

Covenant House International Institute

Bruce J. Henry
Executive Director



General Information

- Began in July 2008
- Areas:
 - Research
 - Leadership Development
 - Advocacy

Research Strategy

- Goal 1: To connect local sites with well-established research expertise at universities, hospitals and independent research entities
- Goal 2: To produce reliable, accurate, and up-to-date data that will enhance programming and influence public policy.

Leadership Training

- Philosophy: To invest in high performance and potential of Covenant House staff by leveraging internal management training models.
- First Leadership Conference held at St. John's University, New York City in November 2007.
 - Included managers from all Covenant House sites
- 3-week Executive Leadership Development Training follow-up with conference participants.
 - First session included 4 participants from the New York, Alaska, and Nicaragua sites
 - Included seminars, book assignments, site visits, weekly supervision, and an individual project.

Advocacy

- Creating “Youth Status Reports” by Site
 - An ongoing series providing data tables and comparative analysis of 24 key indicators of youth well-being at the national, state, and where available, city or county levels.
 - Each report targets a city where Covenant House has a program site.
- Monitoring activity on Capitol Hill regarding elected officials, committee members, legislation, and opportunities for testifying
- Re-establishing relationships with members of Congress and national advocacy coalitions
- Visiting Washington, DC with leadership training participants to meet with their elected officials

Research Partnerships Highlight

- Columbia University Center for Homelessness Prevention Studies
 - Project 1 – Overview of Crisis Center Clients
 - Pilot study of 444 CHNY Crisis Center youth entering the Crisis Center between October 2007 and February 2008
 - Collected comprehensive information from Basic Assessment form including client demographics, personal history, family background, employment, education, health and mental health, and legal information.
 - Gives overview of population and lays groundwork for future studies

Columbia University Research Project

➤ Goals:

- To provide a comprehensive portrait of youth entering the CHNY Crisis Shelter.
- To produce empirical data to support trends, patterns, and anecdotes in our description of youth.
- To develop groundwork for future studies of youth in specific areas (e.g., employment, education, mental health, etc.)

Columbia University Research Project

➤ Demographics

- Gender
 - Males 37%
 - Single Females 31%
 - Single Mothers 31%
- Ethnicity
 - Black 56%
 - Hispanic 27%
 - White 7%
 - Other 10%

Columbia University Research Project

➤ Demographics (continued)

- Age
 - 39% 18 years old
 - 35% 19 years old
 - 25% 20 years old
 - 1% 21 years old
- Upon entry to the Crisis Center:
 - 29% did not have a social security card
 - 38% did not have a birth certificate
 - 57% did not have Medicaid

Columbia University Research Project

➤ Keys Findings

- Experience of Violence: 47% of youth reported being physically disciplined, 37% reported physical abuse, 19% sexual abuse, 19% beaten with an object, 41% witnessed violence in the home.
- Foster Care History: 35% have history of placement, at average age of 9 years old, with average of 3 placements, for average of 4 years duration.

Columbia University Research Project

➤ Keys Findings (continued)

- Unemployment: 78% unemployed. Of those who were employed, 77% made \$8 or less. 41% had worked “off the books.”
- Low Educational Attainment: 68% have no high school diploma or GED, 77% not currently enrolled in school.

Columbia University Research Project

➤ Final Report Research Recommendations

- Investigate dynamics of family environment, relationships, and events.
- Evaluate impact of institutional experiences, particularly foster care placement.
- Identify effective strategies for connecting youth to the world of work and education.

Columbia University Research Project

➤ Final Report Policy Recommendation

- Provide adequate funding for housing and supportive services for homeless youth.
 - Support Mayor Bloomberg's opposition to Governor Patterson's proposed statutory changes which would drastically cut services to homeless youth.
 - Build Futures, Don't BLOCK Them Campaign

Columbia University Research Project

➤ Youth in Crisis Report

- *Youth in Crisis: Characteristics of Homeless Youth Served by Covenant House New York.*
 - Available on Institute website.
 - Featured in the *New York Times* on Tuesday, March 10th
- *Youth in Crisis series*
 - Focuses on characteristics, needs and outcomes of Covenant House youth.
 - Currently assessing next 2 sites for series.

Upcoming Columbia University Research Project 2

- Began February 2009 with Dr. Ron Thompson from the Columbia University School of Social Work
- First federally-funded study through the Institute.
- Will study clients who have been in foster care and factors that influence their lack of housing stability.
- Format: Using an ecological framework, the study will include in-depth interviews with 25 youth about their childhood, family background and relationships, health, experience in foster care, experience in the juvenile justice system, work and educational histories, etc.
- Goal 1: To describe the multiple influences and risk factors for housing instability and homelessness among youth who have been in foster care.
- Goal 2: To identify services needed to improve housing stability for youth.

Other Research Partnerships

- Other projects and partnerships being developed with Covenant House sites, including:
 - Alaska: University of Anchorage
 - California: Children's Hospital Los Angeles, University of Southern California School of Social Work
 - Michigan: Wayne State University School of Social Work
 - Toronto/Vancouver: University of British Columbia
 - Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico: National Autonomous Universities

Other Research Partnerships

➤ Multi-Site

- Planning stage of a multi-city investigation of transience, employment, and substance use among homeless youth .
 - Lead investigators: Dr. David Pollio, Hill Crest Endowed Chair in Mental Health Research at the University of Alabama School of Social Work and Dr. Ferguson of the University of Southern California School of Social Work.
 - California site participated in pilot.
 - National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) proposal targeted for submission June 2009

Conclusion

➤ Future Directions

- Multi-site research collaboration
- Ability to better advocate for youth
- Leadership training program to include staff from all CH sites and external programs
- Questions? Comments?