, Maria Torre, Susan Saegert.

National Latino Education Research Agenda Project: forum on Participatory Action Research. October 9, 2009 at the Graduate Center. Organizer: Maria Torre.

Food-related Research at CHE: Notes from the “Food Revolution.” Panel discussion with Lorraine Mongiello of CUNY Campaign Against Diabetes and Kimberly Libman, doctoral candidate in Environmental Psychology. November 12, 2009 at the Graduate Center.


The Dalmas Taylor Seminar on public policy and research on education, physical and mental health, criminal justice, and cultural identity. December 4, 2009 at the Graduate Center. Organizer: Michelle Fine.


CUNY Campaign Against Diabetes Workshops. Five-day workshops held at the Graduate Center in January and June, 2010. Organizers: Nick Freudenberg, Lorraine Mongiello.


Participatory Action research with Girls for Gender Equity (GGE). April 8, 2010 at the Graduate Center. Organizer: Maria Torre

Adults in Children’s Play: Freedom, Guidance or Interference? April 14, 2010 at the Graduate Center. Panel discussion chaired by Roger Hart.


Childwatch International Research Network: Open meeting of Board members and GC community. April 22, 2010, at the Graduate Center. Organizer: Roger Hart.

6. **Websites**

CHE’s website: [http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/](http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/)

The Participatory Action Research Collective (also known as the Public Science Project) website: [http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/start.htm](http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/start.htm)


ActKnowledge, an affiliated CHE research group, maintains a website at [http://www.actknowledge.org/](http://www.actknowledge.org/)

7. **Reports, monographs and other media**

What’s for Lunch at CUNY? How City University of New York can improve food choices on its campuses and reduce obesity and diabetes. CUNY Campaign Against Diabetes, 2010.


C. **GRADUATE STUDENT EMPLOYMENT**

During 2009-2010, 22 CUNY graduate students were paid fellowships or salaries from funds administered by the Center for Human Environments. CHE also administered stipends to 50 CUNY students enrolled in the CUNY Campaign Against Diabetes January 2010 workshops.
D. GRANTS AND INCOME

1. Grants Proposed

Project Title: Development in Displacement with Living Histories  
Principal Investigator: Colette Daiute  
Funding Agency: US Institute for Peace  
Period: 7/2010-6/2012

Project Title: Training Developmental Psychologists for 21st Century Research  
Principal Investigator: Colette Daiute  
Funding Agency: NSF  

Project Title: Polling for Community Justice  
Principal Investigator: Michelle Fine; Co-PI Brett Stoudt  
Funding Agency: Public Welfare Foundation  

Project Title: Reducing Risk Behaviors by Promoting Positive Youth Development  
Principal Investigator: Michelle Fine  
Funding Agency: New Alternatives for Children, Inc./NIH-NICHD  

Project Title: Child Friendly Cities  
Principal Investigator: Roger Hart  
Funding Agency: UNICEF – Innocenti Research Centre  
Period: 8/2010 – 12/2010

Project Title: Breathing Intervention for Prostate Cancer Survivors  
Principal Investigator: Tracey Revenson  
Funding Agency: Mt Sinai Medical Ctr/NIH  
Period: 12/2010-11/2012

Project Title: Intervention to improve quality of life and couple functioning in Prostate Cancer Survivors  
Principal Investigator: Tracey Revenson  
Funding Agency: Mt Sinai Medical Ctr/NIH  
Period: 12/2010-11/2012

Project Title: Intervention to Control Vasomotor Symptoms for Prostate Cancer Survivors  
Principal Investigator: Tracey Revenson  
Funding Agency: Mt Sinai Medical Ctr/Dept. of Defense  
Period: 12/2010-11/2012

Project Title: Public Health Recovery in High Mortgage Foreclosure Areas of NYC
Principal Investigator: Susan Saegert  
Funding Agency: New York State Psychiatric Institute/NIH-NICHD  

2. Active Grants (2009-2010)

Project Title: Participatory Action Research  
Principal Investigator: Michelle Fine  
Funding Agency: Surdna Foundation  

Project Title: Youth Polling for Justice  
Principal Investigator: Michelle Fine  
Funding Agency: Make the Road New York  
Period: 7/2008 - 12/2010

Project Title: Seminars on Secondary Schooling  
Principal Investigator: Michelle Fine  
Funding Agency: Ford Foundation  

Project Title: Student Success Centers - Evaluation  
Principal Investigator: Michelle Fine  
Funding Agency: New York Community Trust  

Project Title: Rebuilding Urban Communities and Families  
Principal Investigator: Michelle Fine  
Funding Agency: Ford Foundation  

Project Title: Forgotten Alternatives Conference  
Principal Investigator: Michelle Fine  
Funding Agency: EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY  
Period: 2/2010 - 6/2010

Project Title: Food Justice and Technical Assistance  
Principal Investigator: Michelle Fine  
Funding Agency: What Kids Can Do, Inc.  

Project Title: The Changing Geography of Childhood  
Principal Investigator: Roger Hart  
Funding Agency: NSF  
Project Title: Global Youth Exchange
Principal Investigator: Roger Hart
Funding Agency: Overbrook Foundation

Project Title: Framework: Child Friendly Cities & Communities
Principal Investigator: Roger Hart
Funding Agency: US UNICEF

Project Title: Framework: Child Friendly Cities & Communities
Principal Investigator: Roger Hart
Funding Agency: UNICEF – Innocenti Research Centre

Project Title: Promote Children’s Rights
Principal Investigator: Roger Hart
Funding Agency: UNICEF – Innocenti Research Centre

Project Title: Child Friendly Cities & Communities Coordination
Principal Investigator: Roger Hart
Funding Agency: Childwatch International (Norway)

Project Title: Child Friendly Cities & Communities Research
Principal Investigator: Roger Hart
Funding Agency: Bernard van Leer Foundation

Project Title: Sexuality and Global Faith Networks
Principal Investigator: Cindi Katz
Funding Agency: University of Leeds (UK)

Project Title: Tobacco Policy Change Evaluation
PI: Mary Clare Lennon (in collaboration with ActKnowledge)
Funding Agency: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Project Title: Proceedings of the Conference on Childhood Obesity
Project Director: Mary Clare Lennon
Funding Agency: London Metropolitan University
Project Title: Residential Mobility and Young Children  
Project Director: Mary Clare Lennon  
Funding Agency: NIH/NICHD  
THE CENTER FOR HUMAN ENVIRONMENTS

The Center for Human Environments (CHE), located at the CUNY Graduate Center, brings together psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, earth and environmental scientists, and public health experts whose research addresses the relationship between people and their physical settings. By providing a forum where the social sciences meet environmental research, CHE seeks to produce deeper understanding of, and potential solutions to, the problems faced by schools, neighborhoods and larger communities, nonprofits, government agencies and policy makers.

CHE operates as a consortium of specialized research sub-groups that share administrative resources and often pool their expertise and contacts in developing research proposals or sponsoring events. These sub-groups are: the Children's Environments Research Group, the Health & Society Research Group, the Housing Environments Research Group, the Public Science Project (also known as the Participatory Action Research Collective), the Public Space Research Group, and the Youth Studies Research Group. The Center also houses ActKnowledge, a consulting organization that works with community groups, not-for-profits, foundations, and government agencies to evaluate their programs and to help them formulate their own evaluation strategies.

Sponsors of recent CHE research projects have included: the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation; the US Department of the Interior; the Ford, Rockefeller, Robert Wood Johnson, Spencer, Hazen, Overbrook, Russell Sage and Bernard van Leer (Netherlands) Foundations; UNICEF - Innocenti Research Centre; US Fund for UNICEF; the US Institute of Peace; and local partners such as the New York Community Trust and Make the Road New York. CHE has also administered subcontracts from Columbia University, St. Johns University and the University of Washington. In the period 2008-2010, CHE projects provided salaries and/or scholarships for more than 40 students from the Graduate Center (or in some cases from elsewhere in the CUNY system). Eight faculty members from the Graduate Center or other CUNY divisions were engaged as Investigators on CHE projects during the same period.

Here is a sampling of the projects conducted by CHE researchers in recent years: creating a toolkit usable by local governments around the world to measure children’s participation in the civic and social life of their communities; youth development in nations emerging from conflict (such as the states of the former Yugoslavia); urban youth programs in the US and their effectiveness in promoting community development and social justice; how Fire Island National Seashore and the Statue of Liberty National Monument are variously used and valued by different groups; interventions such as journal writing to enhance quality of life for cancer survivors; the measurement of sexual quality of life for female cancer survivors; a survey of NYC high-school age youth and their experiences with schools, health care and the criminal justice system; trainings for CUNY students on diabetes education, prevention and management; statistical methods to model the effects of neighborhood and family change on very young children in low-income areas of the US; the impact of foreclosure on low-income homeowners across the US and the effectiveness of nonprofit agencies responding to the foreclosure crisis.