Kwantlen POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

Acting Together SSHRC-CURA Project Addressing Youth Violence

November 2009 Volume 1 Issue 1

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Friends, collaborators, and researchers at the Acting Together September 11, 2009 Partnership Meeting held at the Newton Community Centre. Acting Together is a CURA project funded by SSHRC.

Message from the Project Director

Greetings!

The Fall season is in our midst. I watch the colorful leaves on the trees and on our paths - a constant reminder that life is filled with lovely colorful experiences despite the occasional storms. It is inspiring to watch that while nearing its end, each leave gives the best it has to offer adding to the beauty of the world. I believe that our CURA project; Acting Together, has provided us with a great opportunity to give the best we have to offer to our community, to our world, as we track through the path of life.

This first newsletter of our CURA-Project marks the path we have travelled together so far. Following the celebration of winning the *Sciences & Humanities Research Council*'s **C**ommunity **U**niversity **R**esearch **A**lliance (CURA) award of $1 million at the beginning of Spring 2009, our CURA project team has been very busy. Our newsletters, which will be published periodically, will highlight these activities.

Given the magnitude and the scope of our project which involves seven academic researchers, four academic institutions, and 11 community organizations, our newsletters will serve the essential role of keeping us all informed and in unison. I have gathered the highlights of the dynamic climate and progress of our project so far in this issue and invite you all to contribute to our future newsletter. Your ideas, your experiences, your feedback, your photos-in-action are all welcome as our newsletter will be a regular feature of the 5-year project.

Our goal to remain focused on strengths rather than deficits among our youth and community to address the issue of gang-related activity and violence has provided a framework to build our project structure. We have accomplished a lot and this newsletter will allow you to share and stay informed about our multiple tasks, activities, and future connections.

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Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada
Canada

The first few months since March 1, 2009 when the project officially began, have been filled with lot of action. The important goal has been to carefully lay the foundation pieces of our project; administration, research, networking, training, and knowledge dissemination. With the spirit of collaboration, our team of academic experts, youth assistants, and community activists has come together and it has been a very productive and dynamic undertaking.

Enjoy the project highlights with a certain sense of pride!

Sincerely,

gira bhatt

www.actingtogether.ca

Acting Together-CURA members

Administration Highlights

(Top) Research Coordinators: Andrea and Jennifer

(Bottom) Network Coordinator: Sandy Alfonso

Research Coordinators

Joining the team are our two new coordinators: **Andrea Spindler**, who recently completed her MA in criminology from SFU, and **Jennifer Matthews** who has MSc in Health Promotion studies and brings with her an extensive experience of working as project manager for community-based programs.

Network Coordinator

Sandy Alfonso who recently graduated with a BA in Psychology and Applied Arts will continue with our team facilitating community connections and sharing information among networks of our partners.

Our Own Space: Surrey Campus, B206

Come by and see the new Acting Together space!! Kwantlen has generously provided the room, furniture, and computers. You will find us on the Surrey Campus, in B building, Room 206 (next to the cafeteria). The area is bright, roomy and even has a nice deck with picnic tables! It has three computers, internet connections for laptops, a printer-fax-scanner and a meeting area with a large LCD TV for presentations. All our partners and members are welcome to use this space.

Our New Phone 604-599-2961

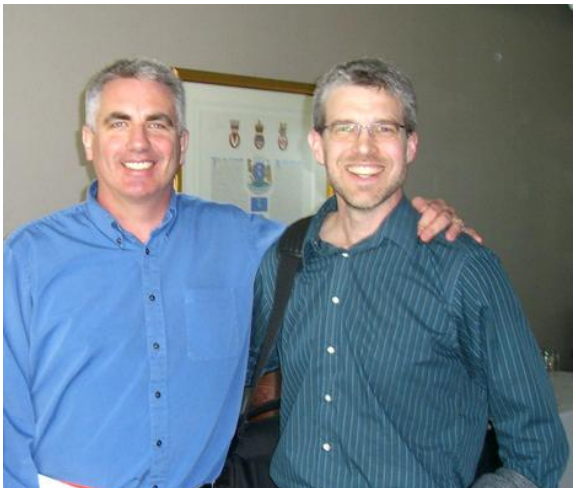
Contact us on our new phone. Andrea will be there to answer your call or you can leave a message and we'll get back to you as soon as we can.

Our Crew of Student Assistants

We have an amazing team of seven undergraduate student researchers who are actively engaged in a range of project-related tasks, such as literature reviews, media-web tasks, event coordination, attending workshops, preparing reports, and providing general research support.

- **Meiko** has recently started his BA Honors in Applied psychology on the topic of perception of violence by youth and parents.
- **Karen** is doing a class project on factors that facilitate or inhibit reporting of violent crimes by lay people.
- **Sandra** has been our photographer, videographer and an expert in creating program flyers for our project related events. She also helps planning and coordinating community events and writing reports.
- **Joshua** and **Sean** have offered great support with focus groups, event planning, research input, and writing reports
- Langara College student **Lydia Ng** is helping our researcher Indira Prahst to summarize the public forum dialogues that focused on youth violence
- **Sandy** has helped with literature review, gathering community event calendar for the website, and with summary reports on various youth violence related workshops and meetings. Sandy has recently graduated with BA in Applied Arts, winning the "President's outstanding graduate" award. Congratulations!!
- **William** is our webmaster who has created our website which he is continually updating with new design ideas, graphics, links, and content.
- SFU graduate students **Sarah Mordel, Sarah Farstad, and Melissa Hendry**, under the guidance of our SFU researcher Dr. Jody Viljoen, have prepared an excellent report on measures that assess risk and protective factors mediating youth violence.

Research Activities



Stephen Dooley and Dr. Roger Tweed from Kwantlen Polytechnic University

Integrating Research and Community

The basis of the CURA mandate is to integrate academic research approaches with community identified needs. As such, our goal is to ensure that we connect the academic researchers with the community wisdom, and the community activists with the academic knowledge. Below is a brief update on the different research activities we've been engaged in over the past year.

Lit Review: Looking at Past Research

One research activity involves reviewing and summarizing research already conducted in the area of youth protective factors and resiliency so that we can build on existing knowledge in a meaningful way. **Dr. Jodi Vijoen** and **Dr. Kevin Douglas**, from our partner institute SFU, are directing two MA students and one PhD student to work on this project.

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The team has spent over 200 hours searching through close to 100 research articles. Next the team will provide a summary of the academic knowledge on character strengths, vulnerability and resilience of youth.

Youth Survey: Planning Phase

The research team has been developing concrete plans for conducting research that will target hundreds of high school students in Surrey School District. Led by the research vision of Kwantlen's **Dr. Roger Tweed**, the team has spent months developing a detailed methodology. With the assistance of SFU student researchers **Sarah Mordel, Sarah Farstad, and Melissa Hendry** the researchers have designed a survey that will assess youth character strengths, risk factors, resilience. In addition, parents and teachers will also be surveyed about protective factors in these youth. During partnership meeting on Sept 11, 2009, our community partners have further streamlined these measures to fit the local context.

The survey is now ready. Once the survey study is approved by all the ethics boards, a test pilot of the survey will be conducted in a small number of classes. This small pilot will help the researchers know the survey is going to work with youth.

Andrea and Steve working on the Acting Together-CURA research plans

Finding Current Community Resources

Our partners, *School District 36* and *South Asian Community Coalition Against Youth Violence,* have gathered a list of resources available to parents, teachers, youth, and community members who may have concerns regarding youth violence.

We hope to add to this list as we learn more about what is available for community members.

The Process of Ethics Approval

In order to conduct any research involving human beings, certain ethical guidelines must be followed. Our target youth being under the age of 19, this requires additional caution. We are required to have the approval from the ethics review boards of Kwantlen, SFU, and the Surrey School Board.

Following extensive consultations with the research team from SFU and Kwantlen, Dr. Roger Tweed has submitted the questionnaire package along with details of the methodology, and the process of informed consent to Kwantlen's Research Ethics Board (REB). Meanwhile, the chair of the REB of SFU has been informed about this collaborative research.

Once the Kwantlen REB approval is obtained, the SFU REB will go through the process of ratification. As well, Stephen Dooley and Dr. Roger Tweed have met with the research review members at the Surrey School District, which has viewed our methodology favourably.

Capturing Community Voices: Focus Groups & Interviews

Because community voices are integral to this project, we are conducting focus groups and interviews with parents, service-providers and youth. Stories, ideas and opinions from these groups and interviews will help inform the community's perspectives on gang-related youth violence. Kwantlen's **Stephen Dooley** is coordinating this arm of the research with with the help of our community researchers **Kashmir Besla** and **Gary Thandi**, and our project coordinator, **Andrea Spindler**. We are aiming to conduct focus groups with parents in early spring, 2010.

Our student researchers, **Sandy Alfonso, Sandra Gutierrez and Meiko Assoon,** under the guidance of our collaborator **Bob Basil,** have helped with recruitment by designing and producing flyers advertising the focus groups.

In addition, **Indira Prahst** from our partner institute Langara College is directing her undergraduate students to summarize and analyze data gathered from public forums on youth violence that have been held over the last year.

If you want more information about the focus groups and interviews, please visit our website www.actingtogether.ca or call **604-599-2961.**

December 8, 2009 Service Provider Focus Group Session

Partnership Meetings

Participant discussion at Sept. 11, 2009 meeting of Acting Together

April 28, 2009

This was the first meeting following the announcement of the success of our CURA proposal. The meeting was hosted at Kwantlen to celebrate the news and share information on the process that would commence. Partners from our academic institutions and our community organizations came together to share news and the celebrations. Video snippets and photographs of this meeting are available on our website.

Sept 11, 2009

This was a half-day meeting hosted at the Newton Community center in Surrey. The program included a brief progress report, a report on academic literature review, a short presentation by Rob Rai from our partner Surrey School District on *Wrap-Around* program underway in schools to protect at-risk youth. An important part of this meeting was to seek input from community partners on academic research plans through very engaging three interactive exercises.

In one activity we inquired; "*what is one sign that indicates that the kids are negotiating adolescence well?*"

The group provided a list of 28 indicators of well-being such as; "*they are truly happy", "hang out with well adjusted kids", "have goals/drive/motivation/interest in success", "are willing to tell you all the activities they are engaged in".*

In another activity, we invited participants to identify their own personal character strengths, and then we wanted to check the extent to which the academic view of "character strengths" matched our local community views. We presented 22 character strengths identified in past academic research such as *curiosity, forgiveness, kindness, hope, bravery*. When asked to choose the most relevant character strengths for our local youth, participants chose *gratitude, creativity, fairness, speaking truth and presenting oneself genuinely, being careful about one's choices, and being aware of motives and feelings of self and others.*

For the third activity, our student researchers presented a brief review of academic research on risk and vulnerability issues among youth, following which we inquired what might be missing about our local context in the past research. Participants identified; *higher socio economic status, not feeling welcome in the community due to race, ethnicity, religion, cultural adaptation challenges, media violence.*

Our research plans and assessment tools will continue to integrate these community voices.

Dr. Gira Bhatt (Project Director) and Balwant Sanghera of SACCAYV cutting the Acting Together-CURA cake

Networking and Collaboration

(Left to Right): Dr. Gira Bhatt (Project Director), Madhavee Inamdar (RCMP, Diversity Officer), & Mike Franklin (Crime Reduction Strategy Manager, City of Surrey)

(Left to Right):Dan Rai (MCFD-Youth Probation), Bindi Mattu (MCFD-Youth Probation), Kashmir Besla (Community Researcher)

November 3, 2009 "Warrior Boyz" Expert Panelists (Left to Right): Supt. Dan Malo, Jagdeep Mangat, Indira Prahst, Sukh Rai

We acknowledge that the community has been very proactive and many programs to address youth violence are currently implemented. As such, our goal is to extend collaboration and offer support to existing agencies and programs that target youth, rather than re-invent the wheel. Networking is therefore a continual process. In fact we have had over 80 meetings since March 1, '09 which included our team members, stakeholders, and community members as well as youth who were involved in some criminal activity in the past and expressed a wish to get involved in the project to help other youth.

BC Children's Hospital: Youth-to-Youth Violence Forum: Oct 3, 2009

We collaborated as research partners with the BC Children's Hospital and Kwantlen's Nursing faculty to host a one-day public forum on Youth-to-Youth violence. It was attended by 84 participants including youth, parents, teachers, service providers, emergency physicians, nurses, and other hospital staff.

The event featured experts from our team; Sgt. Shinder Kirk of the *BC Integrated Gang Task Force*, Rob Rai of *Surrey School District's*, Indira Prahst our CURA research partner from *Langara College*, and BC Children's Hospital's emergency physician.

The afternoon sessions comprised of six focus groups; each examining an aspect of youth-to-youth violence. The shared data from these focus groups will become part of our research data.

Our student researchers won applauds from the organizers for their enthusiastic support. They helped with registration, set-up, and importantly with leading focus groups and helping with data analyses. The research report will be made available shortly.

Documentary "Warrior Boyz" & Expert Panelists: Nov 3, 2009

We collaborated with Kwantlen's Criminology department to host an evening featuring a National Film Board documentary on youth gang involvement; *Warrior Boyz*. The showing *was* followed by a panel discussion with 1) Baljit Sangra, the award winning film maker, 2) Supt. Dan Malo, head of the *BC Integrated Gang Task Force*, 3) Wendy Dawson, the QC for the prosecution of the high profile gang style murder of "Surrey six", 4) Jagdeep Mangat (featured in the film), social justice advocate, 5) Indira Prahst, CURA research partner from *Langara college* and, 6) Sukh Rai (also featured in the film), the vice principal of a Surrey School.

This public event was attended by about 200 community members including students, educators, parents, and activists.

The attendees were invited to voice their views on youth gang involvement which are now being analysed and will become part of our research data.

The event generated lot of media attention. The CBC TV for example, ran its first news story on its 11 p.m. news that evening. As well, CTV, City TV, and local newspapers ran a story about this event. These links are on our website.

Extending the Network

The community's interest in the project is evident from the number of inquires that keep pouring in from various corners. These include individual members as well as community organizations. The CURA team has responded to each one of these inquiries, and has also had one-on-one meetings with several of these. For example, the collaboration with the BC Justice Institute's *Centre for the Prevention and Reduction of Violence* has resulted in commitment to share resources.

Also, our CURA research partner from SFU, Dr. Jodi Viljoen is working closely with the *BC Youth Justice*. We have also connected with the *Surrey School Teachers' Association* and parent-teachers' groups, *BC Crime Prevention*, *Surrey Trade Association*, and *Alcohol-Drug Education Service.*

Knowledge Dissemination

Bob Basil: Collaborator and multi-media expert (Kwantlen, Applied Communications)

We are creating a number of ways to keep people up-to-date with our project activities and research.

- **actingtogether.ca :** Our multi-media website *actingtogether.ca* is up and running. It has been developed by student assistants under the guidance of Bob Basil; our multi-media expert collaborator. Check it regularly as we are continually updating it with news and other features.
- **Videos on Youth Violence**: **Indira Prahst** from Langara College has created two videos about Acting Together for a local TV show *Asian Pulse* featuring the project director **Dr. Gira Bhatt** and student researcher **Meiko Assoon**.
- **Brochures:** Two brochures have been produced to raise awareness about Acting Together and invite participation to our focus groups and other research activities.

- **Presentations:** A number of powerpoint and oral presentations have been given in 2009 and new ones being prepared for conferences in 2010 to share knowledge with academic and community audiences.
- **News Articles: Dr. Gira Bhatt's** two articles have appeared in the local newspaper, *Indo Canadian Voice* (May 30, 2009, & Oct 3, 2009).
- **Other media:** Media coverage from TV and newspapers can be found on our website. Thanks to **Bob Basil** and his students for keeping us current.

Rob Rai (SD#36) giving a presentation at our September 11, 2009 meeting

Training and Education

There are seven undergraduate students from Kwantlen, two MA students and one PhD student from SFU, and one undergraduate student from Langara College actively involved in the project. They are getting trained in conducting systematic search for relevant research articles, conducting focus groups, organizing public events, presenting at public events, web-designing and web-content collection, using multi-media, conference presentation, writing research reports, networking, interpersonal communications skills, and leadership skills.

Also, our community activist members Kashmir Besla and Gary Thandi have participated in preparing ethics review applications and have been collaborating on planning and conducting focus groups, working side by side with our researcher Stephen Dooley. This collaboration has helped the academic researchers, student assistants, and the activists alike on refining academic research and skills of qualitative research.

To summarize, the project has had a very successful start; promising a great future ahead. Our path towards the goal to identify and nurture factors that protect our youth from entering gang-related violent lifestyle, are clearly being marked, and we hope to navigate at a steady course. Kwantlen's strong commitment to be a community partner to act together with it on positive initiatives was made possible by the kind of mutual trust that is always the key to forming the tight collaborative network.

Newsletter Details

Acting Together SSHRC-CURA newsletter is published 4 times per year.

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