

## Building Canada-U.S. Collaborations through Research with Homeless Young People



I am a PhD Candidate in Information Science at the Information School here at the University of Washington. My field is human-computer interaction, also known as HCI. I investigate the socio-technical aspects of information systems, for example the experiences that people have with mobile phones or with applications like Facebook.

### Prior research with homeless young people

Homelessness among young people, up to age 30 is a pressing problem with lasting social and economic consequences in the United States and Canada. Although counting homeless people is fraught with difficulty, experts estimate that up to 3 million young people are homeless each year in the U.S. and 50,000 – 60,000 young people experience homelessness annually in Canada. In order to better understand how technology might help improve the welfare of homeless young people, since 2007 I have engaged in research, service and design projects with homeless young people in Seattle along with my PhD supervisor David G. Hendry. In one of these projects, I helped co-create a community technology center for homeless young people, where I volunteered as an instructor and worked with nearly 100 young people. You can find out more about this project at <http://ischool.uw.edu/news/2011/12/jill-palzkill-woelfer-and-david-hendry-featured-uw-front-porch>



### Collaborations in on-going research in Canada

I received a 2011-2012 Fulbright award to Canada and I have been living in Vancouver, BC since September. My Fulbright project is the basis for my PhD dissertation research – a study which will investigate the role of music in the lives of homeless young people while also considering the ways that location and policies may influence homeless young people's access to technology. Participants in this research will include homeless young people in Seattle and Vancouver, BC. This research is supported by a number of collaborations, including sharing data with a research team at the University of Southern California. Additionally, there are three important collaborative elements with people and institutions that cross the border between Canada and the U.S.



First, while in Vancouver, I am affiliated with the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies (SLAIS) at the University of British Columbia. My adviser at SLAIS is Lisa Nathan, a PhD alumna of the UW Information School who joined the SLAIS faculty in 2008. Prof. Nathan and I share a common interest in the social aspects of technology and meet regularly to discuss research.

Second, I have established collaborations with youth service agencies and I am exploring the possibility of collaborating with public libraries. I have formed collaborations with two agencies that provide assistance to homeless youth, one in Seattle and one in Vancouver, BC. These agencies will be the research sites for my study, and findings will be shared with both agencies. Additionally, after seeing a presentation that I gave in October 2011 at Simon Fraser University in Surrey, BC, one of the members of the Community-Led Libraries Committee which meets regularly at Vancouver Public Library became interested in hearing more about my research. Subsequently, I gave a presentation in January to introduce the committee to my dissertation research and to talk about potential implications of my study.

Finally, I have also begun conversations with researchers in youth homelessness in Vancouver, BC, facilitated by Prof. Chris Richardson at the UBC School of Population and Public Health. I met with Prof. Richardson and others in January to discuss research and intersections between public health and HCI.

As my time in Canada continues, I look forward to meeting more people and taking part in discussions about future directions and shared projects.

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You can find out more about Jill's research with homeless young people at:  
<http://dub.washington.edu/people/jill-woelfer>

You can see a video of Jill's talk at Simon Fraser University at:  
<http://sc-epresence2.surrey.sfu.ca/1/watch/46.aspx>

And you can see highlights from Jill's Fulbright year in Canada at:  
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Jill-Palzkill-Woelfer-Fulbright-Award-to-Canada/244075285624199>