A new report has revealed detailed information about the communities surrounding USC’s two main campuses.

Relying on existing data and focus groups involving community residents and stakeholders, researchers explored social factors that influence health and well-being in the University Park Campus (UPC) and Health Sciences Campus (HSC) neighborhoods. Findings outlined in the USC State of the Neighborhood Report represent an in-depth examination of major issues such as crowded and low-quality housing, unemployment, and poor economic opportunities, in addition to strengths including lower truancy rates in middle school and more licensed child care seats compared to other areas of Los Angeles.

In addition to serving as a snapshot of socioeconomic conditions in these neighborhoods, the 180-page report is envisioned by USC officials and leaders in the community as blueprint for the university’s continued engagement with its neighbors. “As one of the world’s great private research universities, we are very privileged—but with great privilege comes great responsibility,” said Michael Quick, USC provost and senior vice president for academic affairs. “Part of that responsibility is working with our neighbors to make our city better.”

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Summer research experience helps master’s students build foundation for future careers 5
Student’s research delves into archive of video testimonies by genocide survivors 6
Master’s student seeks to bridge gap between research and practice in social work 8
Expert in school crisis and bereavement joins faculty

EXPERIENCING THE LOSS of a loved one is an inevitable part of life.

By the time they graduate from high school, 90% of children will have faced the death of a family member or friend. But surprisingly few people who work closely with children, including teachers and other school personnel, know how to talk about death and loss with their students.

David Schonfeld wants to change that.

“They say the main reason they don’t talk to kids or reach out to them after a death is because they’ve never been trained,” he said. “They are afraid they are going to do the wrong thing, say the wrong thing, or do something that makes it worse.”

A nationally recognized expert in bereavement, school crisis, and developmental and behavioral pediatrics, Schonfeld has spent his career on exploring how children understand and adjust to illness and death. As the newest member of the USC School of Social Work faculty, he plans to share that knowledge through the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement, an organization he founded as a resource for educators and school administrators.

Schonfeld has plenty of experience helping school personnel learn how to respond to a crisis. In the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks in New York, he worked with school systems across the region to help students dealing with grief and handle crises.

“I just kept getting called,” he said. “If there was a student who was killed or there was a car accident or a staff member died, my name got out and they would call me.”

After his fellowship in Maryland, Schonfeld joined the faculty at Yale University. In 1991, he participated in a meeting involving school professionals, elected officials, and faculty members at the Yale Child Study Center to discuss how to help children cope with the Gulf War.

“During the meeting, the comment was made that kids in New Haven were far more impacted by the violence in New Haven than by the war,” he said. “He began working with school systems in the region to help students dealing with violence and death, much of it related to gang activity. As his reputation developed, Schonfeld helped establish an online development and behavioral pediatrics program at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital.

Despite his full-time job at Yale University, Schonfeld has taken on roles of developing and teaching classes about crisis response workshops for more than 1,100 schools across the city. He worked for months traveling from New Haven by train, in a very cordial, targeted effort to make sure every single school in every single school and every district was trained,” said Marlene Wong, a clinical professor and associate dean of field education at the USC School of Social Work who met Schonfeld through his appointment as director.

“I remember his stories about being stuck at a train station somewhere outside in one of the far boroughs and having a real hard time getting back to his house,” she added. “When he makes a promise, he keeps that promise.”

In addition to his work in New York, Schonfeld has offered support to communities affected by hurricanes, tornadoes, and other natural disasters. He worked with educators in Aurora, Colo.; Newtown, Conn.; and Marysville, Wash., following mass shootings.

It’s a calling he fell into almost by accident. Schonfeld had earned his bachelor’s and medical degrees at Boston University and was midway through a residency in pediatrics at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia when he spoke with a supervisor about his career path.

“I told him, ‘I’ve learned how to take care of children’s illnesses, but I didn’t go into pediatrics because I love illnesses,’” he said. “I went into it because I am really fascinated by kids. I like the way they think and develop and grow and I didn’t know anything more about that than when I started. He said, oh, you want behavioral pediatrics.”

At the suggestion of his training supervisor, Schonfeld pursued a fellowship in the top-ranked developmental and behavioral pediatrics program at the University of Maryland.

Although 90 percent of children will experience the death of a friend or family member by the time they graduate from high school, only 7 percent of teachers have received training in how to help a student grieving the loss of a loved one.

During his first year of fellowship training, when administrators from a local elementary school sought advice on helping students who had lost a parent, he volunteered to talk with them. The school leaders didn’t realize this was his first experience at and scheduled an assembly with students, teachers, and parents and invited the media.

After a local newspaper covered the event, Schonfeld was inundated with requests.

HEATH SOYDAN, PhD
Director of the Hamovitch Center

SCHONFELD (continued on page 9)
Master’s students embrace research

**Research and practice** are inextricably linked.

That’s the message being emphasized in the master of social work program at the USC School of Social Work. “These are not two separate worlds,” said Marilyn Flynn, the school’s dean. “The work our students are doing is always informed by science. The less abstract and the more real that is to them, the better practitioners they will be.”

Because the school features a large research enterprise, including a cumulative funding portfolio of more than $100 million during the previous 15 years, students have numerous opportunities to engage with faculty researchers and learn about the science of social work. Some master’s students are already embracing the integrated approach to research and practice in the school, seeking out summer research positions and proposing their own research initiatives. That encourages people like Suzanne Wenzel, the Richard M. and Ann L. Thor Professor in Urban Social Development and former chair of the school’s Research Council. “It’s important for all master’s students, even if they aren’t interested in an in-depth immersion, to have hands-on exposure to research,” she said. “It’s critical for them to be able to lead their profession and to have the best knowledge available in terms of practice. Understanding what practices are most effective is a direct result of scientific research.” That sentiment is frequently reiterated by Harmony Rhoades, a research assistant professor who teaches a research methods class required for all master’s students in the program. She strives to impart the notion that research is not just a task or obstacle for students to overcome before they can graduate and enter clinical practice. “Research is the foundation of being an ethical practitioner and learning what’s really going on with the people you want to serve,” she said. “Otherwise you might get stuck in the same rut and you might be providing services that are not effective.”

The following articles highlight several master’s students’ perspectives on research and practice — just being able to keep abreast of all the advances in the field,” she said. “A huge part of that is taking away the fear around research.”

“The trios of students — Leanne Brotsky, Kate Santulli, and Andy Vogler — spent the summer working alongside Rhoades, Assistant Professor Benjamin Henwood, and other faculty researchers on several projects exploring physical activity among adults with serious mental illness and substance use among formerly homeless youth in supportive housing programs. They collected survey data and interviewed study participants, helped analyze data and build tables, and collaborated with the research team on how to present and disseminate their findings. That’s exactly the kind of experience Brotsky wanted when she decided to pursue an MSW, and she was surprised to learn that some students are not enthusiastic about research. “Research fundamentally influences anything we do as social workers,” she said. “It helps determine what programs get funding and what interventions are covered by insurance or can be reimbursed. It has always gone hand in hand with the work I’ve done.”

While completing an undergraduate degree in clinical psychology at Tufts University, Brotsky did counseling and group work with victims of child’s military dictatorship during a semester abroad. She worked for the National Cancer Institute as part of its information service, responding to questions from patients about their diagnosis and available services. When she landed an internship in a law firm handling emotional support services and referrals for clients, she noticed many individuals were struggling with similar challenges.

“Probably the most important thing, beyond any research skills they learn, is learning to not be afraid of research and the research process,” said Rhoades, an assistant research professor who teaches research methods at the USC School of Social Work. “It’s important to know how to do a lit review, how to go through PubMed to read a research article when it’s first published in a peer reviewed journal instead of 17 years later when it becomes an accepted practice — just being able to keep abreast of all the advances in the field,” she said. “A huge part of that is taking away the fear around research.”

“Now I’m interested in the policy side of research,” she said. “I’m interested in how research informs large-scale interventions.” Her summer research experience only bolstered Brotsky’s interest in pursuing a PhD in public policy or social work, possibly after a few years of clinical work. Students find rewards in summer research

**Inspired by a course on research methods, three master’s students sought positions on a research team for the summer.**

What they discovered is a lesson Harmony Rhoades has been emphasizing in the classroom for years. “Probably the most important thing, beyond any research skills they learn, is learning to not be afraid of research and the research process,” said Rhoades, an assistant research professor who teaches research methods at the USC School of Social Work. “It’s important to know how to do a lit review, how to go through PubMed to read a research article when it’s first published in a peer reviewed journal instead of 17 years later when it becomes an accepted practice — just being able to keep abreast of all the advances in the field,” she said. “A huge part of that is taking away the fear around research.”

The trio of students — Leanne Brotsky, Kate Santulli, and Andy Vogler — spent the summer working alongside Rhoades, Assistant Professor Benjamin Henwood, and other faculty researchers on several projects exploring physical activity among adults with serious mental illness and substance use among formerly homeless youth in supportive housing programs. They collected survey data and interviewed study participants, helped analyze data and build tables, and collaborated with the research team on how to present and disseminate their findings. That’s exactly the kind of experience Brotsky wanted when she decided to pursue an MSW, and she was surprised to learn that some students are not enthusiastic about research. “Research fundamentally influences anything we do as social workers,” she said. “It helps determine what programs get funding and what interventions are covered by insurance or can be reimbursed. It has always gone hand in hand with the work I’ve done.”
Priscilla Hefley, a master’s student interested in international adoptions and the effects of childhood trauma, is conducting an original research study on the effects of genocide, using video archives at the USC Shoah Foundation.

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In contrast, Santulli came to USC expecting to be challenged by the school’s emphasis on research. Having majored in Spanish and religion as an undergraduate, she entered the research methods course with some trepidation. “I was bracing myself for some stuff I hadn’t done for a long time,” she said. “But it was Dr. Rhoades’ teaching style that really piqued my interest. She really wants her students to learn and understand what they are learning.”

At the end of the semester, Santulli found herself approaching Rhoades to enquire about summer research opportunities, viewing it as an opportunity to enhance her abilities as a clinician. “What I realized through this research class is you have to have the same skills to collect data and be an effective researcher,” she said. “I don’t have the clinical skills, but I can sit down with clients and ask them sensitive questions.”

Although her short-term plans involve becoming licensed in clinical social work, Santulli said she is open to the PhD path. Above all, she wants to work with marginalized populations to help create healthy and sustainable communities. She said her work this summer with Rhoades and other researchers gave her a new perspective on social work. “It’s engaging me in a different way than I’m experiencing in the classroom,” Santulli said. “It’s been amazing, eye opening, and fascinating.”

As the third member of the trio, Vogler also entered the MSW program planning to focus on clinical work, potentially involving issues of substance abuse, mental illness, and trauma. However, he echoed his peers in noting how his experience as a research assistant opened his eyes to the importance of research, particularly understanding some of the limitations of knowledge. “When you find a gap in knowledge, it can be very frustrating,” he said. “Why hasn’t anyone asked this question? Why don’t we know the answer? When you work in research yourself, you have a greater appreciation for why that is the case.”

Perhaps a certain topic has simply been neglected, he said. Maybe funding organizations want to see piles of paper that indicate that a particular question is worth answering. Vogler expects that having a stronger understanding of those limitations will help him engage with research when he enters the field as a clinician, such as helping him determine how a new study applies to his work. He encouraged other students to embrace research as a fundamental component of social work and view courses on research as an opportunity to strengthen their professional skills. “Taking the class gave me a little more confidence,” he said. “It’s been a positive experience, a realization that I can do something I could do. Any trained social worker can do research.”

That sentiment is encouraging to Rhoades, who strives to make her class engaging by sharing real-world examples from her experience as a researcher rather than relying solely on a textbook. During one of the summer projects, for example, she noticed that participants reported that they were at home when completing pop-up surveys on their phone, despite data indicating they were in other locations. Rhoades and her colleagues developed a method to translate English to Spanish, the word home had been translated as casa, which to some participants simply meant a house, not their home. “It’s problem solving,” she said. “You are doing a bit of detective work. There’s no substitute for working on an actual research project in the real world.”

**Harmony Rhoades**

“Probably the most important thing, beyond any research skills they learn, is learning to not be afraid of research and the research process.”

**Priscilla Hefley**

“It’s been this consistent thread throughout my life — being an adoptee, working with adoptees and advocating for them, and now researching for them.”

Students connects research with personal passion

As an adoptee from Taiwan growing up in San Antonio, Texas, Priscilla Hefley struggled to find her identity.

To avoid being seen as an outsider, she embraced the mainstream culture. It wasn’t until college that she began to reconnect with her roots and what it meant to be a Chinese American. “Adoptees can have a sense of not really being American and not really being Chinese,” she said. “It was a real struggle. Where exactly do I fit?”

That experience prompted Hefley to pursue a career path involving international adoptions, bringing her to the master’s program at the USC School of Social Work, where she is conducting research on the effects of childhood trauma. Specifically, Hefley is reviewing a collection of video testimonies of survivors of the Holocaust and genocides in Armenia, Rwanda, and Nanjing, China, that is housed at the USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education. She hopes to identify patterns of trauma across cultures that can be addressed in early life to avoid negative outcomes in adolescence and adulthood. After filtering the archival material by language, age at the time of trauma, and experience as an adoptee or orphan, Hefley has started searching for objective symptoms such as intrusive memories, hyperarousal, and numbing.

“If we can identify some of the outcomes that are likely, certainly not inevitable but possible, we can prevent, for example, a lot of inappropriate placements for adoptees or foster children,” she said. “We can prevent being shuffled through the system, because that just imparts more trauma on the child.”

Hefley has always had a fascination with how the human mind can adapt and handle traumatic events. As an undergraduate student beginning to reconnect with her own experience as an adoptee, she decided that she wanted to find a way to help others process childhood trauma. Initially planning to produce documentaries about adoptees to raise awareness, she earned a degree in film and television production from University of Arizona. She went on to complete a master’s in business administration to complement her film skills, but found she enjoyed the interpersonal side of business more than operations, leading her to pursue an MSW at USC.

Her long-term vision is to develop an international organization focused on helping orphans and adoptees deal with traumatic experiences. “Knowing I wanted to work with families, how can I be best prepared?” she said. “There is something within each person that can allow them to pull through, and I’m fascinated and wanted to know more about that.”

There was no way to do that without research. Hefley approached Hazel Atuel, a research assistant professor who taught her first-year research methods class, for guidance on developing a research project related to the effects of childhood trauma on the brain. Atuel immediately thought of the Shoah Foundation archives, a rich source of firsthand interview data with high relevance to Hefley’s interests and background.

My goal was to make this research experience meaningful for Priscilla,” Atuel said.

After researching cognitive and affective indicators of trauma, Hefley began narrowing down the archives to individuals who spoke English, were between 5 and 11 years old at the time of the traumatic experience, and had experience as an adoptee or orphan. Having reviewed only a handful of video testimonies, she has started to identify common patterns across cultures and is considering how that informs her future work, such as helping him determine how a new study could inform her future work, such as helping him determine how a new study could inform her future work.

Given the school’s revised curriculum that emphasizes a strong connection between research and practice in social work, Atuel said students like Hefley can serve as ambassadors to their classmates, highlighting how they can engage in research that is highly relevant to their personal interests. “This is becoming a hallmark of MSW graduates from USC,” she said. “They understand the value of research and how to use it to inform their practice.”

Although Hefley acknowledged that her inherent analytic mindset led her to embrace the step-by-step nature of the research process, she said the human component of her research project has sustained her excitement. She hopes to review approximately 15 to 20 testimonies for each historical event reflected in the Shoah archives, with plans to present and publish her findings for academic and clinical audiences. “It’s meaningful throughout my life—being an adoptee, working with adoptees and advocating for them, and now researching for them,” she said. “I think it’s pretty cool that I can maybe make a difference for these children in other countries.”
MSW student brings insight to research team

On the surface, he seemed like a major success.

The man wasn’t using drugs or relying on the emergency room for medical care. He had his own apartment and had severed negative ties from his days living on the streets of Los Angeles. But Jack Lahey could tell something wasn’t right.

“Lahey said, “We asked him, how do you like your life? He said, I don’t like it, but it’s OK. It was so beautifully sad.”

It was a bit of a wake-up call for Lahey, a master’s student at the USC School of Social Work who spent several hours with the man as part of a research project exploring how people’s lives change after they enter permanent supportive housing after experiencing homelessness.

As a clinician working in social services, he had similar clients who never left their apartment. He would do their grocery shopping and help them apply for benefits or access mental health care.

“We just thought they were easy cases,” Lahey said. “As a researcher, you understand how detrimental it is and that it’s actually a very disturbing case.”

Witnessing that insight is gratifying for Suzanne Wenzel, the Richard M. and Ann L. Thor Professor in Urban Social Development and lead investigator of the research project.

“The process known as ethnographic shadowing in which researchers spend time with study participants to see how they live their daily lives, she said Lahey is adding depth and richness to data on issues such as mental and physical health, substance use, access to care, and quality of life.

“This is a unique way of blending research and practical skills for an MSW student that isn’t often done,” she said. “Jack is being immersed in a scientific project, an experience I think we need to afford to more of our master’s students.”

The research team is also benefiting from Lahey’s clinical experience, said Benjamin Henwood, an assistant professor who is mentoring Lahey. The ter’s student at the USC School of Social Work who majored in history as an undergraduate because he is interested in how people’s perceptions and experiences in the past inform their current lives.

“Describing himself as innately curious, Lahey said he majored in history as an undergraduate because he is interested in how people’s perceptions and experiences in the past inform their current lives.

“Going into social work, I wanted to understand in terms of theory,” he said. “I was learning a lot of techniques in the field and they were working, but I had no idea why. I really wanted to understanding the thinking behind some of these practices, like motivational interviewing.”

In addition to working in homelessness services, Lahey has managed Social Security and disability benefits for individuals with serious mental illness, helped people find jobs as an employment specialist, worked as a union organizer in Washington, D.C., and conducted research for a transportation workers union.

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“Not only could we use the support, but he knows the population so well that it was a really good fit,” Henwood said. “To the extent that we want our research to be as translational as possible, having somebody who has worked in the field only enhances our study.”

When his neighbor, current PhD candidate Lai Kriegel, learned that Lahey was interested in research and theory, she suggested that he help out with a project being led by Henwood.

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“The more I kept digging into writing research papers and understanding that world, the more it clicked,” Lahey said.

He now plans to pursue a doctorate and is interested in specializing in older adult populations, psychological factors, and the role of family members in helping people navigate the health care system.

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A new book outlining the intellectual legacy of an illustrious social work scholar is now available.

In Social Work Practice to the Benefit of Our Clients: Scholar’s Legacy of Edward J. Mullen, contributors highlight the work of the Columbia University professor known for promoting an evidence-based approach to research and practice in social work.

However, the volume is not a simple endorsement of Mullen’s career, said Haluk Soydan (pictured), associate dean of research and director of the Hamovitch Center for Science in the Human Services at the USC School of Social Work.

“It occurred to me that this material goes beyond one scholar’s input,” said Soydan, who edited the book and penned an introductory chapter. “I saw a certain historical perspective on the evolution of social work as a scientific profession, mainly in the United States. Because those who contributed come from diverse countries, it also acquired an international flavor.”

Drawn from a seminar on social work practice hosted in 2014 by the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano in Italy, which published the book, the chapters highlight an ongoing tension in the profession regarding evidence-based practice.

Contributors include Dorian Traube, an associate professor at the USC School of Social Work who benefited from Mullen’s mentorship while completing her doctoral work in social work at Columbia University.
our neighboring communities without displacement,” she said.

She envisions revisiting the data in three to five years to determine whether indicators of health and well-being have improved. If so, did they improve because people who currently reside in these neighborhoods were forced out by increased housing prices and cost of living?

Having grown up in the Los Angeles area before spending much of her professional career in Boston, Amaro returned to Southern California in 2012 and said she feels a personal connection to the community. “I’m committed to trying to shift the focus, which has been solely focused on individual-level programs that don’t address underlying conditions that contribute to a lack of opportunity, to strategies that can promote equity and population health for an entire community,” she said.

That emphasis on building capacity and engaging with community groups is a visionary aspect of the report, Morales said.

He acknowledged that the traditional approach to addressing social ills, by providing services at a grassroots level, remains extremely critical. However, given the limited financial resources and massive scale of socioeconomic issues in these communities, he said building relationships and harnessing nontraditional assets such as residents themselves to develop solutions is an approach that is often overlooked.

A graduate of the USC School of Social Work, Morales said he is encouraged by the university’s commitment to its neighbors and sees its community engagement efforts as contributing to society on a much broader scale.

“Young to find solutions that can address complex problems in a community like this is going to force you into transformative thinking that can be part of a greater set of solutions to benefit the world,” he said.

In the coming months, Amaro and other university officials plan to engage with community leaders, politicians, and other stakeholders to ensure that the report informs ongoing efforts to build stronger and more vibrant neighborhoods around USC.

“It would be a failure if we think that the report is the end of a dialogue and not the beginning of one,” Quick said. “The hard work is in front of us. The report gave us the starting data, but now let’s redouble our efforts to partner with our communities.”

Vern Bengtson, faculty research associate with the USC Edward R. Roybal Institute on Aging, has received the 2015 American Sociological Association Distinguished Scholarly Book Award for his publication Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down across Generations. The award is presented annually to the best book published by an association member during the two calendar years preceding the award year. Drawing on data collected from more than 350 families across nearly four decades, Bengtson explored issues of faith, religion, and family ties across generations.

The National Institute of Drug Abuse has awarded approximately $3 million in funding over five years to Alice Cepeda, associate professor at the USC School of Social Work. Her study will focus on how patterns of intimate partner violence and drug use affected the physical and mental development of a group of Mexican American women that Cepeda first identified in a research project 15 years ago. The research is expected to generate knowledge about critical points in young adulthood that could be targeted for intervention to prevent or reduce negative outcomes.

A new grant from the U.S. Department of Defense will enable Carl Castro, director of the USC School of Social Work’s Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans & Military Families, and Jeremy Goldbach, assistant professor, to explore the adaptation and integration of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals into the military. The researchers, along with former doctoral student Ian Holloway, now an assistant professor at UCLA, will receive $1.89 million over two years. The goal is to assess LGBT issues in the military and generate findings to inform future changes to policies and intervention strategies.