

Homeless and Needing Help

August 11, 2010 11:00 AM Joseph Halm
newwave@tulane.edu

Past trauma, poor literacy and conflicting family relationships as well as poor mental health, incarceration histories and substance abuse, are a few common themes revealed during the first 18 months of detailed study of homeless men in New Orleans conducted by So'nia Gilkey, an assistant professor at the Tulane School of Social Work.



So'nia Gilkey, assistant professor of social work, conducts a survey with a man who comes to Ozanam Inn for help. (Photo by Frank L. Aymami III)

The study, which will continue for another 12 to 16 months, is being performed at Ozanam Inn, an emergency and transitional housing shelter for men run by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of the Archdiocese of New Orleans since 1955.

"The work that we are doing could lead to some groundbreaking changes in the lives of homeless men in New Orleans," [Gilkey](#) says.

The study's goal is two-fold. Gilkey will evaluate the program's effectiveness in securing positive outcomes for men in the transitional housing program. She also hopes to determine what service gaps are present in both program components so that resources are found to provide more comprehensive, client-driven services.

So far, more than 1,400 men have been surveyed. Gilkey says that graduate student Patricia Hawley has been essential in administering the surveys and has contributed significantly in helping Gilkey ensure a sustainable university-community partnership with Ozanam.

Every man who comes to Ozanam for an overnight stay fills out a survey assessment of need and well-being. The survey form, compiled by Gilkey and graduate [social work](#) students, considers past homeless episodes, family relationships, trauma, substance abuse, mental health and physical health status, literacy needs, Hurricane Katrina experiences and several other factors of general well-being.

“Our work at Ozanam helps to improve societal understanding of homeless issues, and further provides evidence that issues of homelessness are quite complex and require a social response that speaks to the varying complicated needs of men in a homeless experience,” Gilkey says.

Joseph Halm is marketing/communications coordinator for the Tulane School of Social Work.