

# Beck Institute on Religion and Poverty FORDHAM UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SERVICE

**Summer 2014** 

## **BECK UPDATES** — Capacity Building

In a host of ways all involved with Beck have been capacity builders this year, furthering our Learning Collaborative work through enriching the Life Skills Empowerment Programs (LSEP), while developing new partnerships for these programs and important coalition work for advancing restorative justice. This newsletter highlights our new LSEP program partners, program updates, an exceptional Restorative Justice Consultation in November, and a good news follow-up on our "Our Daily Bread" documentary.

## **Life Skills Empowerment Programs Grow**

Collaborations with a diverse community of pioneers and committed service providers began five years ago to develop an evidence-base for the LSEP program model that was developed over 25 years ago by Catholic Charities and the Interfaith Assembly for Homelessness and Housing, to support the homeless, giving them a voice, and building coping skills for more successful life management.

This year we have completed evaluations for 18 LSEP program cycles and are preparing to move to the next phase of development, refining the program model based on all we have learned to support broad replication. We celebrate the completion of reports based on pilot and demonstration evaluations supported by the New York Community Trust that show evidence for the model's effectiveness in increasing coping and life management for people in transition.

This past winter the Polar Vortex was daunting. Nonetheless, all of the Life Skills programs completed a successful spring cycle, with ten programs graduating participants, all who were true "overcomers".

Catholic Charities EOP (Educational Outreach Program) reported that this 49<sup>th</sup> program cycle was their very best! Included in the successful eight fall program cycles were two new programs: one in Ossining for the post-

incarcerated, Breaking the Chains, and the LEAP program at the Reformed Church of Bronxville. All are important new directions, highlighted here.

Through the generous support of an anonymous donor, development for sustainability has enriched all Life Skills programs and made it possible to launch new ones. Important new homes have also been established for LSEP programs that have become active communities to meet the needs of participants.

Metro Baptist Church, in the Hell's Kitchen area of Manhattan, now hosts two programs, one serving Veterans and the other, domestic violence survivors. West End Presbyterian Church now hosts Panim el Panim, a program serving the homeless. The First Congregational Church of Poughkeepsie is the home for a vital new community program serving the needs of domestic violence survivors (see insert). See our website for program details and research updates.

#### A Focus on Restorative Justice

The definitive event of this past fall was the Restorative Justice Consultation held at Lincoln Center on November 18, 2013.

Monsignor Quinn, Vice President of Mission and Ministry at Fordham, welcomed over 65 invited guests for the full day event. A panel of national and international restorative justice experts confronted U.S. justice practices, based on their experience of restorative justice. We share possibilities and new direction that resulted from this unique day-long consultation.

Notable achievements for all programs this year are due to our talented and committed Beck team of capacity builders, including GSS MSW and PhD students.

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## **Our Daily Bread**

The College of New Rochelle (BSW program), the Columbia School of Social Work, and Union Theological Seminary recently screened "Our Daily Bread", Beck's first documentary film.

We are proud to announce that this documentary was the official selection and was screened at three international film festivals. In addition to the festivals the 45 minute film received the Merit Award from the Best Short Films Competition.

St. John's Bread and Life, West Side Campaign Against Hunger and Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen, three of New York City's largest emergency food programs are featured in the film.

Dale Lindquist, the producer, cinematographer, and editor was joined by Tony Butler, Executive Director of St. John's Bread and Life at the screenings to discuss hunger, food insecurity and the role of the religious, business, and political communities in addressing this growing problem.



## **Restorative Justice**



The Beck Institute with Union Theological Seminary and the Coalition for Restorative Justice

Planning Committee organized the first Consultation on Restorative Justice and Youth Incarceration. This overwhelmingly successful event, under the leadership of Donald and Peggy Shriver, was attended by international leaders in restorative justice from New Zealand, Norway and Ireland with national and New York leadership from the justice system, faith communities, universities, and social service and community organizations.

The current and future state of the U.S. judicial system was examined in light of the potential for restorative justice practices to be infused in a variety of justice and community settings. The importance of congregational responses was emphasized, as demonstrated by the Coming Home Life Skills Empowerment Programs for the post-incarcerated provided by the Riverside Church and the Reformed Church of Bronxville.

Seven roundtables with cross discipline participants, stepping out of their prescribed worlds, explored current justice reform challenges while considering means for transformation. Among the range of proposals examined, use of community capacity building models are an effective way to strengthen families and provide alternatives to youth incarceration, such as the New Zealand "Family Group Conferencing Model", as evidenced in examples from Judge Andrew Becroft, Principal Youth Judge in New Zealand, and Dr. Lauren Abramson's Community Conferencing Center in Baltimore. Meeting the needs and including the voices of youth, families, and communities suffering short and long term collateral conse-

quences as a result of current judicial processes was seen as a necessary part for effective reform. Trauma work and storytelling were identified as healing paths that can assist with transferring motivation from self-interest to other-interest creating a single community story.

## **Developments Inspired by the Consultation**

Kareena Gore reported that an attendee, Judge George McKinnis of the Bronxville District court, gave powerful witness to the toll the current system takes, as most people he sees in his courtroom are "serious recidivists who, if you look into their faces, their lives have been utterly destroyed. The legislature gives me no tools by which I can be of aid to those people. I can only send them back in."

Inspired by this gathering, Judge McKinnis has organized a dinner meeting June 30th in Bronxville for area judges to consider how to form a program on Restorative Justice. As a start to this initiative, they will hear the Director of a well-funded non-profit entity that has dedicated substantial resources to assist Brooklyn Kings County Court with finding and using effective alternatives to incarceration.

Creative pieces of poetry and dance from post-incarcerated graduates of the Rehabilitation through the Arts (RTA) program were showcased, concluding the Consultation. Participants departed the conference with an increased commitment to instill restorative justice practices locally and beyond. As Don Shriver reminded us at the beginning of our consultation work: "We believe that Will Rogers was right: All of us are ignorant, only in different areas. All of us are somewhat knowledgeable, too. But for some social changes we need to put our knowledge and our organizations together for responsible public action."

Dynamic new networks and connections were formed to further restorative justice! Please contact Beck for a Consultation Summary that points to next steps.





"Restorative Justice closes the gap between human justice and divine justice – and to see the personal transformation that takes place as a result of a personal encounter in a facilitated way is awe-inspiring."

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-Christopher Marshall, Professor and Theologian, at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

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## Important Outcomes and Findings

Few faith-based community models have research evidence that supports their effectiveness. The Life Skills Empowerment Program (LSEP) model has been studied and evaluated by Beck with a quasiexperimental design to document program and participant outcomes. The LSEP program model is innovative as it provides many layers of emotional, educational, and community support.

The following programs were valued collaborators providing LSEP for the 2011-2013 New York Community Trust Fahs-Beck Fund for Research and Experimentation Pilot Study (4 programs) and the Lois and Samuel Silberman Fund Demonstration Study (8 programs/12 cycles/119 participants)

- ComALERT Brooklyn DA's Office, Coming Home post incarcerated
- Riverside Church, Coming Home post incarcerated

- Reformed Church of Bronxville, Coming Home post incarcerated/domestic violence
- Catholic Charities, Beck Institute & IAHH, Living Well domestic violence
- Catholic Charities, Educational Outreach Program homeless
- St. Xavier Mission, Life Skills Training and Empowerment Program - homeless
- Panim el Panim and IAHH, homeless

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Metro-Baptist Church and IAHH, Home Coming - homeless veter-

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## Highlights of Important Outcomes and Findings continued from page 2...

Findings Highlights which follow are outcomes from a longitudinal qualitative/ quantitative evaluation study of LSEP programs for people in transition who struggled with meeting their basic needs for shelter, employment, education, health and mental health, as well as social support. The above programs, with the support of the faith community, offered participants a multi-faceted, intense community experience over a threemonth period as a foundation, with clearer pathways to stability.

#### Finding Highlights:

- The majority of participants successfully completed 24 to 27 program sessions reporting high levels of program satisfaction.
- Program satisfaction was associated with life management/coping.
- A significant increase in life management/coping was still evident for participants at the 6-month follow-up.
- At the 6-month follow-up, participants reported a continued high level of motivation, increased self-confidence, and self/family care.
- All core components of the program model significantly contribute to participants' improved ability to cope and manage their lives.
- Interviews with program providers (staff, volunteers, mentors, program coordinators/facilitators) indicate that the LSEP community has an exceptional influence in developing commitments to social and restorative justice for all involved, including congregations who witness the struggles and transformation of participants.
- Participants' trauma symptoms decreased

slightly. Further exploration of trauma symptoms, recovery, and traumainformed practices is thus underway to meet the wide range of participant needs

 Participants continue to persevere despite current employment and housing challenges. It is noteworthy that almost 90% continue self-improvement, desire for involvement in education, and community connection.

The figure below presents how personal connections mitigated the isolation and alienation that had made it difficult for participants to move forward with their lives. Relationships developed through the program contributed to engagement and completion as participants experienced a renewed sense of belonging important to successful transitions. Healing and hope, significant to increased coping and reduction in trauma symptoms, was supported by: building community through social bonds; creating a program family through relationships; mentor bonds that built trust and expanded possibilities; and writing and telling one's life story that emphasized their shared journey.

Illustrated below are representative comments drawn from participant focus groups that give voice to aspects of their experience:

**Program family.** Connections that resulted in a "new" family experience for participants were formed from consistent involvement with all people in the program. "I knew I had a second family (the program group), that pulled no punches, that was there for me, that cared, and that I wasn't alone with my own mystery—everybody has a mystery, different, not the same, and it really drove me to

understand people."

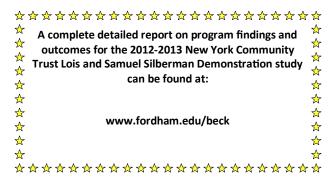
Community develops through social bonds. For many program participants, the program was synonymous with "community". Each gathering began with a meal and was followed by an inspirational reading and reflection period — an important spiritual connection at the start of each session. "We had a communal place with the spirit of community where we felt loved and appreciated from the very beginning." ....
"The group of people in the room — without them — I would be back incarcerated — they have taught us to respect each other, and if we see someone straying we pull them back."

#### Mentor bonds for trust and possibilities:

The active role of mentors with participants included listening and understanding, assistance with setting and working on goals, and developing one's story. "Our mentors were great...anything you wanted to say...any time of day, they were there for us. They helped us to know that we were important, that we were a part of community, and that we are seen... and that there will be a time when somebody else will love you again...open your wings and you fly...you don't have to be the caged bird. Now we are flying and we are living our lives again."

Life Story Bonds. One of the more powerful influences on the quality of connections developed among all participants, staff, and mentors is the development and sharing of participant life stories. "My favorite part was telling my story...sense of freedom, sense of relief...you can never judge a book by its cover. If I had seen these young ladies out on the streets, I never would have thought that we had something in common. It was a wonderful experience."







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WE'RE ON THE WEB! www.fordham.edu/beck

The Bertram M. Beck Institute on Religion and Poverty is an ecumenical institute that partners with New York City interfaith religious and lay leaders who are moved to alleviate poverty in our affluent society. We are committed to preparing leaders who promote social justice and serve the poor.

This newsletter is dedicated to all those who have joined our journey of promoting social justice, fighting hunger and promoting all those aspects of a life that create safety, health, and dreams of a future. Our journey will continue through publications, media projects, research, and coursework.

## **Student Contributions**

Focused on Beck's work on capacity building, sustainability, and restorative justice, graduate students from Fordham's School of Social Service have been crucial to this year's success. Their valued contributions have enriched all who have worked with them. It has been inspiring to see their commitment and growth, encouraging us with creative contributions to the life skills curriculum. Above all, we welcome their investment in working with us on facing the challenges that helping those in poverty present.

Undergraduate students in the Community and Human Services program at SUNYs Empire State College have supported daily program needs including becoming mentors to LSEP program participants. Nine GSS MSW interns served as case managers, advocates, and group facilitators making invaluable contributions to the success of the different LSEP programs. Students had the opportunity to learn about the central role of community through their active assistance in helping people in transition move their lives forward.

Several past and present MSW students involved in the Beck Institute Collaborative have achievements to note: Hope Eisdorfer, 2013 GSSS graduate, was awarded the John G. Sullivan Award for a graduate committed to the service of those who are homeless and suffering from mental illness, substance abuse, and HIV/AIDS. Over the past year Hope has effectively served as the program director for both the Riverside Church's Coming Home Program for the post-incarcerated and Xavier Mission's LSTEP programs for the homeless. Alex Khoobani, MSW graduate 2014 and Research Assistant to Beck, was also granted the honor of the John G. Sullivan Award due to her ongoing support of the Beck Institute Collaborative and LSEP as well as previous fieldwork with homeless families in Ossining (Westchester County, NY). Sue Groman, former MSW 2013 graduate and Research Assistant to Beck, independently developed and coordinated a new Living Well program in Poughkeepsie (Dutchess County, NY). Sue's work in program and community development has been a new chapter in her learning that has been nothing short of phenomenal! She has also continued to hold an important role in transcription of data collection recordings.

Beck's outstanding doctoral candidates have had a central role in diligent data collection and report development, all while managing to successfully pass their courses and for some their comprehensive exams. We look forward to their progress as they continue to work on their dissertations that will bring to light learning gleaned from the past four years of research with the LSEP programs.

Special thanks to: **MSW students** - Argelia Moya, Perthrina Pegus-Neptune, Carlos Beivides, Qualiyah Arrington, Shirin Nassi, Lindsay Cardoza, Sarah Franek, Kara Sprague, Alex Khoobani, Rachel Johnson, and Sue Groman (former RA/MSW student); **Doctoral students** - Jessica Banslaben, Patricia Dawson, Philip Elike, Donald Garner, Jen Hili, Linda Hood, Debbie Mullin, Erica Ponteen. Your commitment to the Beck mission, continued hard work, and wealth of talent has helped us achieve so much this year. We hope the lessons of this year touch your personal and professional lives for years to come.



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