



The Institute for Community Research:

The First 2 Decades

Research Partnerships for Healthy Communities



The Institute for
Community Research

ICR: A HISTORY IN BRIEF

In 1987 the Board, the new Executive Director, and the staff of an existing organization renamed it as The Institute for Community Research (ICR) and modified its mission statement to reflect its new purpose and community agenda. The ICR mission statement calls for research in partnership with communities and the organizations that support them, to promote justice and equity in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society. Over time, ICR has partnered with community and service organizations across the ethnic / cultural spectrum in using social science research as a means to address continuing disparities in health, education and culture. Since its inception, ICR has grown to include a diverse staff of between 45 and 70 researchers, trainers and health advocates, over 40 youth researchers, and statewide arts coordinators. Programs of basic and intervention research, action research training and arts policy established in the first formative year have continued, in partnership with many organizations in the Hartford area, in Connecticut, elsewhere in the United States, and internationally, in China, India and El Salvador.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH WITH ADULTS AND YOUTH

Participatory Action Research (PAR) engages people and organizations that have limited access to resources in the use of ethnographic, historical, visual and other research methodologies to identify critical issues, investigate them by interacting with others in their communities and schools, and use the information plus the new relationships they have established to bring about transformational change. ICR has developed PAR training for change with community women, men, neighborhoods, elementary, middle and high school youth in and out of school, and community activists and has disseminated materials in the United States and Canada.

- 1988–1991** *Rapid Sociodemographic Assessment Project* partnered with 80 organizations and municipalities to critique the 1990 census, train for proactive planning and engage in research technology transfer and knowledge sharing.
- 1988–1992** *Urban Women’s Development Project*, a prototype partnership of five multiethnic organizations, trained over 140 neighborhood women in PAR for advocacy, policy change, mobility and neighborhood action.
- 1991** *Economic Status of Men* brought a multiethnic group of male leaders together to examine and critique the disparities in economic status of urban African American, European-origin & Latino men.
- 1995–1997** *Neighborhood Development and Evaluation Advocacy*. ICR partnered with CURET, Stanley Battle, Ph.D. and Upper Albany Neighborhood Collaborative in a national model to train evaluator-advocates for neighborhood research and action and collect baseline development data.
- 1998–2001** *Parents Studying School Readiness*. ICR developed a model program with a ‘Children First’ Initiative for School Readiness, involving parents in action research to identify and negotiate differences between parental and educator views of school readiness as one way of addressing educational disparities initiating in kindergarten.
- 1998–ongoing** *Youth Action Research Institute*. Each year, ICR conducts summer and year round action research instruction and programming with urban high school youth through Summer Youth Research Institute, year-round action programming and diffusion of the model to other organizations.
- 1998–ongoing** *Youth PAR for Transformational Service Learning*. ICR with National Service Learning (NSL) and Service Learning Research organizations promotes transformational views of service learning and introduces action research as a form of service learning to reduce educational and social disparities in urban areas.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH *continued*

- 2000–2001** *Education and Advocacy Project.* ICR partnered with middle schools in the development of a PAR model to train teachers to conduct PAR with students in their classrooms to transform classrooms and schools.
- 1998–ongoing** *PAR for Family Strengthening and Neighborhood Development.* ICR is training community residents in PAR for family strengthening and neighborhood development as an Annie E. Casey Foundation national demonstration model program in Hartford’s Latino and African-American communities.

INTERVENTION RESEARCH

The term ‘intervention’ refers to any education, social or health service, screening or other activity that is introduced as an improvement. ICR’s interventions are partnerships in which the partners initiate or join the decision to go forward with a project, participate in the design and the evaluation of the intervention, and then sustain it. Interventions are generally participatory and multi-level, involving and affecting individuals, groups and communities simultaneously. One main intervention area has been Youth Participatory Action Research (Youth PAR) that tests the idea that PAR conducted with youth prevents drug and sexual risk taking and promotes a variety of healthy social behaviors. A second approach has introduced cooperative learning as an empowerment strategy for social and emotional development into urban schools and classrooms. A third has utilized a variety of community and cultural elements to engage active drug users, their networks and community organizations in programs of HIV and related risk avoidance. A fourth has focused on environmental factors that promote health and illness among older adults.

Youth Development and Risk Prevention Through Participatory Action Research

- 1989–1994** *Toward a Brighter Future: the Audiological Van Project.* ICR partnered with five organizations involved in preventing developmental delays in early childhood in low income urban communities, screened for audiological problems and language and learning delays, provided training to primary care providers and parents, and evaluated process and results.
- 1990–1994** *Teen Action Research Project (TARP)* promoted PAR as a prevention model with urban high school youth in troubled neighborhoods.
- 1994–1999** *Urban Women Against Substance Abuse (UWASA)* engaged urban middle school girls and their female caregivers in an out-of-school and in-school prevention study to promote improved communication as a way of reducing drug and sexual risk taking in adolescent girls.
- 1994–1997** *Community Action Against Substance Abuse (CAASA),* a model state program, brought adults and youth together for community action against drug use. Action Research was an important component in this program.
- 1998–ongoing** *Dissemination of Youth Participatory Action Research for Prevention* in Connecticut and beyond has disseminated the Youth PAR model as a best practice for teen substance abuse prevention.
- 2000–ongoing** *Sexual Minority Youth (SMY) Program* engages high school SMY of Color in action research and inquiry for personal development and the improvement of safety and identity formation.

HIV/AIDS

- 1989–1997** *CAAP Consortium.* ICR/ Hispanic Health Council formed CAAP, the Community Alliance for AIDS Prevention, a consortium of organizations concerned with HIV/AIDS prevention among active drug users and their sex partners. Programs included culturally targeted outreach intervention and follow-up research (NIDA), case management (CSAT), education (CDC), and advocacy and support for and evaluation of the Hartford Needle Exchange program.

INTERVENTION RESEARCH *continued*

- 2000–2005** *Risk Avoidance Partnership (RAP)* is testing the efficacy of a program to train active drug users as Peer Health Advocates and to assess the diffusion of HIV prevention messages through their networks to high-risk drug-use sites. If successful it will be scaled up in the United States and elsewhere.
- 2002–2006** *Male Sexual Health Concerns and Prevention of HIV/STDs in India*, a joint study of the University of Connecticut, IIPS, Mumbai, ICR and community partners in Mumbai, is preventing HIV in married men through counseling on sexual health concerns leading to sexual risk-taking.
- 2003–2005** *Assessing Women’s Risk for HIV/STDs in Marriage*, in India. This supplement is studying communications issues among couples in the Male Sexual Health Study and developing an intervention for testing and scaling up in India.

School-Based Intervention Studies

- 1997–2001** *Integrating HIV Prevention into a Middle School Social Development Curriculum*. ICR joined Yale University and the New Haven Public Schools in an evaluated intervention that integrated HIV / AIDS information into a drug and sex risk prevention curriculum in middle schools.
- 1999–2001** *Encontrando el Poder Dentro de Ti*. ICR and El Centro (Institute for the Hispanic Family) conducted and evaluated a two-year PAR research and prevention project with the parents of preschool children.
- 2000–2003** *Safe Schools Program Evaluation*. ICR conducted a participatory evaluation of the New Haven Public Schools’ Safe Schools Program, a three and a half year project that coordinated service, policy and educational resources to improve school climate, safety and mental health services in the New Haven Public Schools. ICR’s role was to document improvements in networking, coordination and program implementation and to provide regular feedback to the program’s operating and oversight committees.
- 1999–2004** *Building Group Norms in Urban Middle Schools*. ICR and New Haven Public Schools have conducted an intervention study, testing a new drug prevention middle school curriculum based on cooperative education instructional techniques. The study outcomes are assessed quantitatively using Yale University’s Social and Health Assessment protocol.

Older Adults

- 1993–1995** Working with three senior centers, ICR conducted interactive health education programs for multi-ethnic urban older adults in Hartford on chronic health problems and quality of life issues.
- 2003–2004** *Recipes for Life*. With older adults in senior housing, ICR has developed an interactive photographic program focusing on reminiscence through reflection on coping strategies, lessons for survival and cooking.

BASIC RESEARCH AND ACTION PARTNERSHIPS

Basic research addresses areas of community concern where ICR and community representatives decide that there is not enough information available to guide programs or policy changes. Most basic partnership research at ICR is directed to understanding health, educational, and social disparities and developing strategies for addressing them. Basic research partnerships directed toward program, service, community education or policy change have included HIV / AIDS and substance abuse prevention, factors influencing mental health and chronic diseases in children, youth and older adults, and inaccuracies in U.S. census data collection. Basic research with community partners illustrate the importance of research for directing change strategies for communities that see the benefit of using research technologies for community development and change.

BASIC RESEARCH *continued*

HIV / AIDS With Active Drug Users

- 1988–1989** *AIDS Community Research Group*, formed by ICR and the Hispanic Health Council created one of the country's earliest all-community-based urban research partnerships to study HIV / AIDS.
- 1997–2001** *High-Risk Sites Study*. ICR and the Hispanic Health Council, through the Yale University Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS, conducted a study of the context of drug risk behavior within sites where people use drugs.
- 1999–2004** *Exposure of Older Adults in Senior Housing to HIV Risk*. ICR, with the University of Illinois, the North Central Area Agency on Aging and public and private housing managers conducted a study of exposure to HIV of low income older adults in senior housing in Hartford and Chicago.
- 2002–2004** *Training and Pilot Research on Drug and Alcohol Use and HIV Risk among Migrant Men in Mumbai* brought ICR and the International Institute for Populations Sciences, Mumbai together for training and research on community-based substance use and sexual risk taking in Mumbai.
- 2000–2003** *Microbicide Acceptability in High-Risk Women*. ICR initiated a partnership program of research on female-controlled methods of protection against sexually transmitted diseases and HIV, including a study of microbicide acceptability and a supplement addressing female condom acceptability.
- 2003** *Crack Use and HIV Risk in El Salvador*. ICR, with the Fundación Antidrogas de El Salvador conducted a pilot study examining the social context of crack use and HIV risk in the San Salvador metropolitan area.
- 2003–2006** *Microbicide and Female Condom Acceptability among Female Sex Workers in Southern China*. ICR and Peking Union Medical Center are conducting a replication of the microbicides acceptability study in southern Chinese provinces of Hainan and Guangxi with female sex workers.
- 2004–2007** *Sustainability of Female Condom Use*. ICR has initiated a study of factors sustaining female condom use for HIV / STD prevention in high-risk women.
- 2004–2006** *Housing Status / Stability and HIV Risk among Drug Users*. ICR is studying the links between housing policies, drug users' access to housing, variations in housing status and housing options of drug users, and HIV risk.

Children and Youth, Mental Health and Prevention of Drug Use

- 1995–1996** *Validating a Self Report Measure of Children's Activity Levels and Caloric Outputs*. ICR, schools in Hartford and New Haven, and Boston University partnered to measure Puerto Rican children's activity levels, using portable data collection instruments and daily activity recalls.
- 1997–2002** *Pathways to High Risk Drug Use in Urban Youth*. ICR and Hispanic Health Council partnered to study transitions to hard drug use among urban youth. Supplemental projects focus on the diffusion of ecstasy into urban youth and young adult networks and the role of drugs and violence in the interface of the formal and informal economy.
- 2001–2006** *Urban Lifestyles*. ICR is conducting a study of club drugs, resource inequities and social health among urban youth and young adults, exploring marketing, patterns, predictors and consequences of use, and new drug trends.

BASIC RESEARCH *continued*

Older Adult Health and Mental Health

- 1991 – 1992** *Latino Alzheimer's Education and Training Curriculum.* ICR with Braceland Center for Mental Health and Aging and North Central Area Agency on Aging developed a national curriculum on Alzheimer's Disease for use with Latino families, service providers, community helping resources, and older Latino / Puerto Rican adults.
- 2001 – 2004** *Depression and Barriers to Care in Older Low Income Adults.* ICR, Braceland Center for Mental Health and Aging, and North Central Area Agency on Aging have conducted an integrated study of depression and barriers to care among older adults living in senior housing facilities, addressing barriers, and exploring community understanding of language and concepts associated with depression.
- 2002 – 2004** ICR with Asian Family Services, Connecticut, explored intergenerational health and mental health issues with Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian households.

CULTURAL CONSERVATION

Cultural conservation research and public programming identifies, documents, promotes, supports, and presents the cultural heritage and folklife of the ethnic and occupational communities in the State of Connecticut and the Northeast Region. ICR fulfills this agenda through three standing programs, the Connecticut Cultural Heritage Arts Program (CHAP), the Statewide folk arts program that supports and archives traditional artists and their communities; and the Urban Artists Initiative, a national model that identifies, trains, and promotes the work of emerging artists and organizations, and ICR public programs that include conferences, workshops, installations, exhibits, and performance series combining research and the arts.

- 1988** ICR initiated its first arts / research series *Whose Cultures Count* with the Southeast Asian communities, the Puerto Rican / Hispanic community, African Americans and West Indian / Caribbeans in Connecticut.
- 1989 – ongoing** *Connecticut Folk Arts Program*, known as the Connecticut Cultural Heritage Arts Program or CHAP, was initiated by ICR with support from the NEA. This statewide program has worked with over 200 artists and 80 community and ethnic organizations, and partners with Folk Arts and Folklore programs in Rhode Island, New York, Massachusetts, Maine, Vermont and nationally. CHAP has produced numerous heritage arts events in ICR's gallery and other venues, working in partnership with community groups.
- 1990 – ongoing** *The Urban Artists Initiative.* An ICR / Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism partnership initiated an NEA model program to identify and promote the work of underserved urban artists. The Inner City Cultural Development Project (ICCD), renamed as the Urban Artists Initiative (UAI), has identified, trained, described, promoted and exhibited the work of over 300 Connecticut emerging artists and arts organizations in ten cities.

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

CONFERENCES

- 1991 Demographic Diversity and Restructuring
- 1992 Latino Aged: Wisdom Into Action
- 1992 Children in Difficult Circumstances
- 1995 Facing the Crisis of AIDS: Issues and Models for Community Action
- 1996 Privatization: For the Common Good? Implications for Social Health and Welfare
- 1997 Data Presentation & Press Conference: Preventing HIV Infection Among Drug Users in Hartford
- 2000 Changing Risk, Risking Change: Four National Dialogues
- 2002 Impact of Culture and Environment on Young Children
- 2003 Microbicides: The Power to Protect
- 1993-2004 Urban Artists Initiative Regional Conferences: Building Community through the Arts
Marketing Urban Experiences
Reinventing Urban Areas through the Arts
Working Artists: A Community's Hope
Working Artists: Energizing Communities through the Arts
A Toolbox for Marketing the Arts
Toolbox for Funding the Arts

PERFORMANCES & SEMINARS

- A Hard Way Out*, a youth-produced anti-violence video
- Cape Verdean Music Festival
- CHAP – Charter Oak Cultural Center Traditional Music Performance Series (3 years)
- Southern New England Traditional Arts Apprenticeships
- Puerto Rican Traditional Arts Workshops (Cuatro building, Pandero building, cake decoration, mundillo) for apprentices
- HIV Forum Series
- HIV/AIDS Research and Prevention Partnerships in Southeast Asia
- Connecticut Folk Art and Festivals Bus Tours
- Ten Cities, Ten Years: UAI Showcase Performances

INSTALLATIONS / EXHIBITS AT ICR GALLERY*

- Que Bonita Bandera: The Puerto Rican Flag in Folk Art*
- Auspicious Signs: Tibetan Arts in New England*
- Living Legends: Connecticut Master Traditional Artists*
- Sur Bois: Franco-American Wood Carvers of New England*
- Southeast Asian Wedding Traditions*
- Herencia Taina: Legacy and Life*
- Polonia w Connecticut: Polish-American Traditional Arts*
- Mano a Mano: Puerto Rican Traditional Arts From Island to City*
- The Ties That Bind: Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese Wedding Traditions in New England*
- Summer Youth Research Institute presentation and exhibit, 1995-ongoing
- World AIDS Day Commemoration: One World, One Hope: Visions of our Children*
- Vision, Voice, Remembrance: The Hartford AIDS Memorial Exhibit*
- Children's AIDS Poster Competition
- ICR Koffee House
- Latino Cabaret and Book Signing
- Focus on Four*
(UAI artists in the Capital City urban area)
- Recipes for Life: Celebrating the Lives of Community Elders*
- WO(MAN) SYMBOLS – An Exhibition & Artist's Talk*
- Living Spaces: A Multimedia And Interdisciplinary Program* (An Exhibition, Performance and Talk that Explores the Relationship Between Art, Research and the Physical and Imagined Spaces of our Environment)
- UWASA girls model their future – *Career Dolls Exhibition: What I Want to be When I Grow Up*

*selected exhibits

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