

# Homeless Children's Network Community Development and Education Project: 2007 Evaluation Findings

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## Key Findings

- The large percentage of residents participating in CDEP activities and the overwhelmingly positive reports from survey respondents indicate that the Community Educators have had success in sparking interest and motivation among PSH residents.
- CDEP outreach efforts have played a significant role in the recent increase in mental health referrals to HCN, serving as a gateway through which PSH residents can access other HCN services.
- CDEP participant-driven activities provide a venue for residents to recognize their potential as community leaders.
- CDEP services help families in public housing regain or maintain PSH residency.
- HCN staff have successfully delivered CDEP services by providing consistent outreach, flexibility in program design, practices in cultural competency, and security for participating residents.

Youth respondents most enjoyed being able to speak openly with others about issues such as drug use and violence. One youth comments that they liked “the interaction with people involved and the down to earth mentality people had because they were trying to keep things real.” Youth also comment on the feelings of safety during these sessions, which for HCN staff is critical to successful service delivery. As one youth participant says, “What I liked most is how the police are around to make sure the area is safe and secure.” When asked what they learned through these workshops, youth most often reported learning about the following:

- The dangers of drugs and its effects on the body;
- Anger management;
- STD protection and birth control;
- Making smart choices; and
- Ways to avoid violence.

## Community and Family Health: More Residents Participating in HCN's Mental Health Services

CDEP outreach efforts have had a direct and positive impact on residents' access to HCN services and mental health resources available in the community. Chronic mental health issues are a significant concern for formerly homeless individuals and families. HCN has long provided mental health services to the homeless and formerly homeless population in San Francisco; however, CDEP outreach efforts have also played a significant role in the recent increase in mental health referrals to HCN.

*The families we serve have been hurt...a lot. To ask them to consider health is at first considered absurd. But somehow out of the grace of deeply caring, deeply skilled, and deeply committed people, comes the possibility of a community strengthened from the inside out by that which has been present all along, resiliency and self love.*

- HCN Executive Director

## Community Leadership

CDEP activities have laid the foundation for residents to become active leaders in their communities. While further data collection on resident leadership behaviors is needed to more thoroughly measure progress on this outcome, CDEP has clearly created a space for residents to acknowledge their potential as community leaders. Community Educators offer workshops, informal group conversations, and one-one-one interaction where residents can take the lead. Residents have an opportunity to identify the topics they wish to discuss in an open and inviting setting. As the HCN Executive Director explains the philosophy:

*We are inviting them from the frontend to be community advocates, hoping that this will eventually allow them to be involved in enhancing the health of the individual, family, and community.*

- CDEP Program Director

“Hierarchy is turned on its head. Formerly homeless families have been forced to digest shelter hierarchy without having an outlet to voice their concerns. CDEP’s workshops, on the other hand, invite adults and youth to question authority figures, critique what doesn’t fit well, describe more uplifting and meaningful ideas, and hold systems accountable to their missions.”

CDEP workshops allow residents to take ownership of what they learn. While program staff have curricula they can use, this is not where the work starts. Rather, CDEP “starts with what residents say they want and need.” HCN staff believe that by reconstructing ideas of leadership, the concept “takes on more meaning for families who have doubted their ability to be viewed as a leader.”