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In FY 2013-2014, researchers at the Center for Human Environments (CHE) were engaged in a wide range of projects, some of international scope (a project involving children in participatory planning at the community level in Brazil and India; a UK-US comparative study of child well-being), and some here at home, focusing on the neighborhoods of New York City (a study of a highly regarded community-based organization in Red Hook, Brooklyn; a peer-led college counseling and college retention program now recognized by both CUNY and the NYC Dept. of Education as a model for supporting low-income, first generation-to-college students).

As in the past, CHE projects this year have offered many research employment and fellowship opportunities to Graduate Center students. (Twenty-five GC students received support from CHE projects in 2013-2014—see list attached in our Data Form.) And it is gratifying to note the continuing success of Graduate Center alumni who have worked at CHE in recent years, whether they have taken up academic appointments at institutions such Univ. of Michigan (Sarah McClelland), Technion – Israel Institute of Technology (Efrat Eizenberg), Fordham Univ. (Gregory Donovan), Univ. of Sheffield, UK (Desiree Fields), or at a worldwide design and consulting firm like the Ramboll Group in Norway (Aga Skorupka). These successes demonstrate that CHE provides not just financial support for GC students (which may indeed be an important help for timely completion of their degrees), but also invaluable experience in designing and conducting research, preparing expert reports and presentations, and developing a network of professional contacts, both academic and extra-academic.

To carry out its mission of advancing our understanding of the human/environment relationship, CHE relies on a unique consortium of specialized research subgroups that address specific areas, including children’s environments, health and society, participatory action research, developmental psychology, housing environments, public space, and the evaluation of social change and advocacy projects. Here are highlights from the past year’s work conducted by these research subgroups:

- “The community college as agent of change in the 21st century immigration crisis” is the title of a research project conducted in the past year by Prof. Colette Daiute, Director of the Developmental Studies Research Group. The project, funded by the Spencer Foundation, employed two GC doctoral students in examining community college students’ response to the “deferred action” program announced by the Obama Administration in June 2012. (“Deferred action” allows certain undocumented youth to apply for a renewable permission to remain in the US, and makes them legally eligible for employment and many other kinds of opportunity. By some estimates, up to 20% of community college students in NYC are eligible for “deferred action.”) Prof. Daiute and GC graduate student research assistants Philip
Kreniske and David Caicedo presented findings from the project at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Philadelphia in April, 2014.

- The Children's Environments Research Group (CERG) is now completing an 18-month project, “Child Friendly Communities,” funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation of The Netherlands. This is a continuation of the five-year project, previously funded by UNICEF and other sponsors, to develop and test a highly participatory community self-survey tool for children. The current project, led by CERG Co-Director Dr. Pamela Wridt, has been evaluating the impact of the use of the tools on community planning, policy and change in several countries. To date, the “Child Friendly Places” resource kit has been adapted by projects aimed at improving the living and learning conditions of children and youth in 15 countries, with approximately 60,000 children participating in these efforts. In the current funding, CERG has also been further developing the tools in India and Brazil, working with local organizations that are committed to bringing children’s voices into community development plans for marginalized groups. Support from the Brazilian partner of this project also gave CERG the opportunity to create a robust web presence for the “Child Friendly Places” assessment toolkit (http://childfriendlyplaces.org/). In addition, CERG’s partnership with the Indian organization Shaishav has led to development of a joint Shaishav-CERG proposal (currently under revision), which focuses on child protection and child rights; CERG would be involved as the research, technical assistance, and monitoring and evaluation partner for the Indian organization.

- In Spring 2014, the Spencer Foundation approved funding for a project directed by CERG Co-Director Prof. Roger Hart, “Analysis of the organizational structures and processes of new kinds of rights-based children’s groups and implications for citizenship and civic learning.” This study is a continuation of the Article 15 project coordinated by GC doctoral student Bijan Kimiagar (http://crc15.org/), named for the provision in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that asserts the right of children to form their own associations and groups. Two GC doctoral students, Mr. Kimiagar and Scott Fisher, will work with Prof. Hart on the analysis of data collected from Article 15 workshops conducted by CERG with members of children’s groups in South Asia, Latin America, and Africa. The research team will examine a series of questions about the children’s groups - their decision-making processes, practices of inclusion/exclusion, and relationship to adult supporters -- and in what way the groups may foster children’s civic capacities.
• Also of note: CERG’s Prof. Hart was in the news in Spring 2014, when he was interviewed for an article in *The Atlantic* magazine, for a report on *All Things Considered* on National Public Radio, and for a feature story on the *Connect* program of the Canadian Broadcast Company. All three stories draw on Prof. Hart’s NSF funded research on the “Changing Geography of Childhood,” which spans two generations in a New England town. For more about this project, see “The Overprotected Kid,” in *The Atlantic*, March 19, 2014 (accessible online at http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/03/hey-parents-leave-those-kids-alone/358631/).

• Most recently CERG has been contracted by ECPAT ((End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes), in Bangkok, to critically evaluate how children and youth are involved in the governance of the international network of organizations that support child victims and are dedicated to ending the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

• In 2013-2014, the Public Science Project (PSP) has focused especially on two issues: equity in educational access and opportunity, and policing practices as they affect local communities. Last fall, PSP Director Dr. Maria Torre was engaged by the Chicago Public School system to launch a year-long series of participatory research workshops with students and CPS staff on the reentry of students into the school system following incarceration or other involvement with the criminal justice system. In the past year, the NYC Dept. of Education has also drawn on PSP expertise, which was instrumental in developing a set of workshops and meetings on the reform of DOE discipline policies to eliminate inequities (spotlighted recently by a number of reports), and to replace punitive policies with restorative ones. These meetings, supported by NYC DOE funding, culminated in a Graduate Center summit on May 13 that included new NYC Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña and other DOE officials.

• In May and June, PSP hosted the fourth annual edition of the “Critical Participatory Action Research Institutes,” which drew 80 attendees from secondary and higher education, nonprofits, and community-based organizations. PSP Co-Directors Prof. Michelle Fine and Dr. Maria Torre led the two sessions of the CPAR Institutes, each consisting of a week-long series of workshops, with a focus on the methods and the ethics of engaging community members in research, evaluation, advocacy, and social change projects. One noteworthy aspect of this year’s CPAR Summer Institutes was
that the sessions attracted more international registrants than ever before, including participants from the UK, Canada, Italy, South Africa, and Poland.

- With continuing support from the Association of American Colleges & Universities “Bringing Theory to Practice” project, PSP has further advanced its “Brooklyn Public Scholars” program, which seeks to integrate civic engagement work into curriculum development and faculty assessment at a community college (CUNY’s Kingsborough Community College). The project is also following the effects on student well-being and academic success of the enhanced civic engagement component of KBCC curricula and teaching, and will offer findings in its demonstration site report to AAC&U.

- PSP also houses the “Researchers for Fair Policing” project, led by Prof. Brett Stoudt in collaboration with Dr. Torre. This project, which has developed out of previous years of PSP work in a Bronx neighborhood, is funded by a sub award from the Sociological Initiatives Foundation (parent grant at John Jay College, directed by Prof. Stoudt, who also holds an appointment at the GC). In Spring 2014, PSP’s work on policing practices and police-community relations in NYC attracted the interest of the Police Department of Toronto, which invited Dr. Torre as an outside consultant on its programs.

- In the past year PSP has conducted research on how LGBT students fare under the disciplinary policies and practices of secondary schools. This project, funded by a grant from Indiana University’s Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, has led to the development and submission of a PSP proposal for a national survey of LGBT youth. This proposal has been encouraged by program officers at the Ford Foundation, the Arcus Foundation, and Wellspring Advisors, and has now been approved for funding beginning in Fall 2014. The proposal includes a sub-award directed by Prof. David Frost of Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, a recent GC graduate in Health Psychology who worked on CHE research projects while completing his doctorate.

- In the past five years, the Public Science Project has served as the umbrella organization for “College Access: Research & Action” (CARA), a training and research program that helps high schools develop youth-led college access programs that markedly improve college application, enrollment, and persistence rates for students from low- and moderate-income communities, many of whom are first generation college-goers. In October 2013 CARA was awarded a five-year Multiple Task Award
Contract from the NYC DOE, which provides “pre-approval” for CARA to contract with schools across the entire NYC public system for work on college access programming. CARA also has renewed funding this year from the New York Community Trust, the Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation, and the Fund for Public Schools. And in May 2014, CARA was awarded a two-year contract from the Pinkerton Foundation to support a joint program with CUNY to track and support the progress of CUNY college students who are first-generation college goers.

- In 2013-2014, CHE affiliate organization ActKnowledge has continued work on a three-year evaluation of education programming for low-performing NYC public school districts in the Bronx. This project is sponsored by The Helmsley Trust, and is advised by its Graduate Center PI, Prof. Michelle Fine, who is an expert on secondary schooling inequities and their remedies. Actknowledge also manages a portfolio of research and evaluation projects in the spheres of education, international development, programs for youth, and social change advocacy projects. One recent international project was the development of a theory of change and a cost/benefit analysis for the Alliance for Financial Inclusion, a global network of financial policymakers from developing and emerging countries that cooperate to increase access to financial services for their lowest income citizens. Actknowledge has also consulted for the Rockefeller Foundation on healthcare policy, for the Hunger Project (which addresses food supply issues in nine African nations, India, Mexico, and Bangladesh), for the 4C Association (which works to make coffee production fair and sustainable), and for Oxfam Australia’s youth program. In its education portfolio, ActKnowledge has continued to work with the Hartford, CT Community School Initiative, the Children’s Aid Society (which operates a National Center for Community Schools), and the Paterson, NJ School District, which is the recipient of multi-year federal grants in support of “full-service” community schools. Actknowledge also maintains its “Theory of Change” website, an online program evaluation tool, which to date has attracted more than 5,000 registered users from around the world. A series of webinars on the “Theory of Change” methodology and its use is also offered to the public through the ActKnowledge website.

- In 2013-2014, Health & Society Research Group Co-Director Mary Clare Lennon began a two-year project entitled “Home moves in the early years,” which expands on her earlier research on the impact of family moves on children’s health. Funded by the UK’s Economic and Social Research Council, Prof. Lennon’s work is a collaborative effort with the University of London’s Institute of Education, and employs existing UK
and US datasets to explore key questions about household moves and young children’s well-being. To date, project findings have been presented at the Society for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies (Bielefeld, Germany, Sept. 2013) and at a three-day international workshop hosted by Columbia University’s Population Research Center (June 11-13, 2014). In May 2014, the prime grantee, University of London, added a cost extension to Prof. Lennon’s award, which continues to provide research employment and training in advanced statistical methods to GC doctoral students.

• Together with GC graduate student research assistants, Public Space Research Group Director Prof. Setha Low continued her work in the past year on a research project sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, “Exploring Condominium Governance in Toronto and New York City.” In Fall 2013, Prof. Low also co-authored, with ActKnowledge colleague Dr. Dana Taplin, two studies of visitor usage patterns in NYS parks: Lake Welch at Harriman State Park, and Jones Beach State Park on the south shore of Long Island.

• In 2013-2014, Housing Environments Research Group Director Prof. Susan Saegert worked with GC doctoral students to develop research on alternative housing options in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. She is currently working with collaborators on a re-submission of her NSF proposal on Community Land Trusts as a housing alternative for low-income households. The number of CLTs in the US has grown substantially in recent years, but there remains a lack of rigorous research to document the impact of this form of social housing on the life course of residents.

Here are some of the major events sponsored by the research groups at the Center for Human Environments during the past year, with sources of financial support indicated:

1. National Youth Policy Institute of South Korea. Meeting with Children’s Environments Research Group to present NYPI’s large-scale survey research on youth in S. Korea, and to discuss a framework for potential research collaboration between NYPI and CERG. September 2013

2. “Schooling in a Punishment Society: A Day-long Seminar.” First of two meetings organized by the Public Science Project to examine discipline policies and practices in NYC public schools. Supported by a contribution from the NYC DOE. Nov. 8, 2013

3. An international colloquium on playground design and playground safety, hosted by the Children’s Environments Research Group at the Graduate Center. Nov, 12, 2014

5. Marilyn Gittell Archive Project. Presentation of an archive related to the projects and activities of Prof. Gittell, longtime Director of the Howard Samuels Center at the Graduate Center, and a leading educator and advocate for public education. Supported by the Russell Sage Foundation and by Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s CoLab. Nov. 26, 2013

6. “Suspending Suspensions: A Working Seminar on School Discipline.” Second meeting organized by the Public Science Project; attended by NYC Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña and other DOE officials concerned with reforming NYC public school discipline policies and practices. Supported by a contribution from the NYC DOE. March 13, 2014 (Note: this general meeting was followed by a May 13 summit meeting with the Schools Chancellor, held at the GC and introduced by Interim President Chase Robinson.)

7. “Nine Ways to Change the World: Theories of change for engaging people on global issues.” Forum sponsored by CHE affiliate organization ActKnowledge, with participation of national and international NGOs and nonprofits. March 2013

8. Jocelyn Solis Memorial Lecture. “Mexican immigrant children’s contributions to a community organization.” Supported by the Jocelyn Solis Fund at the Graduate Center Development Office, Prof. Colette Daiute, Manager. April 8, 2014


11. “Workshops on The Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study.” Co-hosted by Prof. Mary Clare Lennon, GC CUNY PI for the study “Home moves in the early years,” an international collaboration supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) of the UK. June 11-13, 2014