

Advancing Healthy Homes/Healthy Communities – Tackling Environmental Disparities *Concept Paper*

Introduction

Environmental hazards in the home harm millions of children each year. The home is where children and adults both are exposed to toxic hazards. The home is also the place where many of these toxins can be remediated and where broader responses can be made that improve the long-term quality of life for families. In response to the risks that these physical and social toxins pose to children and families' health, the Center for the Human Rights of Children, Center for Urban Environmental Research and Policy, Center for Urban Research and Learning, Loyola University Medical Center, and Loyola Law School's Civitas ChildLaw Center ("The Centers") at Loyola University Chicago have developed the "Advancing Healthy Homes/Healthy Communities – Tackling Environmental Disparities ("Healthy Homes/Healthy Communities") project. The mission of the project is to develop Loyola University's capacity as a leading educational institution with a commitment to building a holistic approach in creating healthy homes and healthy communities free of environmental and social toxins.

Purpose

Scientists have long recognized that indoor toxic hazards typically pose far greater risks to children's health than outdoor exposures because of the concentrated levels. Health hazards encountered in the home include: dust, mold, and pests which can cause asthma; lead, pesticides, food additives, and other toxic materials which can result in learning disabilities, and behavioral and health problems; and dangerous gases such as carbon monoxide and radon which can result in long term brain damage, cancer, and death. Unhealthy homes often are concentrated in older, low-income neighborhoods and communities of color.* The costs to the individual of these toxins can be school absenteeism, learning difficulties, academic failure, lack of employment, life-long health problems, socialization problems, criminal records. Societal costs include healthcare, hospitalization, joblessness, special education, and the juvenile and criminal justice systems. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development have identified healthy homes/healthy communities as a priority for the coming years.

* While low-income communities of color are disproportionately impacted by many environmental and social toxins, the research undertaken through this project and initiatives developed undoubtedly will also be helpful to higher socio-economic communities.

Loyola University's Response: Advancing Healthy Homes/Healthy Communities – Tackling Environmental Disparities (Project Description)

The goal of the “Healthy Homes/Healthy Communities” project is to develop Loyola University Chicago as a leading educational institution with a commitment to advancing healthy homes and healthy communities free of environmental and social toxins. The project will use an integrative research and advocacy model to address the public health and housing problems associated with environmental toxins. This approach integrates a unique set of strategies and tactics, including applied research, public education, organizing, coalition building, legislative and policy advocacy, and policy implementation.

Objectives:

1. Facilitate and assist in staffing a county-wide Task Force focused on addressing the problem of environmental and social toxins in underrepresented communities. The Task Force, a public-private-university partnership, will include representatives from the University; City and County governmental health and housing departments, child advocates, community organizations working on environmental health and housing; tenant organizers; other Universities involved in these efforts, and private industry working on health and housing. The Task Force will meet quarterly to review internal and external research on environmental and social toxins affecting children and families in their homes, discuss policy and practice implications, raise awareness among community representatives about the problems and solutions, and develop reform initiative and legislative responses.
2. Engage in scientific research, including both social and natural sciences, on the causes of environmental toxins, as well as the application of that science for developing solutions. Faculty and students from The Schools of Education, Law, Nursing, Medicine, and Social Work, the Public Health Institute, and the Departments of Chemistry, Psychology, Sociology and possibly other departments will be involved in this effort.
3. Involve graduate and undergraduate students in work with community organizations to raise awareness in communities most impacted by environmental toxins.
4. Develop a multimedia, interdisciplinary curriculum to improve knowledge among health care providers (social workers, public health workers, nurses, physicians, etc.). Topics will include risk factors and treatments for different environmental toxins, with a focus on improving competency among health care providers and helping families gain knowledge of environmental toxins and triggers, and improve their coping skills.
5. Gather data on the extent of environmental toxins within and among communities using computer-based geographic information systems (GIS).
6. Promote annual interdisciplinary conferences and internal research symposia.

Loyola University's expertise in building a sustainable green community can be shared in its work with communities as we seek to develop healthy homes. As the project progresses, it is the goal of the Centers to broaden the scope to address and/or integrate social as well as environmental toxins; the international as well as Chicagoland community, and healthy communities beyond home.

Current Activities and Support

In December 2011, under a new Strategic Initiatives fund, Loyola University Awarded the Centers \$60,000 of seed money to support the "Advancing Healthy Homes/Healthy Communities" project. The funding will support the first phase of interdisciplinary and community-based initiatives and activities to support the goals and objectives of the project over eighteen months.

The following outlines the activities and methods of the first phase of the project

- University faculty, staff and students affiliated with CHRC, CUERP, CURL, the Civitas ChildLaw Center, and the Medical Center will engage in scientific research, including natural and social sciences, on the causes of environmental toxins as well as the application of that science for developing solutions.
- Build recognition, commitment, and agreement among key public and private stakeholders on the importance of tackling environmental disparities and advancing the notion of healthier homes and communities.
- Develop an Advisory Board comprised of public, private, university, and community representatives representing various disciplines and expertise.
- Engage community partners in helping to identify community needs and further develop the project.
- Draft five working papers, co-authored by Loyola faculty and community partners, on issues related to the Project, such as emerging environmental toxins, effective interventions, and challenges and best practices on engaging communities.
- Plan and convene an invitational working conference with the goal of developing a blueprint for the City/County, community groups, private industry, public health, housing and child advocates, and the University to address environmental toxins.

About Us

Loyola University Chicago. Committed to preparing people to lead extraordinary lives, Loyola University Chicago (LUC) was founded in 1870 and is the nation's largest Jesuit, Catholic university. Enrollment is more than 15,600 students, which includes about 10,000 undergraduates and over 6,000 graduate and professional students hailing from all 50 states and 82 countries. The University has four campuses: three in the greater Chicago area and one in Rome, Italy. Loyola also serves as the U.S. host university to the Beijing Center for Chinese Studies in Beijing, China. Loyola's ten schools and colleges include Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, Communication, Education, Graduate Studies, Law, Medicine, Nursing, Continuing and Professional Studies, and Social Work. Loyola offers 71 undergraduate majors, 71 undergraduate minors, 85 master's degrees, and 31 doctoral degrees. Among Loyola faculty, 96% hold the highest degree in their respective field. Loyola is consistently ranked among the "top national universities" by U.S. News & World Report, and the University was named a "best value" in their 2009 rankings. Loyola is among a select group of universities recognized for community service and engagement by prestigious national organizations like the Carnegie Foundation and the Corporation for National and Community Service; in June 2011 Loyola was ranked sixth nationally among 20 universities cited for community service by USA Today. For more information about Loyola, please visit www.luc.edu.

The Center for the Human Rights of Children at Loyola University Chicago (CHRC) represents, coordinates, and stimulates efforts to understand, protect and apply the human rights of children. The Center seeks guidance and inspiration from the tradition of Catholic teachings on social justice as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Recognizing that children require special protections, the Center for the Human Rights of Children pursues an agenda of interdisciplinary research, education, and service to address critical and complex issues affecting children and youth, both locally and globally. The Center applies a human-rights approach to the problems affecting children, reaffirming the principle of the indivisibility of human rights and the importance of promoting economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights of children. For more information about CHRC, please visit www.luc.edu/chrc.

The Center for Urban Environmental Research and Policy (CUERP) at Loyola University Chicago works to expand knowledge in the service of humanity by teaching interdisciplinary educational programs, and conducting research and outreach activities on pressing environmental issues. Such issues include global climate change, emerging environmental contaminants, the food production and distribution system, alternative energy solutions, and the unjust privatization of water and other natural resources. For more information about our work, see <http://www.luc.edu/cuerp>.

The Center for Urban Research and Learning (CURL) at Loyola University Chicago is a 16-year old non-traditional, interdisciplinary, research center that emphasizes collaborative university-community research. Typically, community partners work with CURL at all

stages of the research process, from conceptualization and research design to analysis and outcome dissemination. Our research is not “sit-on-the-library shelf” research, but rather is “consumable” research, designed for immediate use by community partners in furthering their goals. Examples of current and past research projects as well as more general information on CURL is available at www.luc.edu/curl.

The Civitas ChildLaw Center, part of Loyola University Chicago’s School of Law, seeks to improve the lives of children and families and the quality of justice they experience: The Center trains law students, attorneys and child welfare professionals to be effective advocates for children, provides high quality legal representation to child clients, promotes children’s law as an area of legal specialization, and influences policies and legislative reforms to improve the lives and quality of justice for children and families. The Center’s Policy Institute tackles issues affecting children and families through the formation of public-private partnerships, fostering interdisciplinary and community collaborations, and advocating for policy and legislative reform in the legal, social welfare, juvenile justice, health care, and other systems that impact children and families. In 2006, the Civitas ChildLaw Center received the U.S. EPA Children’s Environmental Health Excellence Award in recognition of its ongoing and sustainable dedication to, and notable leadership in, protecting children from environmental health risks at the local and state level. More information about the Civitas ChildLaw Center is at www.luc.edu/childlaw.

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