

Drop-In Center Offers Safe Place for Area Youth

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Clinical social worker Isabella Christodoulou loves coming to work each day, and one reason is the effectiveness of her “guerilla therapy” to reach New Orleans' homeless and at-risk youth who flock to the Drop-In Center on North Rampart Street, on the edge of the French Quarter.



Isabella Christodoulou, a graduate of the Tulane School of Social Work, reaches homeless and at-risk youth with “guerilla therapy” at the Drop-In Center operated by the Department of Pediatrics on the edge of the French Quarter. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

“It is fabulous to come to work every day because I don't know what amazing person I'm going to meet next,” she says. “The main thing is that you have to engage people as quickly as possible because when an individual comes though, you don't know if you are going to see them again.”

Established in 1991, the [Drop-In Center](#) is run by the School of Medicine and provides youth from 13 to 24 years old a chance to get off the street. It is open five days a week and offers computer, mail and phone access, snacks, hygiene and first-aid supplies, and case management and mental health services. The center also helps individuals reach their diverse life or educational goals, says Christodoulou, who received a master of [social work](#) degree from Tulane in 1989.

One example is J. DaneÃ© Sergeant, a former client, who began classes at Fordham University this week to obtain her master of social work degree. Sergeant says the center's unique atmosphere drew her in.

“It was something about coming around to a place that was welcoming and being able to identify with the people here. I felt at home,” Sergeant says. “They weren't trying to push anything on me. They were just trying to build up my strengths.”

Sergeant, who finished her bachelor's at Southern University New Orleans in May, was dealing with drug problems after her mother died. She credits the Drop-In Center for her resurgence.

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