

## Starting the Conversation: 2012 ICPH Conference a Success

In January, the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness held its national conference, “Beyond Housing: A National Conversation on Child Homelessness and Poverty,” at the Millennium Broadway Hotel in New York. The conference took place from Thursday, January 19 to Friday, January 20, and featured a variety of speakers, panel sessions, and other events. Approximately 450 policy makers, educators, service providers, and other stakeholders attended the conference.

The conference opened with a keynote address by Ralph da Costa Nunez, president and chief executive officer of the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness. Dr. Nunez filled in for author Jonathan Kozol, who became ill and was unable to attend. The keynote address covered the relationship between homelessness and poverty, with Dr. Nunez offering an historical perspective on government’s role in regulating poverty, focusing on policy changes in New York City. He also called for a specific solution to poverty and homelessness in America. A video of his keynote address can be found at [www.ICPHusa.org](http://www.ICPHusa.org).

“The answer of where to begin to reduce homelessness in America is the shelter,” Dr. Nunez said in his keynote address. “But it shouldn’t be called a shelter, it should be called a community resource center.”

According to Dr. Nunez, homeless shelters in the United States could offer comprehensive services for homeless families including education, training for employment, after-school programs, and day care. He also announced ICPH’s soon-to-be-released plan, “A New Path: An Immediate Plan to Reduce Family Homelessness,” which can be found on the organization’s Web site.

Lunch on Thursday afternoon was another productive aspect of ICPH’s 2012 conference, as members of the organization’s staff and other experts were placed at different tables to lead discussions on their particular areas of expertise. On Thursday evening, ICPH held a screening of the documentary *on the edge*, produced by HEAR US Inc. President Diane Nilan. The film depicted the experiences of seven women living in suburban towns, rural areas, and resort communities across the United States, who shared their personal experiences with homelessness.

Panel sessions were held throughout the conference and focused on a wide variety of issues relating to family poverty and homelessness. Attendees were able to choose from among 20 topical discussions, such as “The Power of Data in Public Policy,” “The Dollars and Sense of Federal Funding,” “The Changing Face of Today’s Homeless Veterans,” “Media as a Tool for Advocacy and Awareness,” and “The Effect of Foreclosures on

Educational Outcomes.” Conference guests were also able to visit New York City sites including the Children’s Museum of Manhattan, to see its program for young homeless mothers and children, a family shelter, a supportive housing site, and a comprehensive community-based prevention center.

Aurora Zepeda, executive vice president of ICPH’s sister organization, Homes for the Homeless, closed the conference on Friday afternoon with a brief address, before opening the microphone up for comments from the audience. Conference attendees described their own work with homeless families, or related policy work, and also spoke of their experiences from the conference. Below are excerpts from interviews conducted throughout the conference:

**Sarah Fujiwara (Horizons for Homeless Children, Roxbury, MA):** I’ve come [to the conference] for a couple of reasons. I’ve known the work of the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness for a long time and really appreciate the perspective they bring and the research that they do. So I was certainly interested in participating and also networking and learning from other providers from around the country. I have heard Ralph Nunez speak before, but it’s just a very helpful perspective for me to hear his historical view. It helps us to not get stuck in the moment so much, but to really understand there are cycles; cycles of hope, as well as cycles of disturbing information.

The [panels] I’m interested in ... are foreclosure leading to homelessness, which I know impacts some of our families. We serve 175 children each day in three community children centers and then we work with a shelter network of about 145 shelters across the state and have programs for those children. I know that a portion of the causes of homelessness is foreclosure, but I don’t know that much about it.

**Patricia Popp (Project HOPE - Virginia, Education for Homeless Children and Youth, Williamsburg, VA):** I really have a passion for making sure our children who are highly mobile are appropriately served. This was an opportunity to share some of the things we’re doing in Virginia and across the country, and to learn from the other folks about what’s going on in other parts of the country. I presented at the “Early Childhood Education” panel and I’ll be doing a session tomorrow on effective teachers who work with highly mobile students. All that mobility really does have an impact on a student’s ability to feel comfortable in a classroom and learn. The more we can do to keep them stable, and help teachers understand how to make them feel welcome and belonging in the classroom, makes a difference in how they’re

able to achieve in the long run.

For more information on “Beyond Housing: A National Conversation on Child Homelessness and Poverty,” or to see videos and photos from the conference, please visit [www.ICPHusa.org](http://www.ICPHusa.org).

# on the Homefront



We know these children do succeed and go on to college. What's really exciting is I've been in the field for 16 years. We spent so much time making sure children were getting into our public schools, and now we're beginning to look at whether they're getting into higher education. We wouldn't be asking that question unless we really started to make a difference with our children who are school-aged, so it's exciting to see things evolve.

**Barbara Peters** (First Step Staffing, Atlanta, GA):

I came down to talk about employment and ways to get folks back into the workforce, and to learn more about what

*Seth Diamond, commissioner of the New York City Department of Homeless Services, gave welcoming remarks and discussed the importance of research.*

other people are doing in the world of employment but also in the world of mainstream benefits for homeless families. The conference has been great; I've gotten a lot of information on that. Folks who are homeless have particular barriers around employment and they really are difficult to address, and sometimes it's as simple as having a place to contact them. So agencies really have to collaborate and work together to get folks back into the work force. Re-entry is tough, especially in this economy.

**Arsenio Gonzalez** (Ruth Fernandez Family Residence, Bronx, NY):

Now and again it's good to get some new ideas. The workshop was excellent, and I got some information that I'd like to take back to my staff. I went to the "Preventing Homelessness" panel, where they presented a program to help prevent homelessness. In the Bronx housing court they deal with people who are about to be evicted and give them financial assistance and social services;

I think it's a great idea. The other workshop I attended today was on trauma-informed treatment, which was excellent. I had no idea that kind of stuff existed, so I'm definitely going to follow up on a resource to see if one of them will come down and do some staff training.

**Joyce Lavery** (Safe Haven Family Shelter, Nashville, TN):

I've come to this conference because unlike New York City and New York State, our homeless system isn't very coordinated. It's very hard to learn about the system, or to learn about best practices and what works in other communities. I'm very much a best practice research-oriented person and it's very important to me, especially where I live, where it's so hard to get information about other like-minded shelters and homeless systems. I want to get a handle on the issues, to hear the messages and hopefully bring them back to my organization and my community so we can be more effective in what we do. It's really about being effective, about learning, and about enriching my practice.

**Margaret Lovejoy** (The Family Place, St. Paul, MN):

I came here to the conference to hear what other people are saying and doing about the issues of homelessness, so that together as a nation, as a community, and as a person we can work toward getting a handle on homelessness so people can go in and out of homelessness at a quicker rate. Right now in Minnesota, in Ramsey County, they're stalled in homelessness, and that's not a good place for families to be. As our speaker yesterday also mentioned, the issue isn't homelessness; the issue is poverty. Today I went to the media session. They gave us good tips on how to stay in relationship with the media in your area, which is very important. Yesterday I visited a family resource center in Brooklyn and got ideas about how to work better on the issue of poverty and stabilizing families.

**Luke Nasta** (Camelot Counseling Services, Staten Island, NY):

I moderated the "Substance Abuse" panel session, which had four panelists from California...who provide multiple services, including substance abuse services, for families in California, ranging from underage children to adults. They help with all the different problems that come along with youth who are disenfranchised, who are on the street, have no trusting relationships with adults, or are maybe the victims of abuse and neglect. They come to their program seeking housing and they do a fantastic job addressing all their needs.

*Below, from left: 1. and 2. Meals at the conference also served as a time for participants to connect with other professionals. Attendees engaged in roundtable discussions, conversing about various topics relating to homelessness and poverty, and sharing experiences from across the country. 3. The keynote address on Thursday was preceded by a skit performed by the City University of New York's Creative Arts Team, which depicted a fictional homeless family. The actors also led a short question-and-answer session. 4. ICPH hosted 20 panels over the course of the conference, including this one on "The State of Permanent Housing."*

ICPH President and CEO Ralph da Costa Nunez commented on the success of "Beyond Housing," and said attendees were able to learn about many different issues facing children and families in poverty. "There were many conversations about the most effective ways to reduce family homelessness," Dr. Nunez said, "but more importantly, relationships established at the conference will continue to foster dialogue and action long after it is over." ■



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