

ANNUAL REPORT
OF
THE CENTER FOR HUMAN ENVIRONMENTS

For the period July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016

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During 2015-2016 Center for Human Environments (CHE) researchers were engaged in several large projects of national and international scope, including a multi-year US Department of Education project on access to higher education as a means of addressing inequality (Prof. Michelle Fine, PI); a national survey of LGBTQ youth funded by a consortium of sponsors led by the Ford Foundation (Dr. Maria Torre, Project Director); and the continuing international child rights work involving the development and testing of toolkits for the participatory assessment of community conditions for children and youth (supported by UNICEF and multiple INGOs (Prof. Roger Hart, Director, Children’s Environments Research Group).

In the past year, CHE researchers were also very active in presenting their work. Below are two of the most notable CHE events from 2015-16:

- **A White House forum on Sept. 29-30, 2015 featured CHE’s Morris Justice Project and Researchers for Fair Policing Project, both of which focus on the human impact of “broken windows policing,” and argue for the importance of using “citizen science” and participatory action research to address issues of social justice. Brett Stoudt, Assistant Prof. John Jay/GC Psychology, led the White House presentation, together with community research partners from the Bronx and Brooklyn. The Morris Justice Project has been developed over the past several years through the Public Science Project at CHE.**
- **Marilyn Gittell Professor in Urban Studies Celina Su, a new CHE faculty affiliate, organized and played host to a three-day Graduate Center meeting (March 30-April 1, 2016) of the URBAN Network, a new national association of social scientists engaged in research on the urban environment. More than 100 scholars and community-based advocates and organizers attended this inaugural conference. CHE received start-up funding from MIT for the URBAN Network in past years, and new grants to CHE from the University of Massachusetts and from MIT supported this first national meeting of the association. Topics of the conference included: Making Place-making Public; Reimagining Immigration Politics; Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline; and Alternative Strategies for Racial Economic Justice.**

Contributing to the education of Graduate Center doctoral students has always been central to CHE’s mission. In 2015-2016, CHE projects provided fellowships and/or research employment for 12 GC students. CHE funds in 2015-2016 also furnished support for student travel to conferences, and offered students compensation for their contributions to conferences held at the Graduate Center, including the national URBAN Network conference mentioned above. Also of significance for student professional development: three GC doctoral students were funded by CHE projects to conduct research in India and in several West African nations as part of efforts to build improved approaches to community-based action and advocacy for children’s rights.

The Center for Human Environments operates as a federal structure, bringing together related subgroups that address specific research 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 CHE research subgroups:

- **The College Access: Research & Action (CARA) program continued to win recognition for its model of peer-led college access and college retention counseling, while also expanding its programming in the New York City public schools. CARA’s centerpiece is its Youth Leadership for College Access program, which relies on peer-to-peer and near-to-peer models to support first-generation-to-college students through the college application process and the initial college years, which can be particularly challenging for those with less family and community experience with college. In 2016 CARA won a third year of Pinkerton Foundation funding to work with Graduate NYC! and CUNY Collaborative Programs in order to develop best practices for preventing first-generation college goers from dropping out in their early years of study. Also in 2016, CARA-trained CUNY college students participated in a meeting at the University of Minnesota, part of a four-year US Dept. of Education project on which Prof. Michelle Fine serves as the CUNY PI.**

In addition to funding from the Pinkerton Foundation, CARA has a five-year Multiple Task Award Contract with the NYC DOE (2013-2018), and also receives support from the Capital One Foundation, the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development, the Fund for Public Schools, and various private sponsors.

- **In 2015-2016, the Public Science Project (PSP) completed data collection for a national survey of LGBTQ youth, funded by the Ford Foundation and a consortium of other sponsors. The project, entitled “What’s Your Issue? Informing a national agenda by and for LGBTQ and gender nonconforming youth,” succeeded in its goal of collecting more than 5000 survey responses, and is now proceeding with a data analysis and dissemination plan that includes a series of meetings with youth community members drawn from a range of LGBTQ youth-serving organizations across the US.**

In May and June 2016, PSP sponsored the fifth annual edition of its Critical Participatory Action Research Institute. Led by Dr. Torre and Prof. Fine, these two separate, week-long sessions together drew more than 70 participants from community-based organizations, medical centers, advocacy groups, and college and university departments. Although most participants are from the US and Canada, the CPAR Institutes have achieved an international reputation, as evidenced by the participation this year of multiple registrants from Brazil and the UK.

In another indication of the Public Science Project’s international reputation, in the past year PSP Director Dr. Maria Torre was invited to present and

conduct workshops on participatory action research in South Africa (September), Brazil (November), and at a conference on Critical Psychology in Vienna (April; in collaboration with Prof. Michelle Fine).

Also of note: the PSP's Morris Justice Project, which grew out of several years of community-based research in a Bronx neighborhood known for high rates of "stop-and-frisk" policing, presented at a White House forum in September. See above for further details on this invited presentation, which drew on work by Prof. Brett Stoudt, Dr. Torre, and community members of the multi-year research project. Researchers for Fair Policing, a second, more recent project at PSP, also participated in the White House forum.

The Children's Environments Research Group (CERG) continued its work on children's rights in the past year with Plan International, a UK-based charity that operates globally. CERG has assisted Plan by developing and piloting a toolkit for evaluating its international program supporting girls' full participation in the civic life of their communities ("Because I Am a Girl"). In 2015-2016, working in Benin (West Africa), the CERG team piloted an approach to teaching Plan staff and program participants how to use the toolkit and then went on to develop an online instructional program for the global use of the toolkit by all of Plan's participating programs.

CERG is increasingly being pulled away from a focus on children's environments and into issues of child protection by its collaborating international NGOs (Save the Children, World Vision, Plan International, Child Fund, etc.), which are now oriented toward working directly with children to help fulfill their rights to protection. For example, CERG recently prepared a report for the NGO ECPAT (Ending Child Prostitution and Trafficking) entitled "Placing The Perspectives Of Children Who Have Experienced Commercial Sexual Exploitation At The Heart Of Organizations That Serve Them." Currently CERG is following up by developing a proposal with a number of international NGOs on the improvement of community-based child protection systems through the involvement of children's membership groups.

The CHE community was saddened in the last year by the passing of Dr. Selim Iltus, a Graduate Center Environmental Psychology alumnus, and for 20 years a co-director of CERG. For seven years, Dr. Iltus had been a Program Officer at the Bernard van Leer Foundation (The Netherlands), which sponsors research and projects with children in many countries of the world. Returning to work again permanently at CERG in early 2015, Dr. Iltus had begun a multi-year international project funded by the van Leer Foundation and managed by RFCUNY. The work, "Housing and Child Well-Being," was in an early phase of development when Dr. Iltus passed away in July 2015. Since then CERG colleagues, collaborating with Bernard van Leer, have restructured the project, seeking to both continue and to honor the legacy of research and practice left by Dr. Iltus.

- **The Housing Environments Research Group, led by Prof. Susan Saegert, was pleased to receive word from the National Science Foundation that the proposal “Interrupting Place-based Inequality: Building Sustainable Communities through Shared Equity Homeownership,” was approved for funding. The three-year project, which begins in July of 2016, will provide multi-year employment for both early-stage and advanced graduate students. Prof. Saegert’s GC CUNY Co-PI on this project is Prof. Mary Clare Lennon, who brings statistical expertise to this survey of the changes in economic, social and cultural capital that may be associated with residence in Community Land Trust housing. The project also involves collaboration with two Co-PIs at Georgia State University, who have previous experience with federally funded research on housing policy and low-income communities, and are also experienced in presenting research findings to housing policymakers at the national level.**

- **In Spring 2016, Public Space Research Group (PSRG) Director Prof. Setha Low submitted a proposal to the National Park Service/Dept. of Interior entitled “Ethnohistory of the President’s House Site at Independence National Historical Park (INDE), Philadelphia PA.” (Dr. Dana Taplin, a frequent past collaborator of Prof. Low’s and now on staff at CHE subgroup ActKnowledge, is the Co-PI.) This project will examine Philadelphia community response to a historic site once occupied by George Washington’s household, which included slave quarters; its purpose echoes Prof. Low’s longstanding research interest in giving recognition to the diverse viewpoints of visitors to public sites, thus opening these public spaces up to a fuller understanding by all.**

Together with several GC doctoral students, Prof. Low is also participating in UN Habitat III, a series of international meetings that focus on the challenges of managing urban environments so as to enhance the well-being of citizens. One special interest of the PSRG team is NYC parks, which were the subject of several previous research projects undertaken by Prof. Low. As in these past studies, PSRG is now focusing on such concerns as diversity and inclusion in park design and stewardship; safety and security; and the (sometimes unintended) consequences of park re-design.

- **Developmental Studies Research Group Director Prof. Colette Daiute has submitted a new proposal to the Spencer Foundation, which funded her 2013-2014 work on the community college as an agent of change in the current US policy debates over immigration reform. The new proposal, entitled “21st Century Narrative: Linking Interactive Digital Narrative and Literary Narrative in Higher Education,” plans to examine how community college students, including those who are English Language Learners, respond to a workshop that includes both conventional narrative writing and the construction of interactive digital narratives. Prof. Daiute’s project is intended to offer insights into how college-level language instruction may profit from integrating new digital forms into conventional language and literacy instruction.**

- **ActKnowledge (AK), which has been a CHE affiliate for more than a decade, has been increasingly involved with international projects as interest in its focus on Theory of Change has grown. In the past year, for example, AK assisted SPARK, a Netherlands-based NGO that works in areas of conflict, in formulating an action plan, and in writing a proposal to the Dutch government.**

AK has also worked recently with Action Aid, a UK-based international development NGO. AK's work for this NGO consisted of an in-depth policy analysis, including case studies of Action Aid programs in Uganda, Nigeria, and Pakistan. Other AK projects have involved ORBIS (an international NGO known for its "flying hospital," which provides medical services in developing areas); the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network of Ireland; UN Women; and UNICEF.

In 2015-2016, AK continued its multi-year partnerships and evaluation projects on the topic of community schools in the US. Its partners in this field have included the Children's Aid Society, a NYC charitable organization recognized nationally as a leader in the community schools movement; the Paterson Public Schools (New Jersey); and the Hartford Community Schools (Connecticut). In addition, AK was pleased to learn recently that it has been selected, from among dozens of contenders, to be the evaluator for the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) community school model in New York City.

AK's online software package, Theory of Change Online (TOCO), designed to build organizational capacity in creating and making use of social change models, has now reached nearly 20,000 registrations worldwide.