

UICNI Children's Mental Health Program Serves 1,850 Students in Three Schools

The University of Illinois at Chicago Neighborhoods Initiative (UICNI) knows a thing or two about stars. Not the stars in the sky, but the ones here on Earth—the 1,850 children who participate in Student Therapeutic Activities and Resources Services (STARS), a program that provides mental health services for disadvantaged youth. The program has a long history of success, and thanks to a generous grant from the Illinois Children's Healthcare Foundation (ILCHF) that UICNI applied for under the direction of Dr. Cynthia Boyd, STARS was able to expand last year. The expansion resulted in a new school-based clinic and more staff coverage at established clinics.

The goal of STARS is to provide comprehensive preventative, early intervention, and treatment services during and after school hours. It does this by having a dedicated team onsite to provide mental health screenings and interventions and to teach life skills while enhancing self-esteem. The clinics provide individual guidance and involve families to increase mental health and academic performance. The clinics run year-round and include after-school intervention programs and services for siblings of students.

ILCHF, the organization that funded the program's expansion, has a mission to ensure that every child in Illinois has access to affordable and quality health care, including the mental health needs of children. The grant acts as seed money to jump-start the program, which is self-revenue generating. Most bills are based on a sliding scale and are paid for by insurance or 3rd party coverage, but all children can receive services at STARS clinics regardless of their ability to pay.

The STARS program is a clinic-based initiative currently at three Chicago schools: The National Teachers Academy (NTA), the Young Women's Leadership Charter School (YWLCSS), and Drake Elementary. Dr. Preib-Lannon, UICNI Community Mental Health Program Director, says that children are happy to come to the clinics. "We combine so many concepts and utilize other activities [to treat the children]." The children are taught relaxation and academic techniques. Dr. Preib-Lannon also uses arts and crafts such as needlework to help the children focus and relax. Play with puppets help children to open up and learn how to express emotions in a positive way.

Children have responded positively to the clinics. "It's looked at as a privilege and a benefit to get that kind of attention," said Dr. Preib-Lannon. Anyone can refer a child to the program, though children under the age of twelve are allowed two visits before parents are alerted. Ideally, parents would be involved in the treatment, and siblings can attend sessions together.

The sessions are tailored to each student. Most sessions are one-on-one and occur once a week or every two weeks, though children with more complex problems can receive treatment 2 – 3 times per week.

Dr. Preib-Lannon oversees each clinic in the program, but each is unique. Currently the largest clinic is at The National Teachers Academy. The mental health section there is one component of an entire health and wellness center



Dr. Barb Preib-Lannon, Director of the UICNI Community Mental Health Program, left, and Dana De Barr, a UIC Nursing student, demonstrate how puppets can be used to help children express themselves.

which expanded in August 2006. Part of this expansion was the creation of the Disruptive Behavior Clinic, which uses family-focused intervention to address behavioral problems. Reports from teachers and staff have been overwhelmingly positive. Staff have noted fewer altercations and critical incidents, and overall improvements in behavior since the expansion.

Another school that participates in STARS is the Young Women's Leadership Charter School. The recent expansion increased the presence of staff from one to five days per week. The girls are in grades 7-12, which is an age group that is especially vulnerable to various physical and mental health issues and benefits greatly from participating in STARS. This school is unique because the girls come from all over the city and from different backgrounds. Key components of the program include using a culturally relevant and responsive plan to enhance self esteem, life skills and resiliency.

Also as part of the ILCHF grant, the STARS program has been introduced to Drake Elementary. Initially, staff will be there three days a week, possibly expanding coverage to five days a week.

The STARS program will continue to adapt to changing conditions in the neighborhood's surrounding schools where clinics are located as outside neighborhood demographics change. The goal is to serve as many disadvantaged youth as possible.

For more information, contact Barbara Preib-Lannon at Bpreib@uic.edu or at (312) 636-4829.

UICNI Research Assistant Surveys CTA Red Line Riders

Sandra Gray, a recent UIC CUPPA Master's of Urban Planning and Policy program graduate and former University of Illinois at Chicago Neighborhoods Initiative research assistant recently completed a Master's project that gives a voice to Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) riders. Gray designed a survey to gather information on riders' satisfaction with the CTA red line and then analyzed the data. Riders were surveyed at an equal number of busy stops at the north and south ends of the line, and could also take the survey online. A total of 849 CTA riders responded. The resulting 70+ page report, "Evaluating Service Quality: Suggestions for the Chicago Transit Authority and its Riders", has been impressing faculty and students alike and hopefully will soon be presented to its intended audience—the CTA.

"Sandra obviously worked really hard, up to the caliber of a project by GCI or the Voorhees Center. A similar project would have cost a professional research institution \$25,000 or so," said Joseph Hoereth, Associate Director of the UIC Great Cities Institute. The total cost of Gray's research project was around \$300, paid out of her own pocket. Gray was emotionally connected to the project and knew



Sandra Gray conducted a survey of CTA Red Line riders for her master's project.

that it needed to be of a high quality for CTA authorities to take it seriously. She wanted her project to create change and improve the quality of public transportation for everyone. "Which is a goal of community development, right?" said Gray.

Conducting research as a student had its advantages, especially the relationships and partnerships Gray forged while being a UICNI research assistant. "GCI taught me about building relationships. I learned how GCI and CUPPA serve as middle grounds for different

agencies or individuals to meet through," said Gray. Gray feels that as a student she approached the research from a unique perspective. For example, by using online surveys in addition to paper surveys.

Six volunteers worked to help Gray conduct paper surveys. They chose the busiest train stations, working at both peak and off-peak times. Riders at south side stops were the most responsive to taking the survey in person, though many commented that their opinions probably wouldn't make a difference. "I was disappointed that so many people were unwilling to complain to the CTA because they don't think it will change anything." North side riders, however, were more likely to respond to the online survey and indicated higher satisfaction in service overall.

"This really put my education in motion, said Gray. "If I could produce this, it shows that any student is capable, once they're given the opportunity."

For more information on this project, contact Sandra Gray at sgray4@uic.edu.

UICNI Partners Assess Accessible Housing Needs in Chicago

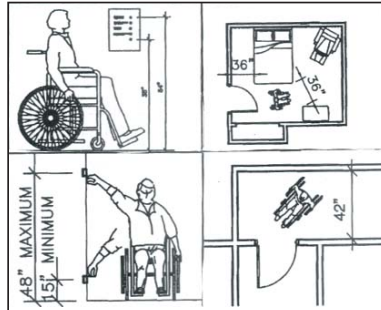
Is there enough accessible, affordable and integrated housing in Chicago? An exciting University of Illinois at Chicago Neighborhoods Initiative (UICNI) partners project is working to find out. With a New Directions grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the College of Applied Health Sciences, the Voorhees Center and Access Living, a non-profit group that works to enhance the options of people with disabilities, have created a self-assessment tool to help persons with disabilities and the elderly assess their own accessibility needs and take control of their housing situation.

The goal of this project is to improve housing accessibility for seniors and persons with disabilities in North Lawndale and Chicago as a whole. The project aims to support people with all types of disabilities to live in communities and settings of their choice. The assessment tool was created by compiling and adapting similar tests from around the country. This assessment tool, coupled with peer mentoring, enables persons with disabilities to work with community organizations and planners to develop access-ready housing, to become mentors to others and to help sustain access initiatives in their communities. This project is consistent with the overall UICNI mission to bring together resources to help strengthen the quality of life for the benefit of current residents, the university, and other institutions.

The assessment tool is designed to evaluate the accessible, affordable, and integrated housing needs of people with disabilities. It collects comprehensive information on a person's living situation, from the ease with which they have access to different parts of their living space to affordability issues. But the tool is more than a survey. While collecting information, the administrators were also able to connect participants with resources. Andrea Gosset, one of the research assistants who administered the tool, recalls providing participants with

service providers' names and phone numbers. Along with the research assistants, "peer assessors" -- persons with disabilities from the community -- were present at each interview session. The peer assessors were a key component to the success of the project. "Participants were more willing to open up to the peer assessor, who also gave support as they administered the assessment tool," said Gosset.

Currently, 40 surveys from a stratified sample of seniors and people with disabilities have been completed and are being analyzed to further evaluate housing types, levels of independence, and locations in the community. A general finding that immediately emerged was the need for more housing that is accessible, affordable and integrated.



The self assessment tool uses words and diagrams (shown above) to help persons with disabilities describe their ability to function in their homes.

Integration of accessible housing in the community is important so that people with disabilities are not segregated in one area of the city. About half of the participants own their homes while the other half are renters, but both groups face affordability issues.

The idea for the accessibility assessment tool came out of a series of town hall meetings held with Access Living and other advocacy groups. Through these meetings, community members determined the need for a tool to assess if there is sufficient accessible, affordable and integrated housing in Chicago. Dr. Joy Hammel, Department of Occupational Therapy and Disability & Human Development, who has a long history of working with Access Living through her research, took advantage of the New Directions Grant to develop and administer the assessment tool. The tool has also been utilized in other projects, including a program that provided inexpensive home modifications to persons with disabilities. The tool was key in determining what home modification would be most effective in increasing mobility.

The DAHS and the Voorhees Center plan to use the data collected with the assessment tool to cre-

Q & A with Andrea Gosset, research assistant and project manager for the Department of Applied Health Sciences



Q: What made you want to work in occupational therapy?

A: I've known since high school that I wanted to work to help people do things that they need to do in their lives. I got my Bachelor's degree in Occupational Therapy in Michigan and a Master's Degree in Occupational Therapy from UIC. I'm currently working on my Occupational Therapy Doctorate with a teaching focus.

Q: How has being a research assistant (RA) affected your school experience?

A: Being an RA definitely enhanced my studies. It allowed me to really understand my field. I was able to work independently and make tasks my own, but there's also a lot of teamwork.

Q: What is it like to work with Dr. Joy Hammel?

A: I'm really happy that I'm working with Joy because she does so much in the community. She does it in a way that provides resources to people and supports them to take ownership of their own lives. Most projects have a social action component and it's all out in the community. People rarely come here -- we go to them.

Q: What advice would you give to other students who are considering becoming an RA?

A: I would advise them to do it. As an RA I'm able to apply what I've learned as a student. It feels meaningful to work with people to understand their lives. Being an RA has opened my mind to working in other fields, like politics and social activism. Working here has broadened my outlook, rather than focusing it, which is what I needed at this point.

ate an online resource that would be accessible to people with disabilities, policymakers, and service providers. A detailed analysis of the findings from the first round of surveys will be presented to the action groups within more town hall meetings later this year.

For more information, contact Andrea Gosset at agosse2@uic.edu.

New Chairperson on UICNI's Westside Partners Council

Gersley Kendricks is the new chairperson on the westside Partners Council. Mr. Kendricks has over 20 years experience of professional services in the area of youth development.

Kendricks is currently the Director of Project BUILD (Broader Urban Involvement Leadership Development). He is responsible for managing the agency's Life Skills Training Program for youth that are 10 to 16 years of age, and are residents in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center. He also manages the follow-up services for those youth upon their release from the Detention Center. Mr. Kendricks has been an employee of BUILD since April of 1996.

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