



CENTRE FOR
Urban Health
INITIATIVES



Fall Newsletter 07

Bringing together researchers, policy makers and the community to support urban health research development.

Notable News

With the winter chill in the air, it is hard not to think of fall passing quickly. I hope you will find some time to enjoy this fall edition of Notable News. It has been a busy time for CUHI since we have been implementing our mid-term centre evaluation for CIHR. I would like to thank everyone that has responded to our request for information or to participate in the stakeholder engagement survey. We greatly appreciate your contributions.

In this issue, you will find updates on a number of fronts. CUHI is pleased to congratulate Blair Wheaton from the Department of Sociology at the University of Toronto and Pat O'Campo from the Centre for Research in Inner City Health on their successful grant applications to conduct a large-scale study into the neighbourhood effects on health in the Toronto region. The Co-PIs and a number of the co-applicants received seed funding from CUHI in the development phase of this project. I would also like to congratulate Neighbourhood Research Interest Group leader, Jim Dunn for his successful CIHR Applied Public Health Chair on Intervention in Residential Neighbourhoods and Population Health.

Finally, CUHI is pleased to announce Research Interest Group (RIG) Development Grants for three new research programs. Brent Berry from University of Toronto, Department of Sociology will be leading the development of a RIG on Ethnicity and Health: Community Influences and Interventions in Urban Canada. Sarah Flicker from York University, Faculty of Environmental Sciences will be leading the planning of an Urban Youth and Social Determinants of Sexual Health RIG. Wendy Young from Health Services Management and Enza Gucciardi from School of Nutrition both at Ryerson will be leading the planning of a RIG on Socio-ecological Strategies for Chronic Disease Prevention and Management. All three RIGs are consistent with our mandate of interdisciplinary research with community and policy partners in emerging areas of population and public health. If these research themes interest you and you wish to become involved, please contact us.

The award winners of the annual Community Based Research Award of Merit are also featured in this newsletter. This award is co-sponsored with the Wellesley Institute and University College to recognize researchers who have done exemplary work in engaging newly emerging communities and promoting the use of innovative and participatory research methods.

We are starting to receive results from our seed grants that we funded less than one year ago. Two projects are featured: the first on school ground design and its influence on children's physical activity and the second on residential land use for food production in Toronto. Also displayed are the results of the Farm to School Research projects. Our monthly "Spotlight on Urban Health" Research Seminar Series will host project speakers over the coming year.

The start of a new academic year brings new students interested in unique learning opportunities in research and urban health. We are assisting in the placement of a number of students for their independent research projects and we have two new work study students hired. We continue to offer conference scholarships to students who are presenting or volunteering at health related conferences. Also featured in this issue are testimonials from previous students and a community intern who have been involved with CUHI.

As always, Alexis and I welcome your feedback and questions. We look forward to supporting the planning of new research interest groups and to supporting knowledge exchange and further development of previous research we have funded. We welcome the engagement of community and policy stakeholders to inform and benefit from our research agendas.

Sincerely,

Brenda Ross, Director of Research
Alexis Kane Speer, Centre Co-ordinator

Promoting Children's Physical Activity through Green School Ground Design

In April 2007, the Canadian charitable organization Evergreen (www.evergreen.ca) received a CUHI seed grant to conduct a pilot study at a Toronto elementary school to identify, test and refine appropriate research methods for a Canada-wide study investigating the influence of school ground design on children's physical activity. A number of interesting findings emerged from the study:

- Gender was strongly correlated with children's physical activity on the school grounds: Girls were engaged in more sedentary activity while boys were engaged in more moderate and vigorous physical activity.
- Conventional design features such as open asphalt and the open playing field were not serving girls well: more than 40% of the girls in each of these areas were engaged in sedentary behaviour.
- On the greened area of the school ground, the highest percentage of moderate physical activity for both boys and girls was recorded.

The findings from the pilot study suggest that multiple methods such as macro-scans, micro-observations, guided walks and interviews are required for measuring children's physical activity in school grounds. Green design features enhance the "playability" of school grounds and stand to make an important contribution to children's physical activity. Evergreen hopes to be able to corroborate these findings through further research comparing school grounds across Canada.

Major Neighbourhood Effects Study Underway

CUHI is pleased to congratulate Blair Wheaton from the Department of Sociology at the University of Toronto and Pat O'Campo from the Centre for Research in Inner City Health on their successful grant applications to conduct a large-scale study into the neighbourhood effects on health in the Toronto region. The project has been funded by both SSHRC and CIHR. Drs. Wheaton and O'Campo will work together with co-applicants of University of Toronto and St. Michael's Hospital to survey 3,000 households in randomly selected neighbourhoods. The team will combine data from face to face interviews with neighbourhood observation data and data from census and City of Toronto sources and, focusing on mental health outcomes, will provide the first dataset of its kind in Canada. The Co-PIs and a number of the co-applicants received seed funding from CUHI in the development phase of this project. CUHI is proud to have assisted with this important work and looks forward to the exciting results this project promises.

Edible backyards: Residential Land Use for Food Production in Toronto

Dr. Sarah Wakefield, Dept. of Geography, Univ of Toronto
Robin Kortright, Master of Arts 2007
Department of Geography, Collaborative Program in Environment and Health, University of Toronto

Food security is a fundamental element of community health. Informal house-lot food growing, by providing convenient access to diverse varieties of affordable and nutritious produce, can provide an important support for community food security. With the objective of developing an exploratory assessment of the contribution home food gardening makes to community food security in Toronto, in-depth interviews were conducted with gardeners in two contrasting neighbourhoods. A typology of food gardeners was developed, and this qualitative understanding of residential food production was then assessed from a community food security perspective. It was found that growing food contributes to food security at all income levels by encouraging and enabling a more nutritious diet. The sustainability of household food sourcing and gardeners' overall health and well-being also increased with food production. Secure access to suitable land to grow food and gardening skills were found to be the most significant barriers to residential food production.

Recognizing Community-Based Research at its Best

The Wellesley Institute, the Centre for Urban Health Initiatives and the Health Studies Program of University College at the University of Toronto presented the Community Based Research Award of Merit on Friday, April 13, 2007 at the 10th Anniversary Community-Campus Partnerships for Health conference in Toronto. The merit recognizes researchers who have done exemplary work in engaging newly emerging communities, promoting the use of innovative and participatory research methods.



Award Winner: The Toronto Teen Survey, Dr. June Larkin

(Women & Gender Studies, Univ. of Toronto) and other researchers from the Environmental Health, York Univ. & Public Health Science, University of Toronto
Community Partners: Gendering Adolescent AIDS Prevention Project, Planned Parenthood of Toronto, the Ontario HIV/AIDS Treatment Network, and Toronto Public Health

- Gathered information on assets, gaps and barriers in sexual health, and education for diverse urban youth to inform a city-wide youth sexual health service strategy

Honourable Mention: Study of Sudanese Settlement in Ontario, Dr. Laura Simich (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health)

Community Partners: Citizenship & Immigration Canada and the Asso. of Sudanese Women in Research

- Looked at the experiences of Sudanese immigrants and refugees, and highlights the diversity within the Sudanese community.

Honourable Mention: Coming Together, Dr. Izumi Sakamoto (Faculty of Social Work, U of T)

Community Partners: Regent Park Community Health Centre and Sistering – a Woman's Place

- The Coming Together project is a two year arts-based project exploring the support networks that women and transwomen use across unstable housing situations

“Coming Together”: Arts-Based Community Research Project with Women and Transwomen Who have Experienced Homelessness

By Izumi Sakamoto¹, Josie Ricciardi² & Aisha Chapra²

¹ University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work, ² Regent Park Community Health Centre

Others contributors: Natalie Wood (Community Artist); Jen Plyler, Rose Cameron & Lily Grewal (researchers), Angela Robertson (*Sistering*, Community Partner), and Brandi Nashkewa, Sheila Samuels, Leahanne Swan, Katherine, Tiesha Anderson, Marie, and Lida (Advisory Board Members). Generous funding was provided by the Wellesley Institute, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Institutional Grant, University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work Royal Bank Fellowship, and Regent Park Community Health Centre.

The Coming Together Project explored how women and transwomen who are homeless and marginally housed form

and use social support networks; how social services can help to enhance these networks; and what women/transwomen experiencing homelessness envision as safe and appropriate housing. The research team conducted in-depth interviews with 20 women/transwomen who were homeless or marginally housed, and with 13 of their service providers. After the initial analysis, the research team recruited a group of women/transwomen who had experienced homelessness to create an advisory board, and a community artist with a background in community development to guide the arts-based research process. The advisory board chose the medium of “staged photography” to further explore themes that had emerged from the in-depth interviews and to reflect the voices of a larger group of women/transwomen. Staged photography” involves the artists taking on the role of the director by creating or staging an image. The advisory board was integral to the facilitation of the art-making sessions that took place at four drop-in sites across Toronto. The women/transwomen that participated were artists themselves, and used models, props, and costumes to create snapshots of their own realities and visions of inclusion, friendship, and safe space.

Findings that have emerged from the Coming Together Project include: the importance of social networks in the lives of women/transwomen who experience homelessness and marginal housing, the importance of safe space, homes and housing, and the consistent experiences of violence and trauma in their lives. Changes needed in social services to enable the support that women/transwomen experiencing homelessness and marginal housing include more Aboriginal-led services, trans-inclusive services, accessible counseling services, and the need for more safe and affordable housing.



The smashing of masks by these transwomen represents the dismantling of the duality they are faced with in a society that discriminates against them, and the power of the community that they create for themselves.



For a copy of the complete report, please contact: comingtogetherproject@gmail.com

CUHI Continues to Support Health Studies

As part of CUHI's commitment to the Health Studies Program at University College, undergraduates enrolled in the program were able to attend an International Sociological Association conference "Health in Families, Healthy Families: Gendered Experiences" held at the University of Toronto last spring.

Approximately fifteen students took advantage of this opportunity and an additional eight students presented.

Presently, CUHI is assisting with the supervision of an upper-year independent research course and providing office space to Health Studies professor Dr. Rena Tandon. We are currently working with Paul Hamel, the program's new director, and the student union on ways in which CUHI can continue to support curriculum enhancement this academic year.

During the 2006/ 2007 academic year, CUHI worked with a group of four Health Studies students on two projects identified as priorities by the Health Studies Program at University College. We would like to thank Marlene Searle, Marino Iurillo, Renaud Boulanger and Xiao Jin Chen for their hard work in producing: *University of Toronto Health Studies Placement Program: Elements for Successful Expansion and Career and Educational Opportunities of University of Toronto Health Studies Graduates*. Both reports have been circulated among college administrators. We would also like to thank Sheryl Yip of Health Studies at Queen's University for her hard work here over the summer of 2007, preparing for our CIHR midterm evaluation.

Marlene Searle (Recent Graduate, Health Studies, University of Toronto)

As a U of T student majoring in Health Studies, I was first attracted to CUHI because of its focus on urban health and its relationship to food, neighbourhoods, and physical environments. The Centre's role in supporting research projects and providing fellowships, workshops and seminars all centred on health from a social perspective was extremely relevant to my area of study.

My work at CUHI varied, ranging from updating the listserv, organizing files and contributing to newsletters to researching contact information, attending meetings and performing interviews. I also represented CUHI and the Health Studies Program in a year long project in which I investigated possible career and educational options for Health Studies students.

My experiences at CUHI provided me with insight into current topics of urban health research and into the detailed and extensive process of applying for funding, as well as greater knowledge of effective methods of information dissemination. In addition, the various tasks and responsibilities enhanced my organizational and communication skills.

I would thus recommend students, especially those in the Health Studies Program, to become involved with the activities at CUHI. The research projects that the Centre funds are of great relevance to the topics studied in Health Studies courses. Students also become knowledgeable of the research process through exposure to the funding application procedure.

Throughout the course of my time at CUHI, Alexis and Brenda, who responded to all of my questions and concerns, consistently provided me with supportive guidance. It was a pleasure to work at CUHI!

Sheryl Yip's (3rd Year, Health Studies, Queen's University)

In the summer of 2007, I volunteered at the Centre for Urban Health Initiatives and my experience there had a major impact on me. It showed me how academic knowledge and concepts that I had been learning in school were being applied in real life. By attending the Toronto Neighbourhood Research Network meeting and listening to researchers discuss their current research studies around the Greater Toronto Area, they showed me how various concepts I was learning in class were being applied in the study of the Toronto population.

I learned that there is a vast variety of health related organizations where I can work after I complete school. There are many job titles that interest me and give me an idea of what I can do with my degree.

Overall, volunteering at CUHI has strengthened my passion for Health Studies. CUHI's purpose and objectives are something I truly value and would love to contribute to in the future. I am grateful for having had the opportunity to volunteer at CUHI because it was an influential and meaningful learning experience. I hope to work with the centre again in the future.



Student Conference Scholarships

In the spring 2007 issue of Notable News, CUHI announced the eleven recipients of scholarships to attend the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH) conference, of which CUHI was a co-sponsor. Kate Reeve (McMaster University) and Kate Rossiter (University of Toronto) were presented with a Viewer's Choice Poster Award for their poster presentation of The Last Straw, an innovative social determinants of health board game. CUHI also recruited many students who volunteered their time to gain gratis entrance to the event. We are proud to announce that CCPH had by far its largest number of student volunteers for a conference yet. Students expressed what an inspiring experience attending the conference was. We would like to thank all those who participated, without which an event of its scale would not be possible.



Alexis Kane Spear, Wendy Mendes & Renaud Boulanger representing CUHI's in the CCPH Conference exhibitor hall.

CUHI has continued to provide conference scholarships to students. Seven scholarships have been given out for students to attend the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) conference this fall. Kate and Kate will be presenting again on The Last Straw. Former research assistants, Hilary Gibson-Wood and Charles Chiu will be participating in a presentation to be given on the Multicultural Yard, Health and Environment Project (MYHEP), a spin-off project of a 2004 CUHI seed grant. Sheryl Yip, our former summer student and Pelin Kaya and Nuangi Wickramasuriya, our work-study students for the academic year will also be attending this year's OPHA conference.

CUHI will be offering ten student scholarships to attend the University of Toronto International Health Program 2008 conference "Challenges in and Around Urban vs. Rural Health Care Delivery and Initiatives". We encourage all CUHI members to attend these events.

Walk21 Global Youth Forum

Subha Ramanathan (Public Health Sciences, University of Toronto) was awarded a scholarship to attend and assist with the youth forum at the Walk21 conference "Putting Pedestrians First" held in early October.

"Hello! My name is Subha Ramanathan and I am currently pursuing a PhD in Public Health Sciences at the University of Toronto. My research focuses on how the social environment of heritage, traditional values and gender roles impacts exercise behaviours among adolescent girls from South Asian and other ethno-cultural communities. I was recently sponsored by CUHI to attend Walk21, an international conference on sustainable and active transportation, and served as a facilitator of the youth steering committee who organized the first annual YWalk Global Youth Forum. Some of my most valuable experiences at Walk21 included working with groups of proactive youth in the stage design and conference program committees, and networking with important stakeholders in youth physical activity initiatives across Canada. I am thankful to CUHI for supporting me in this opportunity for practical training and mentorship within the areas of youth, exercise and the physical environment."

New Faces at CUHI

We would like to take this time to welcome two new faces at CUHI. Pelin Kaya (Bioethics and Human Biology, U of T) and Nuangi Wickramasuriya (Human Biology, Physiology and Psychology) will be working as Junior Research Assistants for the 2007/



2008 academic year. Each stood out in a pool of highly qualified candidates and we look forward to working with them over the coming months.

Pelin: I am extremely thankful to be offered a work-study position with CUHI. I look forward to learning about current research topics in Health Studies and Social Determinants of Health, two areas that I am very interested in. I also look forward to gaining research skills that will aid me as I continue with post-graduate studies.

Nuangi: During my time at CUHI, I hope to gain valuable exposure to issues pertaining to the health and experience of individuals living in urban environments. I feel that being able to contribute to research projects, especially toward organizing and communicating information, would serve to prepare me for my continuing studies in public health.



Farm to School:

This project was supervised by Professor Wally Seccombe, OISE and Susan Butler, FoodShare Toronto. The researchers were five members of the Ontario Farm to School Network with interest and expertise in various farm to school initiatives. Researchers were Amanda Montgomery, Eva Meriorg, Tony Winson, Marni Price and Fiona Knight.

On May 5, 2005 over 150 local parents, students, educators, farmers, Toronto Public Health staff members and food advocates gathered for a one-day participatory workshop at FoodShare Toronto called *Farm to School: Putting Local Food on the Table*. Marion Kalb (Program Director, US National Farm to School Program) led the discussion on the benefits of adopting a farm to school program to enhance children's ability to eat local, healthy food during their school day. The afternoon was spent in small group sessions exchanging ideas and looking for local solutions.

Research Topics

1. **Best Practices in Farm to School: Lessons from the United States, United Kingdom and Canada.** A Review of existing public school food programs connected to farms in Canada, the US and the UK, aiming to identify keys to success.
2. **Curriculum Review.** A review of the Ontario Ministry of Education's curriculum guidelines for grades K to 12, identifying opportunities to integrate agricultural food issues into healthy eating practices.
3. **Kids, Food and Schools: A Review of Literature and Healthy Food Initiatives in Ontario Schools.** A review of public attitudes on food issues pertaining to youth and schools such as school lunch, junk food, advertising.
4. **Case Study of an Urban School.** A preliminary survey of the attitudes of children, teachers and parents toward an existing healthy-food program in an urban, multicultural elementary school.
5. **Policy Review.** Interviews with key political and policy leaders in public education regarding the responsibilities of schools to provide their students with healthy food choices and quality food education in Ontario.

Some conference participants expressed a strong desire to stay in touch, learn from one another, become more familiar with the best programs in other jurisdictions and coordinate efforts to build a strong movement across the province. Thus, the Ontario Farm to School Network was formed. The network members recognized the importance of research as an integral part of moving forward toward its goal of having a complete range of quality food programs such as salad bar lunches, healthy snacks, school/community gardens, on-site composting and partnerships with local farms instituted in Ontario's public schools from JK to grade 12. A steering committee took stock of the Network's research needs and applied for a CUHI grant to research five topics. At FoodShare Toronto, the five researchers met for a day of discussion with fifty members of the Farm to School Network to clarify the research, make more connections and seek to prevent overlap.



Researching Local Possibilities

Results

The results of the research were presented to members of the Ontario Farm to School Network and other interested practitioners in a one day workshop. Some key findings include:

- The key motives for initiating Farm to School programs are the rising health care costs associated with diet, the role to be played in invigorating the local food system, the importance of improving the quality of school food choices, the apparent link between nutrition and violent behaviour among students as well as the skills development and socialization offered in practical life skills, such as cooking, growing and composting.
- The Ontario Curriculum offers an extremely low frequency of exposure to food related education ranging from less than 1% in gr. 8, to a high of just under 5% in gr. 3. As well, no mandatory subjects contain significant expectations with respect to nutrition or other food issues.
- 66% of Ontario residents surveyed by Strategic Communications support ban on junk foods in schools. There was also strong support for the inclusion of instruction on gardening, cooking and diet, nutrition education and "buy local" policies in terms of public school food services.
- Success of Farm to School programs necessitates community partnerships, funding, teacher time, knowledgeable support staff and increased access to schools and school grounds.

School Board Trustees expressed the opinion that other provincial initiatives often take priority over food programs. Change requires a Policy Program Memorandum regarding Nutrition Environment in Schools as well as direct, province-wide funding for school board programs.



What Now?

Next steps for the Ontario Farm to School Network include collating the data in an easy to access format as well as widening the network to include more of the key informants. Parts of the research have been posted on food related websites such as FoodShare Toronto, Food Secure Canada and Foodnet Ontario and shared with interested parties such as the Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition. The results of the curriculum research were presented to the National Symposium for Home Economics/Family Studies educators in April of this year. The Ontario Family Studies Leadership Council and the Ontario Family Studies Home Economics Educators Association plan to address the lack of food related issues within the curriculum during their upcoming review of the Social Sciences & Humanities document. The "best practices" findings were presented at the Ontario Society for Environmental Education conference in Waterloo, Ontario on May 5-6, 2007 and the Canadian Network for Environmental Education and Communication in Nova Scotia on October 19-22, 2006.

Network members are buoyed by the results of the research and anxious to share their findings. For more information contact Susan Butler at susan@foodshare.net.

Grafton Community Garden

Carolyn Taron, CUHI former Community Intern, was instrumental in acquiring urban garden space and sponsorships for a new community garden.

"Flowers are pretty yet food is something that connects us all. We all need to eat ya know..." a friend's teenage son said recently as I was telling him about the new Grafton Community Garden in Parkdale. The Grafton garden is the first 'food focused' community garden and the sixth community garden that I've initiated in Toronto as coordinator of the West End Flowers Fairies. Since I became a member of CUHI in 2004 and worked as the community intern researcher for the UGROW (Urban Garden Research Opportunity Workgroup) project, I was introduced to Food RIG Research, Food for Talk, and other food initiatives. I became an 'out of closet' full fledged foodie! Research topics such as food security, social justice, food in schools, obesity, and growing power, left me dizzy with the sheer excitement of the possibilities.

The findings from the community gardens research inspired me to bring the benefits to my present neighbourhood. From the UGROW participants, I learned that food can become a common language despite cultural differences, and this proved true in our new garden. The Grafton Community Garden is situated in a small park in Parkdale. This site was a used car lot twenty years ago and in recent years it was considered a derelict, drug addled and otherwise underused park. Many young families and seniors lived nearby. A block away a large high-rise apartment building is home to many new immigrants and families from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Spotlight on Urban Health Research Seminar Series

November 22, 2007, Thursday 4-6pm, Health Science Building, Rm. 106 (155 College St, at Mccaul St, U of T)
Communication, Health & the Environment: Media Literacy and the News Media Contribution (or not) to Healthy Public policy
Charles-Antoine Rouyer, Glendon College, York University

December 5, 2007, Wednesday 1:15-2:45pm, University College, Rm. 177 (15 King's College Cir, U of T)
Sudanese Settlement and Sociocultural Aspects of Mental Health: Thinking Globally, Acting Locally
Dr. Laura Simich, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

January 17, 2008, Thursday 1:15-2:45pm, University College, Rm. 177 (15 King's College Cir, U of T)
Use of 911 Ambulance Dispatch Data for the Syndromic Surveillance of Heat-Related Illness in Toronto: Summer 2007
Dr. Donald Cole and Kate Bassil, Department of Geography, U of T

CENTRE FOR URBAN HEALTH INITIATIVES (CUHI)

The design of the garden was influenced by the findings of the UGROW project. A large communal area was planned and individual plots are maintained by families or individual with a firm commitment. This design provided space for community involvement. The natural raspberry bush fence increased the edible landscape and interest from passing foragers. Weekly, 'weed, water, play' gatherings have created a community space that attracts seniors, toddlers, teenagers, young families, street people, local pharmacists and those that pass up on the local McDonald's to graze on heirloom tomatoes or cucumbers in our community garden!

NOTE: West End Flower Fairies received a Clear and Beautiful City Grant for the restoration of the Concord Community Garden. 'Seeds, Soil and Stories' was cited on the application and copies of the report have been passed on to numerous city officials.



For more information on CUHI seminars visit: www.cuhi.utoronto.ca

February 12, 2008, Tuesday 1:15-2:45pm, Earth Sciences Centre, Rm. 142 (33 Willcocks St, U of T)
Which of the Following is NOT an Essential Service: Roads, Schools, Food Access? Exploring Food Security with Young Aboriginal Moms
Dr. Cyndy Baskin, School of Social Work, Ryerson University

March 19, 2008, Wednesday 1:15-2:45pm, Bahen Centre, Rm. 2130 (40 St. George St, U of T)
The Toronto Teen Survey: Improving Sexual Health Services for Diverse Toronto Youth
Dr. June Larkin, Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Studies; Susan Flynn, Planned Parenthood

April 17, 2008, Thursday 1:15-2:45pm, Bahen Centre, Rm. B024 (40 St. George St, U of T)
Mapping the Attributes of the Church & Wellesley Neighbourhoods which Influence Tobacco Use among Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, Transgender People
Dr. Gala Arh, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

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